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Wolfensohn-Poverty

WORLD'S POOR TOO WANT OPPORTUNITY TO GROW, SAYS WORLD BANK CHIEF

KUALA LUMPUR, March 7 (Bernama) -- World Bank president James Wolfensohn said today pouring more money into developing countries is not the answer towards re-establishing social equilibrium among the world's citizens.

"The answer is not just another series of projects, a bit more money to send from developed countries to developing countries...the answer clearly is knowledge, partnership and opportunity brought about by this new (knowledge and digital) revolution," he told the Second Global Knowledge Conference (GKII) here via video-conference from Washington.

Wolfensohn said a recent World Bank study involving 60,000 people in 60 countries showed that people living in poverty were not looking for charity or financial hand-outs.

"What they want is opportunity, knowledge, the chance for themselves, for their children, for women in the family. And they want to ensure that they have self-respect and opportunity to grow and move forward," he said.

The GKII, attended by about 1,200 delegates from all over the world, will discuss efforts to address the widening gap between the information "haves" and the information "have nots" stemming from the global knowledge and digital revolution.

The revolution in those fields, said Wolfensohn, was part of the globalisation process and should be seen as an opportunity for everyone.

He said with technological advances, it was possible within the space of the next few years to have satellites capable of delivering wide-band communication to villages in every part of the world.

"Many of the companies (involved) have indicated to us that for poor communities and schools, connectivity will be free. So one could imagine in the years to come, people in villages having access to knowledge, advice and guidance.

"We at the bank have been seeking to grasp this challenge in a way that is not theoretical but indeed practical," he said.

He said the World Bank and its partners such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) were also looking at the prospect of establishing a "global gateway of knowledge".

The endeavour, he said, would enable the gathering of information on issues relevant to development from various sources.

Meanwhile, Third World Network director Martin Khor told one of the GKII sessions that the potential benefits of information and communication technology (ICT) could only be achieved if certain conditions were present in the developing country concerned.

They include general computer literacy, communications infrastructure, access to hardware and software and a plan in both private and public sectors for making use of ICT.

"The capacity of ordinary people and local communities has to be developed on how to discriminate between the mass of information available on the Internet in order to obtain the kind that is appropriate for the desired purposes," the Malaysian economist said.

Khor also said that while developing countries and their firms could also try to take advantage of electronic commerce (e-commerce), the more likely scenario was that the large firms of the North, already advanced in this area, were in a better position to gain much more from e-commerce.

"And this would lead to the further marginalisation of the developing

economies and their local firms," he added.

The GKII, which focuses on key issues of access, empowerment and governance, is a member of the Global Knowledge Partnership formed after the inaugural conference on Knowledge for Development in the Information Age in Toronto in 1997.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad is scheduled to open the GKII tomorrow.

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