

(prepared for delivery)

"REMARKS TO THE FOURTH WORLD CONFERENCE ON WOMEN"

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Honored guests, fellow delegates and observers, I am pleased and proud to address this historic conference on behalf of the United States of America.

My government congratulates the thousands who have helped to organize the conference, to draft the Platform for Action, to inform the world about the subjects under discussion here and to encourage wide participation both by governments and NGO's.

We have come here from all over the world to carry forward an age-old struggle: the pursuit of economic and social progress for all people, based on respect for the dignity and value of each.

We are here to promote and protect human rights and to stress that women's rights are neither separable nor different from those of men.

We are here to stop sexual crimes and other violence against women; to protect refugees, so many of whom are women; and to end the despicable notion--in this era of conflicts--that rape is just another tactic of war.

We are here to empower women by enlarging their role in making economic and political decisions, an idea some find radical, but which my government believes is essential to economic and social progress around the world; because no country can develop if half its human resources are de-valued or repressed.

We are here because we want to strengthen families, the heart and soul of any society. We believe that girls must be valued to the same degree as boys. We believe, with Pope John Paul II, in the "equality of spouses with respect to family rights". We think women and men should be able to make informed judgments as they plan their families. And we want to see forces that weaken families--including pornography, domestic violence and the sexual exploitation of children--condemned and curtailed.

Finally, we have come to this conference to assure for women equal access to education and health care, to help women protect against infection by HIV, to recognize the special needs and strengths of women with disabilities, and to attack the root causes of poverty, in which so many women, children and men are entrapped.

We have come to Beijing to make further progress towards each of these goals. But real progress will depend not on what we say here, but on what we do after we leave here. The Fourth World Conference for Women is not about conversations; it is about commitments.

For decades, my nation has led efforts to promote equal rights for women. Women in their varied roles--as mothers, farm laborers, factory workers, organizers and community leaders helped build America. My government is based on principles that recognize the right of every person to equal rights and equal opportunity. Our laws forbid discrimination on the basis of sex and we work hard to enforce those laws. A rich network of nongovernmental organizations has blossomed within our borders, reaching out to women and girls from all segments of society, educating, counseling and advocating change.

The United States is a leader, but leaders cannot stand still. Barriers to the equal participation of women persist in my country. The Clinton Administration is determined to bring those barriers down.

Today, in the spirit of this conference, and in the knowledge that concrete steps to advance the status of women are required in every nation, I am pleased to announce the new commitments my government will undertake:

First, President Clinton will establish a White House Council on Women to plan for the effective implementation within the United States of the Platform for Action. That Council will build on the commitments made today and will work every day with the nongovernmental community.

Second, in accordance with recently-approved law, the Department of Justice will launch a six-year, \$1.6 billion initiative to fight domestic violence and other crimes against women. Funds will be used for specialized police and prosecution units and to train police, prosecutors and judicial personnel.

Third, our Department of Health and Human Services will lead a comprehensive assault on threats to the health and security of women--promoting healthy behavior, increasing awareness about AIDS, discouraging the use of cigarettes, and striving to win the battle against breast cancer.

And, as Mrs. Clinton made clear yesterday, the United States remains firmly committed to the reproductive health rights gains made in Cairo.

Fourth, our Department of Labor will conduct a grassroots campaign to improve conditions for women in the workplace. The campaign will work with employers to develop more equitable pay and promotion policies and to help employees balance the twin responsibilities of family and work.

Fifth, our Department of the Treasury will take new steps to promote access to financial credit for women. Outstanding U.S. microenterprise lending organizations will be honored through special Presidential awards; and we will improve coordination of federal efforts to encourage growth in this field of central importance to the economic empowerment of women.

Sixth, the Agency for International Development will continue to lead in promoting and recognizing the vital role of women in development. Today, we announce important initiatives to increase women's participation in political processes and to promote the enforcement of women's legal rights.

There is a seventh and final commitment my country is making today. We, the people and government of the United States of America, will continue to speak out openly and without hesitation on behalf of the human rights of all people.

My country is proud that, nearly a half century ago, Eleanor Roosevelt, a former First Lady of the United States, helped draft the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. We are proud that, yesterday afternoon, in this very hall, our current First Lady--Hillary Rodham Clinton--re-stated with memorable eloquence our national commitment to that Declaration.

The Universal Declaration reflects spiritual and moral tenets which are central to all cultures, encompassing both the wondrous diversity that defines us and the common humanity that binds us. It obliges each government to strive in law and practice to protect the rights of those under its jurisdiction. Whether a government fulfills that obligation is a matter not simply of domestic, but of universal, concern. For it is a founding principle of the United Nations that no government can hide its human rights record from the world.

At the heart of the Universal Declaration is a fundamental distinction between coercion and choice.

No woman--whether in Birmingham, Bombay, Beirut or Beijing--should be forcibly sterilized or forced to have an abortion.

No mother should feel compelled to abandon her daughter because of a societal preference for males.

No woman should be forced to undergo genital mutilation, or to become a prostitute, or to enter into marriage or to have sex.

No one should be forced to remain silent for fear of religious or political persecution, arrest, abuse or torture.

All of us should be able to exercise control over the course of our own lives and be able to help shape the destiny of our communities and countries.

Let us be clear. Freedom to participate in the political process of our countries is the inalienable right of every woman and man. Deny that right, and you deny everything.

It is unconscionable, therefore, that the right to free expression has been called into question right here, at a conference conducted under the auspices of the UN and whose very purpose is the free and open discussion of women's rights.

And it is a challenge to us all that so many countries in so many parts of the world--north, south, west and east--fall far short of the noble objectives outlined in the Platform for Action.

Every nation, including my own, must do better and do more--to make equal rights a fundamental principle of law; to enforce those rights and to remove barriers to the exercise of those rights.

That is why President Clinton has made favorable action on the Convention to Eliminate Discrimination Against Women a top priority. The United States should be a party to that Convention.

And it is why we will continue to seek a dialogue with governments--here and elsewhere--that deny to their citizens the rights enumerated in the Universal Declaration.

In preparing for this conference, I came across an old Chinese poem that is worth recalling, especially today, as we observe the Day of the Girl-Child. In the poem, a father says to his daughter:

We keep a dog to watch the house,
A pig is useful, too,
We keep a cat to catch a mouse,
But what can we do
With a girl like you?

Fellow delegates, let us make sure that question never needs to be asked again--in China or anywhere else around the world.

Let us strive for the day when every young girl, in every village and metropolis, can look ahead with confidence that their lives will be valued, their individuality recognized, their rights protected and their futures determined by their own abilities and character.

Let us reject outright the forces of repression and ignorance that have held us back; and act with the strength and optimism unity can provide.

Let us honor the legacy of the heroines, famous and unknown, who struggled in years past to build the platform upon which we now stand.

And let us heed the instruction of our own lives. Look around this hall, and you will see women who have reached positions of power and authority. Go to Huairou, and you will see an explosion of energy and intelligence devoted to every phase of this struggle. Enter any community in any country, and you will find women insisting--often at great risk--on their right to an equal voice and equal access to the levers of power.

This past week, on video at the NGO Forum, Aung San Suu Kyi, said that "it is time to apply in the arena of the world the wisdom and experience" women have gained.

Let us all agree; it is time.

It is time to turn bold talk into concrete action.

It is time to unleash the full capacity for production, accomplishment and the enrichment of life that is inherent in us--the women of the world.

Thank you very much.