Last Friday, President Barack Obama nominated Dr. Jim Yong Kim to serve as President of the World Bank. As a practicing medical anthropologist and specialist in infectious disease, Dr. Kim co-founded Partners In Health (PIH) and is the current President of Dartmouth University. This nomination is a testament to the power of anthropology to contribute to development and well-being around the world.

Dr. Kim earned an M.D. and a Ph.D. in Anthropology from Harvard University. The combination of the two has enabled him to design public health programs for developing countries based on an exceptional understanding of the cultures and circumstances of citizens in those countries.

Kim’s work does not stop there, according to colleague, G. Derrick Hodge in a March 2011 American Anthropologist article. The MacArthur Foundation awarded Dr. Kim’s work in the field of medical anthropology with a fellowship in 2003, known within the academic community as a “Genius Award”. During this fellowship, he designed a model for reducing the price of pharmaceutical treatments for AIDS and tuberculosis; providing access for millions of people who previously went untreated. In 2005 Kim was one of U.S. News and World Report’s 25 “Best Leaders”; and named one of the top 100 most important people in the world according to Time magazine. Dr. Kim also took time away from academic career to direct the World Health Organization’s HIV/AIDS program. Hodge praises Dr. Kim for his effectiveness as “Kim’s work at WHO had far more direct impact on human life than his scholarly interventions.”

In a PIH press release, Dr. Paul Farmer praised President Obama’s decision: “I can think of no one more able to help families, communities, and entire nations break out of poverty, which is the stated goal of the World Bank,” Dr. Farmer said. “Having had the good fortune to train with Jim at Harvard, and to see him work in settings from inner-city Boston to the slums of Peru, from Haiti to Rwanda to the prisons of Siberia, I know that for three decades Jim has committed himself to breaking the cycle of poverty and disease.”

Dr. Kim’s nomination will be under review by the World Bank’s governing board amongst two other candidates and a decision is expected to be made in April.

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Founded in 1902, the American Anthropological Association is the world’s largest professional organization of anthropologists and others interested in anthropology, with an average annual membership of more than 10,000. The Arlington, VA – based association represents all specialties within anthropology – cultural anthropology, biological (or physical) anthropology, archaeology, linguistics and applied anthropology.