**‘World Bank should rethink its self-defeating stance on human rights’ – UN expert**

**NEW YORK** (7 November 2014) – UN Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, Professor Philip Alston, in an op-ed published in the Washington Post, criticized the World Bank for its long-standing aversion to discussing human rights.

In his op-ed, Professor Alston responded to a recent speech by World Bank President Jim Yong Kim, who said that the Bank stands “in lockstep” with the agenda of Rev. Martin Luther King Jr, without once mentioning the importance of human rights. “Kim’s analysis suggests that poverty eradication can be severed from the struggle for rights that defined everything King stood for. It is as though King’s ‘dream’ was about the creation of a large and benevolent bureaucracy, perhaps based in Washington, that could, by working through governments and not talking about rights, bring prosperity and dignity to the poorest in our societies”, said the UN expert.

“Women’s empowerment, children’s access to education, the rule of law and the promotion of human security cannot and will not happen if ‘human rights’ remain unmentionable at the World Bank”, said the UN expert. The Bank is a crucial actor in the debate over both development and human rights. Its policies matter a great deal, and the policies it lacks matter every bit as much.

“Officials at the Bank ask why it matters whether they use human rights language, as long as they are pushing for gender equality, access to water and so on. The answer is that rights language provides a context and a framework, invokes states’ legal obligations, underscores that certain values are nonnegotiable, brings a degree of normative certainty, and makes use of the agreed interpretations of rights that have emerged from decades of reflection, discussion and adjudication. Most important, rights language recognizes the dignity and agency of all individuals and is intentionally empowering.”

Professor Alston dismissed the idea that the Bank’s 1944 Articles of Agreement forbid it from considering human rights because they are ‘political’. “Human rights are seen to be in a wholly different category from the supposedly antiseptically apolitical work of the Bank. This is nonsense, of course”, said the UN expert.

Today, every country and thus every Bank member state has ratified human rights treaties imposing binding legal obligations to respect rights. Most international organizations have formally embraced human rights as central considerations in their work. “Even most large corporations have human rights policies that put the Bank to shame. The Bank is a lone outlier, apart from its twin, the International Monetary Fund”, said Professor Alston.

\* Read the full op-ed here: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/philip-alston-the-world-bank-treats-human-rights-as-unmentionable/2014/11/07/9091dafa-65da-11e4-9fdc-d43b053ecb4d_story.html>

*Philip Alston (Australia) took office as UN Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights in June 2014, following his appointment by the Human Rights Council. He is John Norton Pomeroy Professor of Law at New York University School of Law. Mr. Alston has previously served the UN in several capacities including as Special Rapporteur on Extrajudicial, Summary or Arbitrary Executions, Special Adviser to the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights on the Millennium Development Goals, as well as chairperson of the UN Committee on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights. As Special Rapporteur, he is independent and acts in his personal capacity. Learn more, log on to:* [*http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Poverty/Pages/SRExtremePovertyIndex.aspx*](http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Poverty/Pages/SRExtremePovertyIndex.aspx)