

**REMARKS BY THE FIRST LADY
AT THE UNITED NATIONS**

December 10, 1997

United Nations Economic and Social Council Chamber
United Nations Plaza
New York, New York

MRS. CLINTON: Thank you. Mr. President, your excellencies. I welcome this opportunity to be here as we begin this yearlong commemoration, which is not just a commemoration of the universality of human rights; it is a celebration of the United Nations. I am especially pleased that we are able to gather this morning in the economic and social council, which at its first session in February of 1946, established the Commission on Human Rights.

Forty-nine winters ago the world acknowledged the new common standard for human dignity, a code for the peoples and governments of the world to live by. One of the people who labored to create that code was Eleanor Roosevelt, then the United States representative to the U.N. Commission on Human Rights. The place was Paris. The delegates who came together to craft the language hailed from countries as diverse as Lebanon, Chile, France, China, and Ukraine. And the dream was the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the first international agreement on the rights of humankind.

Some of humanity's greatest lessons emerge only after the deepest tragedies. This Declaration took shape in a world ravaged by the horrors of militarism and fascism. In the wake of the most violent revelations of the depths to which human beings can dehumanize one another, the world as a whole was ready at last to agree upon these standards for human rights.

Let me read a passage from that document: "Disregard and contempt for human rights have resulted in barbarous acts which have outraged the conscience of mankind. The advent of a world in which human beings shall enjoy freedom of speech and belief, and freedom from fear and want have been proclaimed as the highest aspirations of the common people. Therefore, the General Assembly proclaims this Universal Declaration of Human Rights as a common standard of achievement for all peoples and nations."

The document goes on to state what should be obvious, but too often is not: "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience, and should act toward one another in a spirit of brotherhood." How radically idealistic an act it was at first for the nations of the world to describe publicly in this Declaration.

That act did not, however, take place in a vacuum. It was a response to evil, and I used that word deliberately. Those study the Holocaust know that Nazis were able to pursue their crimes precisely because they were able progressively to constrict the circle of those defined as humans. From the moment they came to power, they proceeded step by step to dehumanize, through laws and propaganda, the mentally ill, the infirm, gypsies, homosexuals, Jews -- they whom they identified as lives unworthy of life.

This cold, dark region of the human soul, where people withdraw first understanding, then empathy, and finally even the designation of personhood from another human being, is not, of course, unique to Nazi Germany. This new device, this ability to dehumanize, has been witnessed in all times and places. And it is precisely this device that the Declaration attempted to help us resist.

Thankfully, in the half-century since the birth of the Declaration, we have as a global people managed progressively to expand the circle of full human dignity. Because of this document, individuals and nations alike have a standard by which to measure fundamental rights. Many of the countries that have emerged in the last 50 years have drawn inspiration from the Declaration in their own constitutions. Courts of law look to the Declaration. It has laid the groundwork for the world's war crimes tribunals. And it has prompted governments to set up their own commissions to safeguard basic liberties.

At the United Nations Conference on Human Rights in Vienna in 1993, it was the power of the Declaration that inspired the establishment of a High Commissioner on Human Rights. And let me add how lucky the United Nations and indeed the world is that Mary Robinson fills that post.

At the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995, it was the strength of this Declaration that enabled us to say for all the world to hear that human rights are women's rights, and that women's rights are human rights.

And yet -- and yet, in spite of this half-century of progress, we have not expanded the circle of human dignity human dignity far enough. There are still too many of our fellow men and women excluded from the fundamental rights proclaimed in the Declaration, too many whom we have hardened our hearts against -- those whose human suffering we fail fully to see, to hear, and to feel.

Any look back at history shows that every nation has had its blind spots that have kept people out of the promised circle of full humanity. Take the example of my own country. We in the United States have had our own difficult experiences with the selective or unequal application of the rights established in the American Constitution. Even the founding fathers, whose ideas of human dignity were so far ahead of their time, proclaiming that all men are created equal in the Declaration of Independence, inscribed slavery in our Constitution.

It has taken most of our 220 years, some of them bloody, few of them easy, to extend the benefits of citizenship to African Americans, to those without property, and women. Eleanor

Roosevelt herself was 35 years old before she could vote.

Even today, we circumscribe the circle -- in what we choose not to see. Black South Africans described what it was like to work all day in white environments in which one was literally not seen. In the Balkans people have willed themselves not to see the humanity of those whose heritage is different from their own. We ourselves in the industrialized world often choose not to see the child labor that goes into our beautiful carpets or are comfortable shoes.

And in too many places today what we fail to see are the injustices done to women. We choose not to see the injustice of legal systems around the world that continue to treat women as less than complete citizens. In too many places female heirs are seeing less inheritance than male heirs. Inequitable divorce laws compel women to remain in cruel marriages. And courts of law require the testimony of two women to equal that of a solitary man.

Our vision is limited in other areas as well. We choose not to see the contribution of women to the economic lives of their families and countries. In too many places women are discriminated against for bank loans and credit, first jobs and promotions. They are denied pay equal to that of men, or any pay at all. And they live disproportionately in poverty, making up 70 percent of the world's poor.

We also circumscribe the circle by what we choose not to hear. Freedom and equality for all depend first on whether a citizen truly has a voice. It is telling that even in the drafting of the Universal Declaration, there was a debate about women's voices. The initial version of the first article stated, "All men are created equal." It took women members of the Commission, led by Hansa Mehta of India, to point out that "all men" might be interpreted to exclude women. Only after long debate was the language changed to say, "All human beings are born free and equal."

Today we still choose not to hear the voices of many women. In too many places women are blocked from participating in the political lives of their countries. Just nine days in Sudan, 36 women were arrested while attempting to deliver a petition to the United Nations office there in protest of human rights violations in their country. They were arrested, fined, and at least one woman received 40 lashes.

In too many places girls and women never even learn to project their voices. Two-thirds of the 130 million children out of school are girls. Two-thirds of the 96 million people worldwide who can neither read nor write are women. Even now the Taliban in Afghanistan are blocking girls from attending school. Not only that, they are blocking those like Emma Bonino, the European Union Commissioner for Humanitarian Affairs, who would speak out on behalf of this injustice.

Freedom of speech and freedom of the press, the rights to petition the government and to assemble -- all these are essential. But think how much weaker these rights are in a nation where the majority of young women are illiterate. Rights on paper that are not protected and implemented are not really rights at all.

We further constrict the circle of human rights through what we choose not to feel. As Eleanor Roosevelt put it, "When will our conscience grow so tender that we will act to prevent human misery rather than avenge it?"

In too many places the suffering of women is designed as trivial, to be explained away as a cultural phenomenon. Perhaps is for this reason that women do not receive proper health care, including access to family planning. Perhaps that's why the genital cutting in some countries more than 90 percent of women have undergone continues. Perhaps that is why domestic and sexual violence remains the most serious under-reported and widespread human rights violation in the world.

In almost every country of the world, domestic violence is one of the leading causes of injury and death to women. In my country 30 percent of female murder victims are killed by current or former partners. As Secretary of State Madeleine Albright has said, domestic violence can never again be dismissed, as it often has in the past, as part of a country's norm or as a set of private assumptions about family life. Let us say it loudly for the entire world to hear us: We do not believe that violence against women is simply cultural; we believe it is simply criminal. (Applause.)

And perhaps that is why rape and sexual assault continue to be tactics of war. It is the cruelest injustice that so many wars end not in peace for women and their families, but in refugee crises that trapped women and children in lives that go from bad to worse. Women and children make up 80 percent of the world's 23 million refugees.

The full enfranchisement of the rights of women is unfinished business in this turbulent century. What meaning do the language of freedom and human rights have for a young women forced into prostitution and traffic in the commercial sex trade? What meaning can it have for women forced into involuntary servitude as sweat shop workers or domestic servants? What meaning can it have for a women forced either to bear a child or abort one? What about the very ingrained practices that undermine the growth and development of girls from their very first years, such as the common practice of feeding them last or less?

As I have been privileged to travel around the world, I have met countless women who know nothing of this Declaration and its promises. But they are eloquent in their belief that they deserve respect and better treatment, in their families, workplaces, and societies.

And yet some critics continue to dismiss women's sufferings as minor. But are they? In 1958 Eleanor Roosevelt wrote: Where do human rights begin? In small places, close to home, so close and so small that they cannot be seen on any maps of the world. Yet they are the world of the individual person -- the neighborhood he lives in, the factory, farm, or office where he works. Such are the places where every man, woman, and child seeks equal justice, equal opportunity, equal dignity without discrimination. Unless these rights have meaning there, they have little meaning anywhere.

Other critics dismiss human rights violations as harmless. A report released this week by the Harding Commission on preventing deadly conflict proves otherwise. According to the report, an upsurge of egregious human rights violations is almost always a powerful warning of dire events to come, including massive refugee flows and civil wars.

Still others say that human rights are a Westerner's luxury -- not inalienable, but alien. But I believe, and the women I've listened to believe, that human rights are as essential to life as air or water, that they are felt beyond culture and tradition as innate. The women I have met do not feel that human rights are a foreign concept invented by purists. Rather they know, in spite of everything they are told by culture and tradition, in their very hearts and souls, that these are God-given rights that they were born with as surely as they were born into the human family.

For if they are not innate, how have people throughout history known to fight for them so valiantly? Paradoxically, the proof of universality lies with the perpetrators of human rights violations themselves. Why would those who have dishonored humanity run to cover their tracks were it not for the knowledge that wrong had been done? The Nazis tried to hide their concentration camps. Communism kept its terrors in the shadow of the Iron Curtain. Scores of bodies are hidden in the hard ground of places like Bosnia and deep in the forests of places like Rwanda.

Throughout my hemisphere, people have disappeared. Why go to the trouble? Because human rights transcend individual regimes and customs. The beliefs inscribed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights were not invented 50 years ago. They are not the work of a single culture or country. They have been with us forever -- from civilization's first light.

Sophocles wrote about them 2,500 years ago. He had Antigone declare that there ethical laws higher than the laws of even kings. P.C. Chang, who helped draft the Universal Declaration, pointed out that Confucius articulated them in ancient China. The belief that we must respect our neighbors as we would respect ourselves resides in the core of the teachings of all the major faiths of the world.

The principles inscribed in the document whose birth we mark today are not constructed, but revealed. Every great religion exposed and taught their truth. If I were to tear up this declaration, its values would abide. If I were to burn this document, its meaning would remain. If I were to prevent someone from hearing these words, they would still ring as loudly as ever in the hearts of men and women.

It is because every era has its blind spots that we must see our own unfinished business now while we stand on the threshold of a new millennium with even greater urgency. We must rededicate ourselves to completing the circle of human rights once and for all. We must challenge ourselves to see more sharply, to hear more clearly, to feel more fully.

And we must do something else. We must support democracies new and old that work to fulfill the aspirations of this Declaration. As my husband the President said last night: Democracy, the rule of law, civil society -- those things are the best guarantees of human rights

over the long run.

It is time for us as a global community to commitment ourselves. We have run out of excuses not to. Here we are at the very close of the 20th century, a century that has been scorched by war time and time again. If the history of this century teaches us anything, it is that whenever the dignity of any individual or group is compromised by the derogation of who they are, of some essential attribute they possess, then we all leave ourselves open to nightmares to come.

Conversely, if the century has a lesson for us that is redeeming, it is that by extending the circle of citizenship and human dignity to include everyone without exception, then we have the basis where new worlds of hope can flourish.

So let us in this year of commemoration walk toward those new worlds. And let us do so knowing that the path will never be easy. These rights may be eternal, but so too is the struggle to attain them. Though the darkness of the human heart may recede, it will never go away. It must be with realistic eyes that we look for human rights. And it must be with a clean hand and open hearts that in this, the 50th anniversary of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, that we rededicate ourselves to their fulfillment.

Thank you very much. (Applause.)

FIRST LADY HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON

PHYSICIANS FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

DIRKSEN SENATE OFFICE BLDG.

WASHINGTON, D.C.

APRIL 28, 1999

Thank you, Len, for that kind introduction. It's a great pleasure to be with all of you today, to celebrate the work of the Physicians for Human Rights, and to honor an outspoken champion of those rights, Senator Dianne Feinstein. There are so many here who are working on the front lines -- and in the halls of government -- to advance human dignity and freedom around the world. I'm pleased to see Theresa Loar, senior coordinator for international women's issues at the State Department; and Bennett Freeman, deputy assistant secretary for democracy, human rights and labor at the State Department. I want to acknowledge as well members of Congress who have joined us today -- including Senators Patti Murray and Mary Landrieu. [Former Gov. Anne Richards may also be present.]

I want to take a moment to commend the work of Physicians for Human Rights, which does such a remarkable job of documenting human rights abuses and crimes against humanity -- and holding them up to the cold light of public scrutiny. Today we will be focusing on the pervasive violation of women's rights taking place under the iron heel of the Taliban in Afghanistan.

But I know that your members are also active in many other regions of the world -- including some who are now interviewing the refugees streaming out of Kosovo, and documenting the terrible stories of mass killings, rape, and other crimes being reported there.

So I want to applaud Dr. Robert Lawrence, [president of the Board of directors] Len Rubenstein [executive director] and Holly Burkhalter -- who I know had a great deal to do with bringing everyone together today -- and everyone at Physicians for Human Rights, for the important work that you do every day here and across the globe.

Today, we honor someone who has worked tirelessly to end the violence in America's communities -- and improve human rights around the world: Senator Dianne Feinstein. As a freshman Senator -- she fought valliantly -- and sucessfully -- to ban assault weapons — making the streets and communities and schools of America safer for our citizens. [The Senator was with us at the White House yesterday -- as the President proposed a series of gun-control measures in response to the shootings at Columbine High School. It's times of tragedy like these that we look to leaders like Dianne Feinstein who have stood so tough for so long on these issues of public safety.]

As a human rights advocate — Senator Feinstein has helped educate the public about international human rights violations such as the use of rape as a weapon of war, and the trafficking of women and girls. And today, we honor her especially for her work to end the widespread violation of women's rights in Afghanistan -- by organizing Congressional hearings and briefings; speaking out on the issue; calling for an international tribunal to investigate claims of rape as a tool of terror against women in Afghanistan -- and spearheading the passage of a Senate resolution calling for an end to the systematic abuse of women and girls in Afghanistan.

I also want to applaud her work on behalf of the Convention to Eliminate All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). It's an outrage that 163 countries have ratified that human rights convention — and we remain the last democracy in the world which has failed to do so. I join Senator Feinstein — and the President — in calling on Congress to pass CEDAW this year. We cannot -- and should not -- tolerate one more year of delay.

As I look around this room this afternoon, I am reminded of the words of Eleanor Roosevelt, who said that “the destiny of human rights is in the hands of all of our citizens, in all of our communities.”

Thanks to the work of your hands — and your hearts — and the work of so many like you around the world — progress is being made around the world -- particularly for women.

Today, more women and girls are learning to read and write, as nations — often for the first time — begin to invest in their education. Women are living longer and healthier lives, and more are surviving childbirth, as they gain greater access to health care and reproductive services. Women are discovering a new level of economic independence, and contributing more to their families and communities, as they gain access to jobs and credit. And as a result of hard-won changes in laws and social attitudes — women are holding positions of power and authority as never before.

Yet as we all know — the women of Afghanistan are being pushed brutally backward in time. The opportunities they once enjoyed are being trampled by the iron rule of the Taliban — creating one of the clearest examples of the systematic violation of women's rights in any nation today.

We know our work is not over, when the women of Afghanistan -- who used to make up half the country's teachers -- are now prohibited from teaching -- and their daughters are barred from school. When thousands of war widows have become the sole support of their families -- and many are now begging in the streets to feed their children, because they have lost their livelihoods. When women are savagely beaten by "religious police" for not being fully covered by the burqa, or for making noise while they walk.

We know our work is not over, when women continue to die after being turned away at hospitals -- because the Taliban prohibits most doctors from treating women and girls. We know our work is not over — when even land mine awareness instruction is forbidden to women and older girls — increasing the injuries from mine explosions among the female population.

I've just read about one of the terrifying stories that has just recently been brought out of Afghanistan by Zora Rasech [RAH-sick] of Physicians for Human Rights -- who my husband and I had last December at the White House for International Human Rights Day. She has literally risked her life -- and shown uncommon personal courage -- to interview women in Kabul and in the refugee camps in Pakistan. Her story is about a woman who refused to obey Taliban orders to close a home school for women and girls.

She was shot in the head and stomach -- in front of her 40 students, her husband, and her 18-month-old daughter -- when Taliban militia burst into her house -- demanding she close the school. When she refused -- and instead denounced the Taliban for its repression of women -- she was murdered on the spot.

We cannot allow these terrible crimes against women and girls of Afghanistan -- and truly, against all of humanity -- to continue. We must make it unmistakably clear that the suffering inflicted on the women and girls of Afghanistan is not cultural -- it's criminal. And we must do everything in our power to stop it.

If these events in Afghanistan were taking place ten years ago -- many nations -- and individuals -- would be looking the other way. It would be business as usual. But today, the international community is saying no. No, we won't tolerate such widespread violations of women rights and human rights. No. We won't turn away when half the population of a nation is being persecuted, and robbed of their most fundamental freedoms.

I'm pleased that so many countries and non-governmental organizations are taking action -- including our own. I'm proud of what the President and his Administration have done to spotlight the human rights crisis taking place in Afghanistan -- and to put women's human rights at the top of our foreign policy agenda for that country. The President has condemned these violations in the strongest possible way to heads of state --including Prime Minister Sharif of Pakistan. And he and others in the Administration are working with human rights and women's rights groups here in the US.

The President recently met with the Feminist Majority, which has taken on the mission of educating the American public about the plight of Afghan women. Our Secretary of State Madeleine Albright has herself traveled to the refugee camps along the border of Afghanistan, meeting with women there -- and vowing she will never forget their suffering. And she hasn't. Last year, we provided almost \$4 million for health and education projects for Afghan women and girls -- through the State Department and USAID. We remain committed -- as a nation and as citizens -- to continuing these activities in support of the women and girls of Afghanistan.

I want to thank all of you here today for reminding us of the lessons we must continue to learn -- and pass down to every generation. That we have a responsibility to each other as human beings. That we can never give in to silence; and that we can never -- ever -- resign ourselves to indifference.

Thank you for all you've done -- and will continue to do -- to promote the cause of human rights and democracy around the world.

Thank you.

FIRST LADY HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON
REMARKS AT 7th MILLENNIUM EVENING
THE PERILS OF INDIFFERENCE:
LESSONS LEARNED FROM A VIOLENT CENTURY
EAST ROOM, THE WHITE HOUSE
APRIL 12, 1999

Welcome to the East Room and the White House for our 7th Millennium Evening -- The Perils of Indifference: Lessons Learned from a Violent Century. We are honored to have so many [Members of Congress], Ambassadors, religious leaders, historians, and human rights activists here for what, I believe, will be an unforgettable evening.

Before we begin, I'd like to thank our sponsors, the National Endowment for the Humanities and Sun Microsystems, who is helping to bring this event to millions of people around the world via satellite and the Internet. Let me thank Pioneer New Media for donating these screens. And the Library of Congress and the United States Holocaust Museum for lending us the extraordinary displays in the Grand Foyer.

And I especially want to thank our guests of honor, Elie and Marion Weisel and their son, Elisha [Ee-leash-ah]. When my husband and I look back at our years in the White House, one of the highlights certainly has been the time we've spent with Elie and Marion, the friendship we've cultivated, the wise counsel we've always received. But, like many of you, my family first got to know Elie Weisel many years ago, through his writings and teachings about the responsibility we all have to each other as human beings.

For those of us who have read Night, we will never forget the description of the horrors inflicted on him as a young boy -- a boy of great religious convictions who tells us his God has been murdered...a boy of 14 who is forced to ask, "Was I awake? How could it be possible for them to burn children and for the world to remain silent?"

When I invited Elie Weisel here more than a year ago, I never could have imagined that children in Kosovo would be crowded into trains -- separated from their families, separated from their homes, robbed of their childhoods, their memory, their humanity. There are two major differences this time: We are not seeing the extermination of an entire people. And this time the world -- thank God -- is not silent.

On any day in the last 40 years, it would have been a tremendous honor to hear Elie Weisel speak at The White House about the need to never give in to silence or resign ourselves to indifference. But there has not been a day in the last 40 years, when it would have been more important than now -- here on the eve of the Days of Remembrance, and in the midst of the crimes against humanity being perpetrated in Kosovo.

When I invited Elie Weisel here, I explained that we were planning a series of Millennium Evenings designed to mark this specific moment in history -- by honoring the past and imagining the future. And in many ways our previous lectures have been celebrations of that past -- the founding ideals of our republic, the Jazz music, poetry, and scientific discovery that have defined us as individuals and as a nation. But honoring our past, learning from it, means looking not just at our noblest achievements, but at our greatest failings. Not just at what makes us proud, but the darkest impulses which have marred this century.

We know that the Nazis were able to pursue their crimes against humanity precisely because they were able to limit the circle of those defined as humans. The mentally ill, the infirm, gypsies, Jews -- all were identified as lives unworthy of life. This process of dehumanizing comes from the darkest regions of the human soul, where people first withdraw understanding, then empathy, and finally personhood.

Now, this phenomenon of indifference, this human capacity for evil, is not unique to that time and place in Nazi Germany.

I remember sitting in a room in Tuzla talking to a group of Bosnians. They were Serbs and Croats and Muslims. And they explained how men and boys were put in camps and executed. How women were raped. How children were turned into orphans. One of the people I was talking to said, “You know when it started in my village, “I went to one of my neighbors and I said, ‘We’ve known each other. We’ve been at each other’s weddings, we’ve attended the funerals of our loved ones together. Why is this happening?’” And the response she was given from an old friend was: ‘Well, we were read in a newspaper that if we didn’t do this to you, you would do it to us.’

It was the message of hatred that Milosevic and his allies were communicating in order to turn Bosnia into a killing field. What are we to do today when leaders hijack holy traditions, not to lift people closer to God, but to push them apart? What do we do about those who try to constrict the circle of human dignity by convincing us that our differences -- race and religion, gender, ethnicity and tribal -- are more important than our common humanity?

If this violent century teaches us anything, it is that whenever the dignity of one of us is threatened, the dignity of all of us is threatened as well. And none of us can remain silent.

When I was in Morocco just a few weeks ago, I learned about the origins of that country's history of religious tolerance. During World War II, His Majesty King Mohammed V, who was young at the time and had every reason to wish to develop a good relationship with France, decided that when the Vichy government asked for lists of Jews, he would say 'no.' He said that if Jews had to wear yellow stars, everyone would wear them. And he sent a message to his people, calling on all Muslims to stand with their Jewish brothers and sisters -- and saying that we don't have Jews or Arabs in this country, only Moroccans.

Imagine how life might be different here and throughout the world if each of us would see, feel, hear and act to stop the suffering of others as if they were our own loved ones. Maybe then we will never again in this country have to witness a black man dragged like an animal behind a car or a young gay man savagely beaten to death. Maybe then we will no longer see the small daily indignities that do not make the evening news, but strike at the values of this nation and the humanity of us all.

Because maybe then in 1999, we will learn that it isn't enough to refuse to commit crimes of hatred -- it isn't enough to look deep into our hearts and find no hatred. We must find compassion and love.

Every time we let a racial or religious slur go unchallenged, an indignity go unanswered, we are making a choice to be indifferent -- a choice to constrict the circle of human dignity. A choice to ignore history at our children's peril.

In Elie Weisel's Nobel Prize acceptance speech, he remembered asking his father how the world could have remained silent. And he imagined what that same young boy would ask him today: "Tell me what have you done with my future? What have you done with your life?" And "I tell him, " Weisel says, "that I have tried to keep memory alive, that I have tried to fight those who would forget."

And, I would add just a little more: You have taught us the meaning of the Holocaust and made sure that we always listen to its victims. You have been the world's conscience. You have been the voice of the voiceless -- from the Soviet Jewry, to the people of South Africa under Apartheid to the people of Yugoslavia today. You have

been a teacher to us all.

When that young boy asks what Elie Weisel has done with his future, we point to awards and honors too numerous to mention -- including the Nobel Peace Prize and the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

We hold up more than 40 books, and his service as the founding chair of the United States Holocaust Memorial. But, perhaps, the greatest gifts he's given have been the young people at Boston University and all over the world who understand our past...and who know that, in the future, we have a weapon to combat the worst in human beings -- and it is the best in human beings.

I understand that when Elie Weisel was forced to leave his home more than 50 years ago, he went into the backyard and buried the watch he had received on his Bar Mitzvah. In 1997, he went back to that spot. He took the same number of child size paces he had taken as a boy. He dug into the ground with his fingernails. And I'm told it was a bittersweet moment. Because, the watch was still there. It had lasted all those years -- but his family, his village, and so many others, were gone.

Mr. Weisel, thank you for keeping their memories alive despite the passage of time. And thank you for teaching us the lessons that transcend time -- lessons about the perils of indifference that we must finally learn if we are to make this next century a century of peace.

It is my great honor to introduce a friend, a teacher, a voice of justice and freedom, and a role model to us all, Elie Weisel.

FIRST LADY HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON
INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY
UNITED NATIONS
MARCH 4, 1999

Revised 3/4/99

It is a great honor for me to be back at the United Nations, and to be able to join Secretary General Annan for this International Women's Day celebration. I want to thank Agnes Marcaillous [An-yes MARK-eye-YOU] and the Group on Equal Rights for Women in the UN for hosting this gathering; and all of you for the hard work you do every single day to advance the fundamental rights of citizens around the world -- [and here, at the UN].

Thank you, Secretary General Annan, for your remarkable leadership. Last year, when you joined the President and me at the White House to mark International Women's Day, you said: "Women's rights are not something to be given or taken away by government; like a subsidy... the oppression of women, from discrimination to death, is the oppression of humanity." As we once again gather for this special international tribute to women's accomplishments around the world, how grateful we all are that Secretary Annan not only stands here with us today -- but stands with us every day -- as a true champion of human rights and women's rights.

As some of you know, I had the privilege of addressing the UN a little over a year ago -- on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

And today, we celebrate together the strides that women have made over the last half century since that historic document created a new international standard for human dignity and freedom.

Eleanor Roosevelt, who devoted her life to those principles, once said that human rights begin “in small places, close to home, so close and so small that they cannot be seen on any maps in the world.” Yet it is in those small places, -- our homes, schools, health clinics; and market places -- where women are lifting up their lives and the lives of their families.

More women and girls are learning to read and write today, as nations -- often for the first time -- begin to invest in their education. Women are living longer and healthier lives; having fewer unwanted children; and more women are surviving childbirth -- as they gain greater access to health care and reproductive services. Women are discovering a new level of economic independence; and contributing more to their families and communities, as they gain access to jobs and credit. And as a result of hard-won changes in laws and social attitudes, women are holding positions of power and authority as never before.

It's remarkable what we've accomplished just this past year. The government of Yemen waived its tuition fees for elementary school girls to encourage families to send them to school. Turkey passed the Family Protection law making spousal abuse a crime. The nations of Cote D'Ivoire and Togo passed statutes that ban the practice of female genital mutilation -- and only a month or so ago -- the government of Senegal banned the practice as well. Women of Nigeria -- who have struggled 39 years for this moment -- are celebrating the overturning of a traditional practice that denied widows inheritance rights. And for the first time, the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia prosecuted the aiding and abetting of rape as a war crime.

Much of that progress been sparked by the UN's longstanding commitment to bringing women together in international forums -- to talk about common challenges, and to forge a common future. And I know that delegations from around the world are meeting here now, as participants in the UN Commission on the Status of Women. Because it wasn't until the UN Conference in Nairobi that domestic violence was recognized as a crime, and not a cultural tradition. It wasn't until the UN Conference in Cairo that the world agreed that population and economic development must go hand in hand, and that women must be at the heart of our development efforts.

And it wasn't until women came together in Beijing that we said to the world -- once and for all -- that women's rights are human rights, and human rights are women's rights.

These UN conferences have also encouraged the flowering of non governmental organizations and advocacy groups -- who carry out such valuable work to improve the lives of women in their countries. Groups like UNIFEM, the UN agency working with NGOs around the world to advance the status of women -- are investing in women's education, promoting leadership training; and expanding microcredit loans to women. And in the process, they are transforming women's lives.

Nasri Hussein Adam lives in Somalia, where the war has displaced so many families, and resulted in great human suffering. She was trained in conflict resolution with UNIFEM's support, and now encourages other women to become engaged in helping to build a more peaceful future. Rekha Dubey, who lives in Uttar Pradesh, India, was the only daughter in her family, and when her father died, she lost everything. Her uncle took the house, her in-laws were thrown out, and she lost her older son.

Through UNIFEM, Rekha learned about her legal rights, and now she has her house -- and her son -- back again. And perhaps most importantly, her dignity. She's now running for elected office in her community.

Women have always been at the forefront of the battle for human rights and individual dignity. And through Vital Voices, a remarkable private/public partnership to support women and democracy, I've had the privilege of hearing many of their voices around the globe -- sometimes raised in song or in a whisper; sometimes in a cry of anguish, or a burst of laughter.

In Romania and Russia, I heard how women were struggling to breathe life into the institutions of civil society -- where they had only known authoritarian rule, and there had been no tradition of democracy. In Ireland, I listened to Catholic and Protestant women who would meet, often over a hot cup of tea, to talk about how to overcome decades of distrust, and who would work side by side in their own communities to bring an end to the sectarian violence. In Guatemala and El Salvador, women on both sides of the armed conflicts in those two countries wept over the loss of their husbands, sons, or fathers, and spoke to me about how they too had borne the pain and humiliations of torture.

Yet today, these same women have gained positions of power and influence, and are busy rebuilding their countries and giving their children new hope for a peaceful future. And I've heard the voices of women in my own country, as all of us work to become equal partners at home, at work, and in the halls of government.

As we stand here today, at the close of one century -- and on the brink of a new one -- the voices of women around the world reflect our deepest yearnings of hope for a better future. And their stories help us to define how far we've come, and how far we have yet to go.

No one can deny the extraordinary strides forward that women have made in the last half century. Yet no one can deny the great suffering and injustice that women and girls continue to experience every day, in every country. And no one can deny the boundless energy and potential that remain untapped; or the countless dreams that die, unfulfilled.

At this unique milestone in human history, we must ask ourselves, what has experience taught us that will help us secure a new era of freedom and equality among all people?

What lessons can we bring with us into the 21st century that will help us unleash the full promise of every woman, man, boy and girl?

One of the most powerful lessons we have learned from experience and history, and confirmed in Nairobi and Cairo and Beijing, is that a nation's progress depends not only on protecting women's fundamental human rights. It depends as well on ensuring women's equal access to life's basic tools of opportunity.

No nation can hope to succeed in the global economy of the 21st century if half of its people lack the opportunity and the right to make the most of their God-given potential. No nation can hope to move forward when its women and children are trapped in endless cycles of poverty; when they have inadequate health care; poor access to family planning; or when women make up the vast majority of those who can't read or write. No nation can hope to improve its quality of life when women are constrained inside social or cultural customs that impoverish their spirits, and limit their aspirations.

Without these basic rights and opportunities -- without the chance to participate fully as equals in the economic and political life of their communities -- women will only continue to suffer. And even where progress is being made -- we know women are the first to lose their hard-earned gains in times of crisis.

Recent experience has shown that many of the countries in the throws of the current global financial crisis have turned back the clock to the days when women are the last hired, and the first fired. In countries embroiled in armed conflicts, women and children make up the vast surge of humanity fleeing the violence as refugees. And too often, their suffering is compounded, when women are used as weapons of war -- brutally raped and humiliated by soldiers on both sides.

Perhaps the most egregious and systematic trampling of fundamental human rights of women is taking place today in Afghanistan — under the iron rule of the Taliban.

Where women used to make up almost half of the Afghan doctors, they are now forbidden to practice. Where women were once half the teachers — they are now barred from teaching. Where girls used to go regularly to school — the doors of those schools are now slammed shut.

We've all heard the terrible stories; of an elderly woman being flogged with a metal cable — until her leg was broken — because a bit of her ankle was showing under her burqa — the garment women wear to cover themselves from head to toe; of the thousands of war widows — the sole support of their families — many of whom are now begging on the streets to feed their children because they are forbidden to work.

The Taliban has imposed a draconian Catch-22 — in which health care for women has all but vanished. I've read about a woman burn victim who died a terrible death — and another with appendicitis who died after being turned away at two hospitals — and the countless women and children whose health is deteriorating every single day — because of the Taliban's rules against male doctors treating women. This unbearable suffering led one Afghan woman to lament: "A rock or a bomb may kill all members of a family at once; but this is a slow death; which is more painful."

Some still claim these atrocities are cultural. Yet increasingly the world recognizes that they are criminal. I'm proud that many countries are now taking action -- including the United States.

I've just heard about a campaign in my own country by leading citizens -- aimed at improving the educational opportunities for Afghan girls, primarily in the refugee camps outside the Afghan borders. And I'm pleased that my own government is supporting similar efforts. We cannot allow these crimes against Afghan women and girls -- and truly against all of humanity -- to continue with impunity. We must all act.

Trafficking in women and girls is another widespread international human rights violation that will continue to haunt us into the 21st century if we do not act now. An estimated one to two million women and girls are trafficked every year around the world -- forced into labor, domestic servitude, or sexual exploitation. Women sold as domestics and slaves in illegal sweatshops are sometimes literally worked to death. Women and children trafficked into the sex industry are exposed to deadly diseases, including HIV and AIDs.

I've spoken to young girls in northern Thailand -- whose parents sold them as prostitutes, and who are now dying of AIDS. And when I was in the Ukraine -- women came up to me in tears, not knowing why the young women in their communities were disappearing.

Trafficking in women is not just an egregious violation of women's and girls' human rights. It is an international criminal activity, with traffickers operating boldly across international borders. And once again, I am pleased that nations around the world are mobilizing their resources to put a stop to this criminal and inhumane activity.

Next week in Vienna, the UN will be negotiating a protocol on trafficking in women and children as part of the Organized Crime Convention, and the United States is one of the leaders in developing this document. This new instrument of international cooperation will set new standards for our efforts to prevent trafficking, punish traffickers, and protect its victims, and will strengthen the global fight to end this pervasive human rights violation and transnational crime problem. There are also ongoing multilateral efforts, and the United States is working closely with the governments of Italy, Israel, Finland and the Ukraine on this critical issue.

Another powerful lesson that we must heed as we move into the next century is that for women to advance, so must the forces of democracy. The rights that we all hold so precious in our lives -- freedom of conscience, religion, expression and association -- can only be protected and expanded when democracy is flourishing as well.

And democracy must mean more than elections -- as important as they are. We must also fortify the institutions of civil society, like labor unions, non governmental organizations, advocacy groups, and independent newspapers. And we must protect those institutions with the rule of law. Without a fair legal system, without an independent judiciary; without laws being fairly and equitably applied, our basic rights and freedoms will always be in danger.

We've seen how the rule of law has become a particularly effective tool in the fight against domestic violence around the world. When I was in El Salvador last year, I saw an exhibit hanging on the wall of a woman's center. It displayed the weapons that have been used to batter and violate women -- including knives, machetes, and wooden clubs. And I heard the story of Maria, a 32-year old mother of two who suffered years of violence, afraid to act out of fear of reprisals against her children.

Yet thanks to new public outreach campaigns, and the passage of historic legal reforms -- domestic violence is finally being called what it is -- a criminal offense. Finally, women like Maria, who suffered so long in silence -- are being protected -- and are once again finding their voices.

As more governments move toward greater rights and freedoms, strengthen the rule of law, and provide greater opportunities for their citizens, we see the forces of democracy take hold around the world. Even within the last ten years, the number of elected democracies has doubled -- as more and more nations recognize that strong democratic institutions assure respect for human rights and a better quality of life for all citizens.

Who would have imagined even a few decades ago that my husband and I would have the honor of receiving three world leaders at the White House who had exchanged the walls of prison for the halls of government? Kim Dae Jung of the Republic of Korea, Nelson Mandela of South Africa, and Czech president Vaclav Havel all suffered repression and imprisonment.

Yet forgiveness and a commitment to human rights have since defined their presidencies -- teaching us all once again that the longing for freedom and dignity can never be stamped out. It will always triumph.

Some -- however -- continue to deny these lessons of history and experience. Some governments continue to believe that the repression of basic human rights will create order; that economic liberties can compensate for denial of individual human liberty.

But as my husband warned in a recent address on foreign policy in San Francisco, in today's world, nations "simply cannot purchase stability at the expense of freedom." In the long run -- it will not work.

We can only keep learning these critical lessons about sustaining human rights and women's rights if we keep learning from each other. And that means continuing to meet together -- in international forums, in small groups, or over a cup of tea -- to exchange ideas; share stories; and listen to the vital voices of freedom.

In a few weeks, I will be traveling to Egypt; Tunisia; and Morocco, to see first hand the progress that women are making in that region of the world, and to better understand the challenges they continue to face. I know I will be inspired, as I always am, by the extraordinary spirit and courage of women as they struggle to improve their lives and protect their basic human rights. But I know I will also be struck; as always; not just by the rich diversity of cultures and customs -- but by the dreams that we share; and the common destiny toward which we continue to reach.

It was in that spirit that I was pleased to announce last June, during my trip to China, that the United States would sponsor a series of exchange programs to bring Chinese women together with their counterparts in the U.S. And today, I'm very pleased to tell you the first delegation just arrived here in the United States — a diverse group that includes a woman who runs a cable station, another who runs a woman's hotline, and a remarkable lawyer who I met during my trip to China who is head of a women's law clinic in Beijing.

The delegation will meet with American women leaders in government, politics, education and business -- continuing the invaluable tradition of cultural and political exchanges that have helped expand freedom and build democracy in so many countries over the years. I'm also pleased to announce that with the strong support of the US Information Agency, the President's FY 2000 budget includes funding to continue this China/America women's exchange into the coming year.

It was in China that I first heard the saying, "women hold up half the sky." It's a powerful image of what women do every single day, in every country, as they struggle to raise their families, pass on their culture's values and traditions; protect their rights; and participate fully in the life of their communities.

I've just recently learned that this saying is also deeply imbedded in the cultural of our own Native Americans. But that shouldn't surprise us. Its message of hope for a world in which women are equal partners in all aspects of our lives -- is universal, carried deep within every woman's heart.

But if we are to fulfill those hopes and dreams in the 21st Century -- then we must acknowledge the very real challenges that remain before us. Because as we all know, women can't hold up half the sky if the vast majority of them are being robbed of the education they need to thrive in the future; and if girls are denied the chance to go to school.

Women can't hold up half the sky if they are denied the loans and credit they need to lift up themselves and their families;

Women can't hold up the sky if they are victims of abuse in their own homes, or are kidnaped or sold into marriage or slavery;

Women can't hold up half the sky if they are denied the freedom to plan their own families.

Women can't hold up the sky if they are denied their basic legal rights, and are unable to share equally in life's opportunities.

Women can only hold up half the sky if their feet are planted firmly on the soil of freedom and equal justice.

I want to thank everyone here for the work you have done -- and will continue to do -- to create a world in which all citizens enjoy the freedoms of liberty; in which all children are valued and given equal opportunities; in which every citizen can live in dignity, free from fear, and filled with hope. Only then will we be able to say -- with honesty -- that yes, women can hold up half the sky.

Thank you.

**First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton
Human Rights Day
The White House
December 10, 1998**

Thank you all. Good morning, and welcome to the White House.

This is an historic day -- Human Rights Day, 50 years after the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

And I am pleased that we have members of the Cabinet. We have many human-rights activists; we have members of Congress. I want to welcome Representative Eddie Bernice Johnson and Representative Tom Lantos. We have members of the Roosevelt family and many friends of the cause of human rights, from religious organizations to civic organizations. And we are joining together with people and communities around the world to mark this 50th anniversary.

On this day in particular, we recall the words of Eleanor Roosevelt, who labored so long to help craft this declaration: "The destiny of human rights," she said, "is in the hands of all of our citizens in all of our communities."

Many are gathered for observances in Paris, where the Declaration was adopted 50 years ago. The United Nations General Assembly in New York is holding a full day of commemoration and will adopt a declaration to protect the defenders of human rights around the world.

And in communities across the United States, Americans from all walks of life, from Hawaii to Maine, are demonstrating their strong support for human rights at town meetings and other celebrations, coordinated by the "In Your Hands Campaign" of the Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt Institute.

Fifty years ago, this remarkable document, born out of the ravages of militarism and fascism, set a new international standard for human rights against which government and individuals would be judged. Its words are just as powerful today: "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights." That sent and still sends a powerful message around the globe that human rights of all -- of men and women, of rich and poor, of young and old -- are sacred.

Today, we have come together to celebrate the progress that has been made as a result of this declaration and to honor four individuals who have dedicated their lives to ensuring that the Declaration, and what it stands for, continues to speak on behalf of the downtrodden and silenced and most vulnerable in our societies.

I want to take a moment also to recognize a number of young leaders who are here with us today; from Nigeria to Bosnia, Guyana, Canada and Guatemala. These young people are working courageously in their own countries to secure human rights and democracy for the next century and millennium.

Eleanor Roosevelt once asked, "Where do human rights begin? In small places, close to home, so close and so small that they cannot be seen on any maps of the world. Such are the places where every man, woman, and child seeks equal justice, equal opportunity, equal dignity without discrimination."

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights has lived up to Mrs. Roosevelt's hopes because it has, in fact, helped to change attitudes in small places, as well as entire governments. It has been used by many countries to write their own constitutions and has laid the groundwork for the world's war crime tribunals. It empowered participants in Vienna to affirm that both men and women are entitled to a range of protections and personal freedoms. And at the United Nations' fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, this document enabled us to say, for the world to hear, that human rights are women's rights, and women's rights are human rights.

Every day we see the declaration at work in the "small places" around the globe. Whenever people come together to protect a woman from abuse, to open a village health clinic, to end discrimination in all its forms, to secure the right to vote, we see the work of the declaration. Whenever citizens are given the tools of opportunity, like health care, education, and economic independence, we see the declaration at work. Whenever a child can grow up free of fear and violence, and is able to fulfill his or her God-given potential, we see the declaration at work.

The faces in the photographs behind us, of children and families from around the world, express the hope and pride in family and community that sustains those who continue to struggle for human rights. And I want to thank the human rights photographer Phil Borges for his extraordinary talent in bringing their lives closer to our own.

Everyone here today, however, knows how far we still have to go to ensure that the circle of human dignity embraces all citizens. Whether it's young girls being sold into prostitution in Thailand, women who are victims of violence in their own homes here in this country or elsewhere, boys being used as human shields in Uganda, those recovering from the ravages of the Yugoslav conflict, those arrested in China for political activity; we have to recognize the depth of injustice and human suffering that still exists around us.

Perhaps the most egregious and systematic trampling of fundamental human rights of any person is taking place in Afghanistan today against women. Under the iron rule of the Taliban, where women used to make up 40 percent of Afghan doctors, they are now forbidden to practice medicine. Where women were once half the teachers, they are now barred from teaching. Where girls used to go to school, the school doors are now slammed shut.

We have all heard the terrible stories of an elderly woman being flogged with a metal cable until her leg was broken because a bit of her ankle was showing under her burqa, the garment women wear to cover themselves from head to toe because otherwise they will be beaten and punished; of the thousands of war widows, the sole supporters of their families, many of whom are now begging on the streets to feed their children because they are forbidden to work.

The Taliban has imposed a draconian catch-22 on women. Health care for women has all but vanished. Women can no longer be treated by male doctors, yet women physicians are prohibited from working. I've read about a woman burn victim who died a terrible death and another with appendicitis who died after being turned away at two hospitals and the countless women and children whose health is deteriorating because of the Taliban's rules against male doctors treating women.

The Taliban has not only closed schools for girls, it has even forbidden land mine awareness instruction for women and older girls, leading to increased injuries from land mine explosions among the female population. All of this suffering left one Afghan woman to lament, "A rocket or a bomb may kill all members of a family at once, but this is a slow death, which is more painful."

→ I'd like to recognize two Afghan-born women here today who have done invaluable work on behalf of the women and girls of Afghanistan. Zohra Rasekh of the Physicians for Human Rights, who, at great personal risk interviewed many of the victims of the Taliban and who then helped publicize their plight to the rest of the world; and Nazaneen Jabbar Khel, who has established a school which educates 700 Afghan girls from five different refugee camps in Pakistan. I would like both of them to stand. (Applause.)

547-9881 We cannot allow these terrible crimes against women and girls -- and, truly, against all of humanity -- to continue with impunity. We must all make it unmistakably clear this terrible suffering inflicted on the women and girls of Afghanistan is not cultural, it is criminal. And we must do everything we can in our power to stop it.

I'm pleased that so many countries and nongovernmental organizations are taking action, including our government and many organizations here. Last year the United States provided \$3.9 million for education and health training for Afghan

women and girls, and we remain committed to continuing these activities and creating new programs to support Afghan women in their efforts to secure their human rights and their access to health and education.

When we celebrate today the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, we do have much to be thankful for. And many of us are living in societies and democracies that have gone such a far distance in the last 50 years to honor and protect human rights.

But let us not forget the hundreds of millions of people who are still at risk, the 100 million children who live in the streets, the 160 million children who are not even in primary school, those who are denied freedom of religion, freedom of thought, freedom to express an opinion, who have no choice that they can make to determine the course of their own lives.

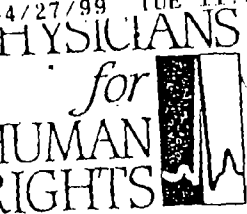
This is not a marginal issue. Human rights goes to the very center of what we in the United States believe politics and democracy should be about.

And so today we celebrate the progress, but we also challenge ourselves to continue to seek out opportunities, wherever possible, to do all that we can to eliminate the continuing scourge of human rights abuses, wherever they may be found.

I also would like to thank all of you who are on the front lines. We introduced two; there are others whom we could introduce. I appreciate greatly the work that you do to constantly prod our conscience and bring issues to public attention.

Now I would like to introduce someone who has helped to place human rights at the center of America's foreign policy, and who will honor those working in this country to bring Eleanor Roosevelt's legacy into the next millennium, the president of the United States. (Applause.)

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To: Christy Mary

Fax: 303-456-2435 / 202-456-5709

From: Leonard Rubenstein

Message:

The following is PHR's history and mission
Statement as well as our most recent
Press Release on Afghanistan.



Physicians for Human Rights: History and Mission

FOUNDING MEMBER,
INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN
TO BAN LANDMINES;
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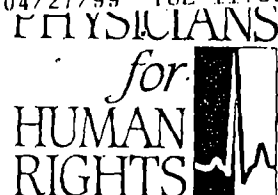
Physicians for Human Rights mobilizes the health professions and enlists public support to protect and promote human rights for all people. Since its founding in 1986, PHR has sent over 75 medical and forensic teams to dozens of countries to investigate reports of torture, disappearances, and extrajudicial executions; prison conditions; landmines; use of chemical weapons and many other areas. PHR bases its actions on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international human rights and humanitarian agreements.

PHR fulfills an important need in the human rights movement. Because of their training, health professionals and scientists are uniquely qualified and can play an important role in human rights investigation, fact-finding and documentation. For example, scientists can conduct autopsies, uncover graves, identify remains and determine cause of death. Moreover, they can conduct surveys to quantify in stark figures the morbidity and mortality that result from such violations of human rights as torture, excessive use of force by police and military, and use of chemical weapons and landmines. Medical examinations and collection of medical histories can provide objective and forceful evidence of abuse by governments and can alert the international community to refugee crises and populations at risk.

In addition, when organized under PHR's leadership, health professionals can put pressure on governments that violate human rights. The grounding of their concerns in medical ethics and their recognized commitment to health render their voices uniquely powerful. For these reasons, PHR supports a constituency of human rights activists among health professionals at home and supports indigenous human rights organizations who struggle for democracy, civil liberties and the protection of health and well-being abroad.

PHR is also a unique human rights organization because of our ability to assemble investigative teams directly from our own membership. PHR members are internists, nurses, pathologists, social workers, epidemiologists, toxicologists, burn specialists, orthopedic surgeons, psychiatrists, psychologists, and forensic scientists, among others. Since 1986, PHR members have worked to stop torture, disappearances, and political killings by governments and opposition groups; to improve health and sanitary conditions in prisons and detention centers; to investigate the physical and psychological consequences of violations of humanitarian law in internal and international conflicts; to defend medical neutrality and the right of civilians and combatants to receive medical care during times of war; to protect health professionals who are victims of violations of human rights; and to promote principles of medical ethics and prevent medical complicity in torture and other abuses. PHR shared the 1997 Nobel Peace Prize as a founder of the International Campaign to Ban Landmines.

PHR has more than 4,000 members and contributors and is supported entirely by private philanthropic contributions. Our United States offices are in Boston, Washington, and Chicago, and our DNA Research Laboratory is in Seattle, under the auspices of the University of Washington. We conduct classes in medicine and human rights at Harvard Medical School, University of California-Berkeley Medical School, and Princeton University.



FOUNDING MEMBER,
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TO BAN LANDMINES:
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March 29, 1999

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Director of Administration and Finance

ABUSES OF AFGHAN WOMEN WORSEN; MEDICAL GROUP URGES WOMEN'S RIGHTS BE PART OF ONGOING AFGHAN PEACE NEGOTIATIONS

(LOS ANGELES) An Afghan-American human rights expert reported that the health and human rights of Afghan women and girls have worsened in the past year with the addition of new edicts by the Taliban, the expulsion of foreign humanitarian groups, and the closing of the few health facilities that had been available to them.

Zohra Rasekh, M.P.H., a senior consultant to Physicians for Human Rights (PHR), an organization with the most authoritative information on the health and human rights of Afghan women as well as leaders in the campaign to eradicate Taliban abuses, just returned from her second trip to the region to interview Afghan women. The Taliban also have abused women living in refugee camps in Pakistan, the group said. PHR urged that restoring Afghan women's health and human rights be a key goal of continuing peace talks between the Taliban and its military adversaries.

"In recent weeks, press reports indicate a cessation of hostilities between the two major warring parties. This is welcome, but any coalition government which may emerge from future negotiations, including one led by the Taliban, must commit to a full integration of women and girls into society," said Leonard S. Rubenstein, PHR executive director. "A new government for Afghanistan that does not address the Taliban's war on women and girls should not be blessed by the United Nations or by individual governments."

In Pakistan, visiting Afghan refugee camps in Peshawar just two and half weeks ago, Rasekh obtained horrifying testimony from relatives of a woman executed by the Taliban in Kabul. The woman had refused to obey Taliban orders to close a home school for women and girls. She was shot in the head and stomach in front of her forty students, her husband, and her eighteen-month-old daughter when Taliban militia burst into her home and demanded that she close the school. When she refused, and denounced the Taliban for its repression of women, she was executed on the spot.

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PHR also learned that the Taliban have added further restrictions to their requirement that Afghan women cover themselves from head to toe. Newly arrived women refugees in Pakistan report that, in recent months, the religious police roam Kabul with young boys or old men at their side who lie on the ground and peer under the fabric of a woman's wide-legged pants to check if any part of the skin is exposed. If that is found to be the case, the woman is beaten and/or arrested.

The Taliban, which have easy access to the refugee villages in Pakistan, have been engaged in harassment, abuse, and murder of perceived political opponents. In the last three months, several people were assassinated in Peshawar, Pakistan. PHR calls upon the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to significantly enhance security in the camps, to set up human rights ombudsmen to obtain human rights testimonies, and for donor governments to engage directly with the Pakistani authorities and demand that security be enhanced.

International assistance to newly arrived refugees fleeing from the Taliban into Pakistan is virtually nonexistent. Hundreds of newly arrived refugee families have received practically nothing in aid and assistance for longer-term refugees is minimal. PHR calls upon the UNHCR and donor countries to immediately upgrade assistance to the refugee camps and to make emergency assistance for new arrivals and health care, education, and job programs for women a girls a priority.

Under the auspices of the United Nations, the Taliban recently ended the first round of peace negotiations in Turkmenistan with its opponents, the Northern Alliance. PHR urges the international community to insist that any future negotiations between the parties to the Afghan conflict include a commitment to end discrimination against women, to reintegrate schools, hospitals, and the workplace, and to end dress code and chaperone requirements that limit women's mobility. A human rights framework must also include an end to gross abuses of human rights, including trials without due process and cruel and inhumane punishments such as amputations and public beheadings.

PHR published the groundbreaking report, *The Taliban's War on Women: A Health and Human Rights Crisis in Afghanistan* in August 1998. The report was the first and only report to systematically assess the health and human rights concerns of Afghan women and give voice to them. Rasekh interviewed 160 women in Kabul about their access to health, mental and physical condition and attitude about human rights. The report has created increasing public outrage against the Taliban's extreme restrictions of women's rights.

Copies of recent Senate testimony by Zohra Rasekh on abuses of Afghan women can be obtained by contacting PHR or visiting PHR's web site www.phrusa.org (What's New section)

Physicians for Human Rights (PHR) mobilizes the health professions and enlists support from the general public to protect and promote the human rights of all people. As a founding member of the International Campaign to Ban Landmines, PHR shared in the 1997 Nobel Peace Prize.



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MESSAGE:

*material I have put together
for the First Lady's speech at
the Einstein Memorial -
for Folking points etc.
Call if you have
questions*

NUMBER OF PAGES (INCLUDING COVER SHEET): (8)

Office of the Senior
Coordinator for International
Women's Issues

Material for the First Lady
Physicians for Human Rights Luncheon
April 28, 1999

Women and girls of Afghanistan

Public statements:

The President, the First Lady and the Secretary of State have all condemned the treatment of women and girls of Afghanistan by the Taliban.

At the Human Rights Day ceremony, December 10, 1998, the First Lady, Hillary Rodham Clinton said, "We cannot allow these terrible crimes against women and girls - and, truly, against all of humanity - to continue with impunity. We must all make it unmistakably clear this terrible suffering inflicted on the women and girls of Afghanistan is not cultural, it is criminal. And we must do everything we can in our power to stop it."

President Clinton pledged this government's continued assistance to "women suffering under the Taliban regime in Afghanistan" at the December 10, 1998 Human Rights Day ceremony.

President Clinton raised the issue of respect for the human rights of all Afghan citizens, including women and girls and ethnic minorities, with Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif of Pakistan during his visit to Washington last year.

In a joint statement issued on December 4, 1998, President Clinton and the Prime Minister of Pakistan, Nawaz Sharif, "...agreed to work for an immediate end to the conflict in Afghanistan and the restoration of durable peace, stability and normalcy in the country based on the principals of sovereignty, territorial integrity and non-interference in internal affairs, as well as a political reconciliation and respect for the human rights of all Afghan citizens, including women and girls and ethnic minorities."

The President pledged United States assistance to Afghan women and girls suffering under the Taliban at the March 11, 1998 International Women's Day celebration.

First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton has consistently spoken out against the treatment of women by the Taliban in forums around the world. At the Human Rights Day ceremony December 10, 1998, she recognized two Afghan women in the audience for their invaluable work on behalf of women and girls of Afghanistan and said "We cannot allow these terrible crimes against women and girls - and, truly, against all of humanity - to continue with impunity. We must all make it unmistakably clear this terrible suffering inflicted on the women and girls of Afghanistan is not cultural, it is criminal. And we must do everything we can in our power to stop it."

At the United Nations International Women's Day celebration on March 4, 1999, the First Lady said "There probably is no more egregious and systematic trampling of fundamental rights of women today than what is happening in Afghanistan under the iron rule of the Taliban."

In her remarks at the United Nations on the 50th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights on December 10, 1997, the First Lady spoke about the importance of education for girls and the Taliban's prevention of girls from receiving an education. "Two-thirds of the 96 million people worldwide who can neither read nor write are women. Even now, the Taliban in Afghanistan are blocking girls from attending school. Not only that - they are blocking those, like Emma Bonino, European Commissioner for Humanitarian Affairs, who would speak out on behalf of this injustice."

Secretary of State Albright aptly characterized the Taliban's treatment of women in Afghanistan as "despicable" when she visited the Nasir Bagh refugee camp in Pakistan in 1997. She said "We are opposed to their [the Taliban] approach to human rights, to their despicable treatment of women and children, and their lack of respect for human dignity, in a way more reminiscent of the past than the future."

At the March 11, 1998 International Women's Day celebration, Secretary Albright said, "In Afghanistan, all

the major factions are guilty of violence against women. But the most powerful, the Taliban, are determined to drag Afghan women from the dawn of the twenty-first century back to the thirteenth. The only female rights they seem to recognize are the rights to remain silent, and invisible, uneducated and unemployed."

At her induction into the National Women's Hall of Fame, at Seneca Falls, New York on July 11, 1998, Secretary Albright reaffirmed our government's commitment to the women of Afghanistan when she said, "Afghan women and girls have asked for our help. I know because last fall, I sat in a tent in the high mountains of Central Asia and listened to their stories. I'll tell you what I told them. The United States cannot and will not abandon them. We are increasing our support for education and training. And we have made it clear that if leaders of the Taliban or any other Afghan faction want international acceptance, they must treat women not as chattel, but as people; and they must respect human rights."

Meeting with Feminist Majority:

Since the fall of 1996 when the Taliban first issued edicts restricting women's human rights, groups in the United States have advocated United States support for restoring the rights of women and girls of Afghanistan.

On March 19, 1999, the President met with the Feminist Majority Foundation to discuss the plight of women and girls in Afghanistan. The President affirmed the policy of no U.S. government recognition for the Taliban regime.

The Feminist Majority Foundation initiated its Campaign to Stop Gender Apartheid in 1997 to inform the public about the Taliban's treatment of women and to mobilize support for full restoration of human rights for Afghan women and girls. A major event was held on March 29, 1999 in Los Angeles to increase public awareness of the issue and raise resources for this Campaign. The Campaign has brought together over 130 women's and human rights organizations, national and international.

Situation of women and girls in Afghanistan:

The situation of women and girls in Afghanistan deteriorated rapidly with the resumption of fighting between the Afghan factions in 1992. The trend

significantly intensified with the Taliban takeover of Kabul in 1996 and the imposition of harsh social strictures. Although Afghan women traditionally have suffered disadvantages in many areas of Afghan society prior to the civil war, a limited but growing number of Afghan women, particularly in urban areas, worked outside the home in nontraditional roles. There were female lawyers, government officials and doctors in Kabul.

The Taliban immediately forbade women to work outside the home, but gradually allowed exceptions for female doctors and nurses in restricted circumstances and have since stated that widows could work outside the home to support their families. In urban areas, women had been forbidden from going outside the home unless accompanied by a male relative. They often cannot appear in public, particularly in cities, unless wearing a traditional long robe called the "burqa" covering them from head to toe. A small mesh covered opening about five inches square provides the only means to see. Some women have been beaten by the Taliban "religious police" on the street for failure to wear the burqa; for not being fully covered; or for making noise when they walk.

Many Afghan women wore the burqa before the Taliban took control. However, it was not an enforced dress code. Many women in Kabul typically appeared in public wearing scarves that just covered the head.

The Taliban restricted education for girls, particularly in urban areas such as Kabul. Private home-based schools, which had quietly continued to operate, were ordered closed last year in Kabul, though we understand some were allowed to reopen. Although the Taliban claim that they are not against female education and have requested resources from foreign donors for educating both boys and girls, we have as yet seen no serious effort to provide educational opportunities for women and girls.

The impact of Taliban restrictions on women is most acutely felt in cities such as Herat and Kabul, where there are some numbers of educated and professional women. In rural areas women do chores, tend animals, gather water and fire wood and, when working in the fields, do not wear burqas and enjoy a greater degree of mobility. At one time before the Taliban takeover, Kabul University had several thousand women students while professional women worked in different

capacities in the city. Especially hard hit have been war widows (there are over 30,000 in Kabul alone), many of whom are the sole providers of the family. Many were reduced to begging on the streets to feed their children.

Women's and girls' access to medical services and hospitals has been drastically reduced. The lack of ready access to medical facilities that do exist is further impacted by a critical and chronic shortage of medicine and equipment.

United States humanitarian efforts for women and girls:

The United States is committed to providing humanitarian assistance to women and girls of Afghanistan. United States officials play a key role in making the issue of assistance to women in Afghanistan a major focus of the donors' Afghanistan Support Group.

In FY 1998 the State Department's Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration (PRM) and USAID's Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA) provided \$3.9 million for health and education projects for Afghan women and girls. This included funding through non-governmental organizations including Save the Children, the International Rescue Committee and Church World Service, as well as through UNHCR and UNICEF.

Women and girls also benefited from international humanitarian programs for refugee and earthquake assistance. In FY 1998, in addition to projects specifically for women and girls, PRM contributed some \$5 million in earmarked funds for Afghan refugees and returnees and \$14.8 million for the regional programs of UNHCR and the ICRC - a significant portion of the latter was for Afghan conflict victims in Afghanistan. Earthquake assistance and help for internally displaced persons from OFDA reached some \$7 million.

In FY 1999 PRM expects to continue to emphasize health and education programs for women and girls in refugee camps in Pakistan and to the extent possible, in Afghanistan. The State Department's Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor has committed to contributing \$200,000 in FY 1999 Human Rights and Democracy Funds to the UN Consolidated Appeal for Afghanistan. The funds are to be targeted to women's democracy/human rights advocacy-building programs within the Appeal.

Women in Kosovo

The U.S. and NATO allies are working with humanitarian organizations to alleviate the humanitarian crisis. We will do whatever is necessary to ensure that Milosevic's current campaign of ethnic cleansing does not stand and that refugees can return to their homes, villages and towns and rebuild their lives in Kosovo.

The refugees tell of extreme violence: people forced to leave their homes at gunpoint, women and children forcibly separated from their husbands, fathers and sons, homes and villages torched, passports and other identity documents confiscated. Even more serious are the reports of arbitrary and summary executions, of mass graves, and most recently of mass rape of young women and girls. A

Vice President Gore announced on April 21 that the U.S. is committed to providing refugee for up to 20,000 Kosovar Albanian refugees. The program is designed for refugees in Macedonia who have family ties in the United States, or who are in vulnerable circumstances. The U.S. government is organizing this effort with international and non-governmental organizations.

Operation "Sustain Hope" was announced by the President on April 5 to coordinate our own humanitarian response to the refugee crisis in the region. The U.S. has committed over \$150 million in financial and material assistance since the crisis began just over a year ago. This includes the \$50 million recently authorized by the President to help address the urgent needs of the refugees. We are sending over 1 million humanitarian daily rations to the region, as well as tents and other relief supplies.

The First Lady, as well as the Secretary of State, and members of Congress met earlier this month with two prominent and courageous Kosovo Albanian women's rights and human rights activists to discuss the human tragedy unfolding in Kosovo. Vjosa Dobruna is a pediatrician who directed the Center for the Protection of Women and Children in Pristina. Aferdita Kelmendi directed Pristina's Radio-TV 21. Because of their work, both women were targeted for persecution by Serb forces, forced into hiding

and fled to Macedonia where they are continuing their work to help refugees fleeing Kosovo.

**The Convention on the Elimination of
All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
(CEDAW)**

The U.S. has not yet ratified CEDAW. The UN General Assembly adopted CEDAW in 1979. The U.S. actively participated in the drafting and signed the treaty in 1980. Although the Senate Foreign Relations Committee voted in favor of ratification in 1994, the Senate has not formally considered the treaty since that time. To date, 161 countries have ratified CEDAW, including all of our European allies and most of our trading partners. The U.S. is one of the few countries that has not yet ratified CEDAW.

Ratification of CEDAW will strengthen our efforts to advance the status of women throughout the world.

Ratification will enhance our efforts to ensure women around the world are treated fairly and have the opportunity to reach their full potential.

Ratification will allow us to participate in the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women and give us a greater voice in shaping policies that affect the lives of women.

Both state and federal laws in the U.S. already provide strong protections for women and are largely consistent with the provisions of CEDAW. The treaty does not affect U.S. sovereignty or states' rights.

The small number of reservations, understandings and declarations upon which the State Department and the Senate Foreign Relations Committee have already agreed, addresses concerns about the effects of CEDAW on our law. These include an explicit understanding that the treaty does not create an international right to abortion.

Lois Gochnauer, April 26, 1999