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JYK MYANMAR SPEECH

Your Excellency President U Thein Sein, Excellencies and Ministers, Distinguished Guests, Colleagues.

It is a pleasure and an honor to be here today, on my first visit to Myanmar – and the first ever by a sitting President of the World Bank Group.

Myanmar is emerging decisively from conflict, fragility, and isolation toward a prosperous and peaceful future. This country is in the midst of a triple transition: from a military government to democracy, from conflict in border areas to peace, and from a state-centered to a market-oriented economy.

Today, we are witnessing a vibrant public and political debate about how to build a better future. The World Bank Group is now and will be in the future a strong partner with the government of Myanmar as it takes bold steps toward achieving a democracy dividend for all.

We will substantially increase the World Bank Group support for Myanmar in the coming years, through a multi-year public and private sector investment program of around \$2 billion dollars. At the same time, we will work with the government and communities as partners, and help build more effective, transparent and accountable national institutions.

This funding will help us ramp up work in three areas that are closely aligned with Myanmar's priorities: energy, health, and agriculture.

Seventy percent of Myanmar's people lack access to electricity. In villages, people still pump water by hand, children read by candle light, and meals are cooked over indoor wood fires. While progress has arrived quickly in urban areas, it has been much slower in coming to rural Myanmar, where poverty is concentrated and jobs are scarce.

We share the Government's commitment to expanding reliable, affordable access to electricity, especially to rural areas. **That's why, over the next five years, we're seeking to invest \$1 billion dollars in Myanmar's power sector – including generation, transmission and distribution.** Moreover, our investments will be designed to attract additional private sector funding. With this funding, with support from donors and the private sector, and with swift action by the government to enact policy reforms, **Myanmar could increase access to electricity to 50 percent of the population in 2020.** This will lay the foundation for the government to achieve its goal of universal electricity access by 2030.

Investing in Myanmar's electricity potential will not only improve the lives of its citizens, but it will also create a better business environment and that in turn will create jobs. This will help the country prosper *and* reduce poverty.

My second point is that investments in infrastructure and in people need to go hand-in-hand. Healthy children learn better at school, healthy adults are more productive, and families protected against catastrophic medical bills can avoid falling into poverty.

Most importantly, investing in people's health can bring strong economic returns not just for families, but for countries. A recently published study in the Lancet health journal found that 25 percent of economic growth in some countries was attributable to better health outcomes. One dollar invested in health could return anywhere from 9 dollars to 20 dollars. There is no argument anymore: Investing in health can help significantly grow economies.

For Myanmar, this is particularly good news because of the country's ambitious target of achieving universal health coverage by 2030. We strongly endorse this target, as do many development partners. Donors have committed to a combined \$800 million dollars for the next three to four years. For our part, the World Bank Group plans to invest \$200 million dollars to support the government's effort to achieve universal health coverage.

Yesterday I had the great privilege of visiting a health center in [North] Dagon with his Excellency, the Minister of Health. I was extremely impressed both with the Minister of Health

and with the activities in [North] Dagon and with the commitment to universal health coverage. In the spirit of what President U Thein Sein just asked us to do, to work together, to bring all of our efforts together, along with the Government of Myanmar, we at the World Bank Group and along with partners, will host a meeting on the margins of our April meetings of the World Bank Group and the International Monetary Fund, a meeting where the Director General of the World Health Organization , Secretary General of the United Nations (are schedule to attend). We hope that all will participate and we will try to come up with a unified plan that will accelerate progress toward universal health coverage. And I will participate personally in that meeting.

My third point is related to the first two -- agriculture. If Myanmar is going to achieve its goals to reduce poverty and to boost prosperity, it will have to focus on improving agricultural outcomes. Agriculture accounts for 43 percent of GDP, generates about 54 percent of employment, and provides livelihoods to more than 70 percent of the population. Despite natural advantages of abundant land and water, productivity is low, and that is a problem the government, with help from its partners, can fix.

We will help Myanmar with technical assistance and funding to improve its agricultural productivity. In addition, rural electrification should be a great boost to the country's millions of farmers. And improvements in access to quality health care also should increase the production of farms because it will improve the health of so many.

Let me finish by saying that I have wanted to come to Myanmar ever since I took my job 19 months ago, and especially since we reopened our office after an absence of 26 years. We started with just four people in August 2012. Today, we have more than 30. And by June of this year, the World Bank Group will have committed more than \$700 million dollars for Myanmar. Helping Myanmar's leaders achieve success would make all of us proud here in the country, but also across the world.

I also must say that I am extremely grateful for the warm hospitality of the people of Myanmar, starting with my visit to Shwedagon Pagoda, where I paid my respects at the Tuesday

Corner, I didn't know I was born on Tuesday - but the people of Myanmar knew that I was born on Tuesday.

Also, I was so impressed last night by a meeting that we had with Government Ministers and the private sector and I just want to share with you one part of that meeting. Of course, one of the areas of discussion was the telecommunications licensing award process. The meeting started off with the two winners saying how the process was open and transparent – but of course they would say that, because they won the awards. The most interesting part of the meeting though, was when the losers of the telecoms said, ‘And I have to admit even though we lost, it was a wonderful process very transparent and very fair.’ This is a strong foundation from which to begin. There are so many other areas where we can use the same process and again show the world that this government, and this country, is committed to transparency, to fairness and to processes like the telecommunications process which will give everyone confidence. In my meeting with U Thein Sein this morning, it was clear to me, and this was our second meeting, we share very deeply, a commitment to ending poverty and boosting shared prosperity of the people here in Myanmar. And we look forward to working together in every way to provide better health care, to provide more energy, and to improve agricultural outcomes.

I have no doubt that Myanmar can regain its place as one of Asia's most dynamic countries. The country's leaders can provide its people with unprecedented economic opportunities; and can build a nation where every man, woman and child has a chance to reach their full potential. We will stand with Myanmar to overcome the major challenges that lie ahead and to help it dramatically increase access to electricity and health and significantly improve agriculture production. Myanmar has the potential for a future brighter than few dared dream just a handful of years ago. Now it's up to the country's leaders to take bold action, and for its partners to support them every step of the way.

Dyay su tim bade.