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Briefing on the United Nations Fourth World Conference of Women October 25, 1995

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THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

October 23, 1995

The Honorable Carol Rasco
Assistant To the President For Domestic Policy
The White House
West Wing
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Ms. Rasco:

I invite you to join me on Wednesday, October 25 from 11:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. for a briefing on the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women and a discussion of the United States follow-up including the President's Inter-Agency Women's Council.

As you know, the end of the Conference in Beijing is actually the beginning of our work in our own country. We will discuss how we can best translate the Platform for Action into concrete improvements in the lives of American women and their families.

The briefing will be held in Room 450 of the Old Executive Office Building and will include lunch. Please contact my office by phone 202/456-7261 or fax 202/456-6244 in regard to your attendance and include both your date of birth and your social security number in your response. Photo identification is required to enter the building.

I look forward to seeing you on the 25th as we take the next step in bringing home the message of the U.N. Conference.

Sincerely yours,


Hillary Rodham Clinton

**PHOTOCOPY
HRC HANDWRITING**

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Hillary Rodham Clinton
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*Called
& faxed
to confirm
attendance
R*

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

file mtg.
(SUSPENDED)
First Lady's
Briefing

October 25, 1995
The President's Interagency Council on Women

On August 26, 1995, prior to the UN Fourth World Conference on Women, President Clinton announced the formation of an interagency Women's Council. This intragovernmental body is charged with coordinating the implementation of the Platform for Action adopted at Beijing, including the U.S. commitments announced at the Conference. The Council will also develop related initiatives to further women's progress and engage in outreach and public education to support the successful implementation of the Conference agreements. The President said:

"The (Women's) Conference is going to talk about education and domestic violence and grass roots economics, employment, health care, political participation....And we don't intend to walk away from it when it's over. I'm going to establish an interagency council on women to make sure that all the effort and good ideas actually get implemented when we get back home."

Secretary of Health and Human Services Donna Shalala, who served as Co-Chair of the official U.S. delegation to Beijing, will chair the Council and First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton will serve as Honorary Chair. The Council will include high level representatives from Executive Branch agencies. Theresa Loar and Kathleen Hendrix from the State Department, will continue to play leadership roles as they did in preparation for the Women's Conference.

The President's Interagency Council on Women may be reached at:

202/456-7350
202/456-7357 fax
<http://women.usia.gov/usia>
(internet)

The President's Interagency Council
on Women
The White House
New Executive Office Building
Suite 3212
Washington, DC 20503

Follow up on U.S. Commitments Made in Beijing

1. President's Interagency Council on Women. The President has established an Interagency Council. This intragovernmental body is charged with coordinating the implementation of the Platform for Action adopted at Beijing, including the U.S. commitments announced at the Conference. The Council will also develop related initiatives to further women's progress and engage in outreach and public education to support the successful implementation of the Conference agreements.

POINT OF CONTACT: Theresa Loar (202) 456-7350. President's Inter-Agency Council on Women.

2. Working Women. Under the direction of Karen Nussbaum, the Director of the Women's Bureau, the Department of Labor (DOL) has followed up its survey on working women by responding to the three areas that matter most to working American women: job security, work and family responsibilities, and valuing of women's work. By reaching out to any organization that has ever contacted the Women's Bureau, the Department has developed an "Honor Roll" of organizations and companies that have pledged to improve the lives of women in one of these areas. More than 400 pledges have been received so far, from major multinational corporations as well as small local enterprises. In March, the Department will follow up with these companies and organizations to see whether real improvements have been made.

POINT OF CONTACT: Mimi Castaldi (202) 219-6611, DOL.

3. Domestic Violence. Through the Office of Domestic Violence at the Department of Justice, the Administration has taken several very important steps to publicize the problem of domestic violence. The Administration declared October to be Domestic Violence Awareness Month, and a variety of local and national programs are being held around the country in conjunction with this. In addition, President Clinton has signed an Executive Memorandum, directing all federal agencies to train their employees about domestic violence and direct them to resources that are available.

POINT OF CONTACT: Bonnie Campbell (202) 616-8894. DOJ.

4. Women and Microenterprise. The Department of the Treasury will shortly be announcing an initiative concerning this commitment. The US Agency for International Development (USAID) is also planning to continue its existing programming concerning improving access to credit for microenterprises -- an activity that disproportionately benefits women.

POINTS OF CONTACT: Jeanne Nelson (202) 456-9022. Office of the Vice President. Beth Rhyne (202) 663-2360. USAID.

5. Health. The Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) is taking action on a range of problems of concern to women throughout the life cycle, recognizing the additional problems faced by women of low income and from ethnic and racial minorities. Programs include: a comprehensive plan to reduce smoking among children and adolescents by 50 percent; a new initiative to reduce teen pregnancy; the establishment of a Governing Council on Children and Youth; the inauguration of the National Women's Health Clearinghouse; new initiatives on breast and cervical cancer, the impact of poverty-related diseases on women, and the inclusion of women in clinical trials; contraceptive research and development; a continued commitment to the Women's Health Initiative; and a public policy agenda on HIV/AIDS specific to women, adolescents and children.

POINT OF CONTACT: Sarah Kovner, (202) 690-5400, DHHS

6. International Development. USAID is continuing planning for two mutually-reinforcing initiatives concerning women's political participation and legal rights.

The political participation program will increase women's access to and participation in political processes and elections in both transitional and consolidating democracies around the work. It will provide assistance in political leadership training, support networking among politically active women and women's political organizations, educate women about voter rights, civic rights and responsibilities and provide technical training and leadership services. The Global Bureau's Center for Democracy and Governance recently awarded The Asia Foundation -- in cooperation with the African-American Institute, America-Mideast Educational and Training Services, Inc., and Participa (of Chile)-- a \$1 million, three-year cooperative agreement.

The women's legal rights program will develop through research and disseminate knowledge about women's legal status, and strengthen the capacity of PVOs, NGOs and other actors to implement corrective programs. Goals will include strengthening women's legal literacy, integrating gender issues into law school curricula, providing gender-sensitive training to the judiciary, support legal clinics, engage in dialogue with legislators to promote equitable laws and policies and facilitate partnerships and networks across sectors.

POINTS OF CONTACT: Women's Political Participation -- Melissa Brown (202) 736-7979; Women's Legal Rights -- Cate Johnson (703) 816-0266; both of USAID.

drafted:PIACW:JAMeer
10/24/95
FOLLOWUP

**Summary of the Reservation and Interpretive Statements
at the UN Fourth World Conference on Women
Made by the United States Delegation**

Reservation

o The United States entered a single reservation to the Platform for Action, concerning paragraph six, within the "Mission Statement" section of the document. Reservations are commonly used by nations at the United Nations to suggest opposition to a particular idea or term, while not dissociating from consensus on a document as a whole.

o This paragraph called for the mobilization of new and additional resources to developing countries from all available funding mechanisms to promote the advancement of women.

o The U.S. Delegation clarified that it could not agree to increases in funding other than through reallocation of existing resources or through the provision of other than governmental resources.

o The reservation also noted that many of the most critical actions to be taken do not require additional funds from the international community.

Interpretive Statements

o In addition, during discussion in the Main Committee, the United States entered 13 interpretive statements to the Platform for Action.

o They included the notion that the United States intends to carry out the Platform of Action, though it does not accept all of its provisions as legally binding. The Delegation noted that the term "sustainable development" should be understood in light of its previous use in the UN Conference on Environment and Development, and the World Summit on Social Development.

o Another interpretive statement noted that the United States does not support discrimination based on sexual orientation, even though the term is omitted from the Platform for Action. And the Delegation also pledged to develop more comprehensive knowledge and data collection on the issue of unwaged work.

o The United States clarified that it understood a section of the document describing causes of environmental degradation not to imply that these conditions always cause such degradation. The Delegation noted that "the radical transformation of the

relationship between men and women" refers to the realization of full equality between the sexes.

- o Another interpretive statement noted that the United States committed itself to creating an enabling environment for non-governmental organizations. The U.S. Delegation also reaffirmed the importance of freedom from coercion, discrimination and violence in relations between women and men.

- o The United States noted that foreign occupation is not, *per se* a human rights violation, though human rights violations do occur in situations of foreign occupation. The Delegation stated that in the United States "equal remuneration for men and women for work of equal value," is carried out through the doctrine of "equal pay for equal work."

- o Another interpretive statement clarified the notion that NGOs are invited rather than mandated to carry out the Platform for Action, since governments cannot instruct NGOs how to act; this is especially true among members of the media, where such action by governments might be construed as impinging upon their freedom to print, say or express their opinions.

- o Finally, the Delegation showed through an interpretive statement that the United States has neither accepted an "agreed target" for official development assistance (ODA), nor agreed to increase its share of ODA for social development programs. Though the United States will continue to work with developing countries, it is national governments, and not international donors, that bear primary responsibility for national development.

- o This reservation and interpretive statements are fully in accord with principles guiding U.S. Delegations to previous UN meetings and other international fora.

- o Other states noted similar concerns with the Platform for Action, though the level of reservations is similar to that for previous world conference documents, and is lower than for some recent ones (The International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo, for example, where some delegations lodged reservations against entire sections of the document.)

UN FOURTH WORLD CONFERENCE ON WOMEN
UPDATE ON HOT BUTTON ISSUES
FROM US DELEGATION

FAMILIES AND MOTHERS

- The Platform reaffirms the crucial role of women in the family:

"Women play a crucial role in the family. The family is the basic unit of society and as such should be strengthened. It is entitled to receive comprehensive protection and support. In different cultural, political, and social systems, various forms of the family exist. The rights, capabilities, and responsibilities of family members must be respected. Women make a great contribution to the welfare of the family and to the development of society, which is still not fully recognized or considered in its full importance. The social significance of maternity, motherhood and the role of parents in the family and in the upbringing of children should be acknowledged. The upbringing of children requires shared responsibility of parents, women and men and society as a whole. Maternity, motherhood, parenting, and the role of women in procreation must not be a basis for discrimination nor restrict the full participation of women in society. Recognition should also be given to the important role often played by women in many countries in caring for other members of their family."

- The US Delegation supported this language and contributed to its formulation. We recognize that women have multiple roles in modern society. These roles can impose difficult choices on women even as they offer women new opportunities to develop their full human potential -- as mothers, sisters, daughters, business leaders, politicians, academics, caregivers, and providers.
- Investing in women -- important in itself -- is investing in families: mothers devote more of their earnings to their family and the one-earner family is increasingly a thing of the past as it is more and more difficult to sustain a family on one person's income.

ROLE OF RELIGION

- The US delegation played a leadership role in building consensus on strong language supporting religious liberty. The language in the Platform is as follows:

"Religion, spirituality and belief play a central role in the lives of millions of women and men, in the way they live and in the aspirations they have for the future. The right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion is inalienable and must be universally enjoyed. This right includes the freedom to have or to adopt the religion or belief of one's choice either individually or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest one's religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching. In order to realize equality, development and peace, there is a need to fully respect these rights and freedoms. Religion, thought, conscience and belief may, and can, contribute to fulfilling women's and men's moral, ethical and spiritual needs and to realizing their full potential in society. However, it is acknowledged that any form of extremism may have a negative impact on women and can lead to violence and discrimination."

PARENTAL RESPONSIBILITIES

- After extensive negotiation, a drafting group consisting of more than 70 countries with a broad range of views, reached agreement on how to address parental rights issues in the platform.
- This package thus negotiated balances both the responsibilities, rights and duties of parents with the rights of the children as they pertain to service provision for children in sections on education, health and girls.
- Some of the original text was initially ill-placed as it referred to services for women. As negotiated there are two full references to parental rights in the Platform. One each in health, girl-child and education.
- The following language appears twice following other phrases:

"...taking into account the rights of the child to access to information, privacy, confidentiality, respect and informed consent as well as the responsibilities, rights and duties of parents and legal guardians to provide, in a manner consistent with the evolving capacities of the child, appropriate direction and guidance in the exercise by the child of the rights recognized in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. In all actions concerning children, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration."

NATIONAL SOVEREIGNTY and UNIVERSALITY of HUMAN RIGHTS

- The Platform reaffirms the universal nature of human rights, a fundamental principle reflected in the UN Charter and the Vienna Declaration of Human Rights.
- However, some countries use the concept of national sovereignty to justify denial of human rights and equality on the grounds that their national laws, cultures, religions and customs preclude them from giving their citizens the full protection of international human rights and fundamental freedoms.
- We recognize that cultural and religious diversities exist among different countries and that domestic implementation of human rights programs is a legitimate matter of national responsibility. However, to ensure that the overall goal of protecting human rights for all people is not undermined by unnecessary restrictions or limitations rooted in claims of national sovereignty, the US worked with other delegations to develop appropriate language to reflect the obligation of all countries to respect and promote human rights regardless of their historical, cultural or religious particularities.

CREATION OF NEW RIGHTS

- The Platform does not create any new rights.
- The Platform reaffirms the human rights of women.
- The Platform includes language that states "Good health is essential to leading a productive and fulfilling life and the right of all women to control all aspects of their health, in particular their own fertility, is basic to their empowerment."
- In 1993, the Vienna World Conference on Human Rights made clear that women have "the right to accessible and adequate health care and the widest range of family planning services..." In 1994 the International Conference on Population and Development reaffirmed language agreed to for more than twenty years in UN documents recognizing "the basic right of all couple and individuals to decide freely and responsibly the number, spacing and timing of their children and to have the information and means to do so, and the right to attain the highest attainable standard of sexual and reproductive health."
- The health language in the Women's Conference Platform is an elaboration of these previously agreed rights.

EQUALITY IN SEXUAL RELATIONS

- The consensus language adopted by the contact group is:

"The human rights of women include their right to have control over and decide freely and responsibly on matters related to their sexuality, including sexual and reproductive health, free of coercion, discrimination and violence. Equal relationships between women and men in matters of sexual relations and reproduction, including full respect for the integrity of the person, require mutual respect, consent and shared responsibility for sexual behavior and its consequences."

- The intent of this language is to promote equality in relationships between women and men.
- Together with other parts of the platform, this language recognizes the human rights of every woman to be free of violence and coercion in all aspects of her life. No new international human rights are created with this language. It simply recognizes existing rights as they apply to reproductive and sexual health and sexuality.
- The US participated in developing the language which draws from views articulated by a wide range of delegations in the sub-contact group, including delegations from Jordan, Morocco, Iran, Argentina, the Holy See, Brazil (for several South American countries), Trinidad and Tobago, (for Caricom plus Haiti and Cuba), Senegal (for the Africa Group), and the European Union.
- Rights can only be enjoyed in the context of the obligations they impose on individuals to respect the rights of others. In no case can an individual's right be used to take rights away from anyone else (i.e. a child's right to be free from abuse).

SEXUAL ORIENTATION

- US supported the Platform in its intent to improve the status of all women. We support the elimination of barriers that women may face because of such factors as race, age, language, ethnicity, culture, religion, sexual orientation, or disability. We oppose discrimination in all forms.
- In the final hours of the conference, the references to non-discrimination based on sexual orientation were deleted from the Platform because there was no consensus and considerable opposition to retaining them. Some states, such as Canada and South Africa, and including the U.S. made statements from the floor in support of retaining language. In the US Interpretative Statements and Reservations concerning the Platform that was filed at the end of the conference, the US issued the following:

USG Interpretative Statement
Paragraph 48, Chapter IV (Strategic Objectives)

The United States Government has a firm policy of non-discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and considers that the omission of this reference in Paragraph 48 and elsewhere in the Platform for Action in no way justifies such discrimination in any country.