



Dr. Jim Yong Kim  
President  
The World Bank Group  
1818 H Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20433 USA

April 17, 2013

Dear Dr. Kim,

We write to ask you to more fully engage the World Bank Group in addressing the global land crisis.

Three steps you have taken lead us to write this letter: 1) Your statements on April 8, 2013 acknowledging the risks of large-scale land acquisitions and the vital role secure access to land plays in achieving sustainable development; 2) Your pledges that the World Bank Group will support the UN's new Voluntary Guidelines on Land Governance and the CFS principles for responsible agricultural investment; and 3) Your commitment to strengthen the safeguards and project risk assessments for the World Bank Group's investments and policies. We welcome and applaud these new commitments. We are now calling for you to operationalize these pledges across the Bank's portfolio and take additional steps to demonstrate global leadership in addressing the global land crisis.

The recently completed Land and Poverty Conference, organized by the World Bank, demonstrates that land insecurity is indeed a global crisis; that conventional development approaches remain inadequate; and indeed, that they often exacerbate problems. Across the developing world millions of poor people are being dispossessed from their lands by agribusiness, mining, and infrastructure development projects. Dispossessions occur at higher rate today than ever before in modern history, and there has been a tragic increase in the harassment, beatings and murder of people trying to protect their families and their lands.

The Bank's own research and operational projects demonstrate that secure land rights for local communities and Indigenous Peoples are vital to reduce their vulnerability to climate change, enable effective climate change mitigation, and help realize global progress on food security and poverty reduction. Yet, many governments maintain the practice of ignoring customary land rights and allocating their peoples' land to large-scale industrial production and environmental protection, even if it comes at the cost of local human rights. And the Bank's country assistance strategies, policies, and project lending, have too often endorsed this approach.

We are calling on you to help us – and the many communities and organizations around the world already engaged in this struggle – to confront this crisis by elevating secure community land rights as a priority of the World Bank Group, and working to ensure that all assistance, advice, and investments promote development models that fully respect local peoples' human rights.



The Bank helped identify the land crisis. But under your leadership, it can do much more. The World Bank occupies a unique position and many institutions, including ours, are eager for you and the World Bank to lead.

In particular, we recommend four areas of opportunity in the near term:

1. **Develop a new land policy to build on your new commitments and prioritize the recognition and security of the land rights of local, rural, and indigenous communities.** The World Bank’s research and policy reports of 2003 and 2001 regarding land rights are outdated and were not designed to provide operational guidance across the World Bank Group. Since then, much has been learned from operations and the Bank’s own Independent Evaluation Group. Important initiatives to improve programs are already underway, including the World Bank Group’s new Framework and Strategy on Investment in Palm Oil, the Forests Action Plan recently requested by CODE, and the recommendations of the CAO Audit of the IFC financial sector investments. This new policy should build on the promising steps taken by the IFC and the Bank to increase transparent reporting of land-related investments, and encourage the development of new international mechanisms to track and monitor major land investments and transfers. It should incorporate lessons from the Bank’s prior focus on land administration and prioritize stronger collective land rights. The land policy should also become a central component on the World Bank’s new policy on climate change. A coherent policy that ensures implementation of existing commitments, unites dispersed initiatives across the Group, demonstrates a better understanding of the critical role of land in social and economic development, and scales-up the Bank’s effort would be a large step forward for the global community. This new land policy should be consistent with international standards, and developed in consultation with members of affected communities, member governments, and forward-looking private investors.
  
2. **Establish mechanisms to ensure the operational application of the new land policy across all of the World Bank Group’s advisory services and lending programs.** The Bank Group’s direct project investments are an important, though declining, portion of its overall influence. To achieve coherence across the Group and to optimize the Bank’s contribution to dealing with the land crisis, all of the Group’s investments, commitments, and policy actions should promote the new land policy, including through its Country Assistance Strategies, the Development Policy Lending portfolio, the new programmatic lending mechanisms, the Advisory Services of the IFC, and the Financial Intermediaries used by the World Bank Group. The recent IEG review of the Bank’s implementation of the 2002 Forest Strategy demonstrates the challenge. The review found that although the Bank had made some progress in promoting community forestry, it continued to endorse protected area approaches and industrial forest concessions that abused local land rights. In addition, the portfolio overall had not demonstrated that it had alleviated poverty. The Bank Group’s tremendous analytical resources can be mobilized to identify the development and business models that should be promoted. The Land Governance Assessment Framework promoted by the research department of the Bank should be used to monitor and assess the overall effects of the World Bank Group’s policies and investments on local land rights and governance.



3. **Ensure that the Bank’s ongoing safeguards review process strengthens the Bank’s own safeguards regarding land rights and transparency of investments.** The Bank’s safeguards are adopted by leading public and private investment institutions across the world. It is a unique point of leverage. But the existing safeguards regarding land rights needs to be expanded and strengthened, made more coherent across the World Bank Group, and applied evenly across policy and lending operations, including the financial intermediaries. Crucially, these new World Bank safeguards on land rights and land acquisition need to meet international human rights standards and obligations, as well as fully incorporate the new Voluntary Guidelines. With this step the Bank could proactively facilitate the consideration of new standards by the other development institutions, private banks, and other investors.
  
4. **Bring this global crisis to the attention of the world, and help us gain greater commitment from the G8, the G20, the United Nations, and the major private sector leaders of the world to prioritize the securing of community land rights.** The upcoming Spring Meetings, the IDA 17 replenishment, and the G8 meeting in June are prime opportunities to demonstrate the Bank’s full commitment to addressing the land crisis. The Spring Meetings are an opportunity to inform the world of the Bank’s new pledges and plans for full adoption across the Group. The IDA 17 meetings provide an opportunity to learn of the efforts of other donor governments and discuss opportunities for the World Bank to help deal with the land crisis. The Bank can encourage the land transparency initiatives being developed for the G8 meeting and fully support their implementation.

Dr. Kim, you have personal experience with this crisis. As you well know, the community of Cange was created by poor farmers thrown off their land without adequate consultation or compensation during the construction of the Péligre dam. The lack of clear property rights undermined poor families’ ability to conserve their land and grow food. If it were not for the Lafontants, and then later *Zanmi Lasante*, the people of Cange would have been left alone and destitute, without land and without hope. Such vulnerability remains the reality for most poor people in most of the developing world. Safeguards alone would not have saved the people of Cange. Progressive, pro-poor investment was required, as it is required in all situations where the poor remain vulnerable and without secure land rights.

The dispossession of the rural poor from their lands is not only a major global crisis; it is an injustice that can be prevented. Our organizations, along with the International Land Coalition, Oxfam International and many others, are already better coordinating to strengthen and scale-up our collective efforts. Improved performance and greater consistency across the World Bank Group is a big step forward, but it is not enough. Your leadership and the full weight of the World Bank are needed to set new standards for protecting land rights in international finance and help secure the rights and development hopes of the world’s rural poor.

We are eager to meet with you, at your convenience, to discuss these recommendations and how to move forward. We appreciate your consideration and look forward to hearing from you.



Sincerely,

Andy White  
 Coordinator  
**Rights and Resources Initiative (RRI)**

*On behalf of RRI Partner Organizations:*



*And additional signatories:*

- Center for International Environmental Law (CIEL)**
- Environmental Investigation Agency-US**
- FERN**
- Forest Peoples Programme (FPP)**
- Global Witness**
- HELVETAS-Swiss Intercooperation**
- International Forestry Resources and Institutions (IFRI)**
- Namati**
- PRISMA (Salvadoran Research Program on Development and Environment)**