

**PHOTOCOPY
PRESERVATION**

**Civitas Palermo World Conference
Palermo, Italy
6/18/99**

**Civitas Palermo World Conference:
Making Education for Democracy an International Priority**

Remarks by First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton

Palermo, Italy

June 18, 1999

Thank you very much to the mayor for that generous introduction and for your leadership that has been so critical to the progress that we mark as we meet here in Palermo. Thank you also to the many leaders who have joined us today: your Secretary and Minister of Education Berlinquer; the Chairman of the European Commission, Romano Prodi; my friend David Dorn, the chair of Civitas International; the United Nations Undersecretary Pino Arlacchi; and to all of you who are civic educators and leaders from around the world.

As we gather here this evening in this beautiful opera house, we can celebrate together its re-opening. And we could even hear, if we listen hard, the shouts of joy from children who listened to their first concert two years ago after they helped re-open the doors of this historic building—the third largest opera house in Europe. I have heard stories about how hard they worked week after week and month after month as they helped bring this building, closed for 25 years, back to life. The children held art exhibits to raise money. They encouraged their parents and their neighbors to be part of this historic effort. Their enthusiasm was infectious, and soon everyone was involved with electricians and craftsmen working so hard to restore the building to the cheers of community residents.

These young people now serve as guides. They not only introduced visitors to this beautifully restored cultural center, they help introduce visitors and their fellow citizens to an object lesson in citizen action and democracy-building. They have, it is to be sure, reclaimed their precious cultural heritage. But as importantly, they have become part of a remarkable citizen movement to combat crime and violence that continues to transform life in this city.

Today we have come from more than 80 countries to learn the lesson of Palermo and to underscore the vital role that citizens and citizens' movements play in strengthening the forces of democracy around the world. I have to recognize the contribution of Civitas International. It has provided invaluable help and promoted important work to make the idea of civic education come alive, and by doing so, it has helped to nurture democratic workings around the globe. Thank you for sponsoring this important international conference.

I have seen the results of the work of Civitas in many different settings. Just a few years ago, I had the privilege at the White House of meeting with some of the teachers who had been trained by Civitas, who had been working with young people in Bosnia helping to prepare future citizens following the end of that terrible conflict. I will give credit again to the work they were doing—as they went into classrooms and communities helping people not only to rebuild the physical aspects of their lives, but to reclaim their rights as human beings and as citizens—to help build a new democracy.

All of you know so well that a democracy proclaimed on paper alone does not guarantee that people understand their democratic and civic responsibilities. But today, the work of Civitas, the work of the people and leaders of Palermo, and the work of so many of you here is helping to make more clear than ever that if communities wish to enjoy the benefits and perks of democracy, then they must produce citizens who understand what hard work it is to keep democracy alive.

We come together in a time of great possibilities, and we can see the courses of democracy sweeping across the world. Even today, we celebrate the first free elections in Indonesia in more than 40 years; the reaffirmation of democracy by all races in South Africa; a new hope for peace in the Middle East; and finally, the end of Serbia's brutal and systematic effort to drive ethnic Albanians from their homes so that finally—finally—the Kosovars can begin to return to gather their families together and rebuild their lives. And I wish to thank the government and the people of Italy for your stalwart support of our efforts in Kosovo.

So there is much to celebrate. I could list many examples that would keep us here all night. But as Kosovo unfortunately reminds us, even as the forces of freedom, peace, and democracy move forward, age-old ethnic and religious and tribal hatreds continue to be unleashed and strong undercurrents of crime, violence, and corruption threaten to dismantle many of our hard-fought gains.

I have been privileged in the last seven years, both with my husband and on my own, to try to travel our world on behalf of the United States. And I have seen firsthand newly emerging democracies take hold, find their footing, stumble, regain their footing, and try to go forward. I have seen advanced democracies struggle with corruption and crime and violence, but I have seen how resilient the forces of democracy can be. But in order to strengthen and maintain these forces for justice, peace, and power, we have to do more to nurture and build a strong civil society and to teach not only our children, but ourselves, the lessons of citizenship.

Now building and maintaining a democracy is very hard work. It is, in fact, a never-ending process. My own country became a democracy—a newly independent state, if you will—in 1776. And for over 220 years, we have been working hard to protect that democracy. It took us more than 10 years to draft the Constitution, almost 90 years to rid our nation of slavery, almost 150 years to give women the right to vote, and even longer to ensure that all of our citizens were equal under the law. It is still difficult for people to understand, even those in well-established democracies, that elections by themselves are not enough; that laws by themselves are not enough; that even peace agreements, whether it's between nations or between governments and organized crime, are not enough.

What we have learned over the years is that our most cherished ideals can only be made real through the everyday effort of ordinary citizens. Our laws and institutions are absolutely critical, of course, but democracy is nurtured and sustained only when democratic values are rooted in the hearts, the minds, and the actions of ordinary men and women. When citizens truly believe that every individual is entitled to respect and dignity; when citizens practice the

responsibility of citizenship in their daily lives; and when parents pass on these lessons of the heart to their children by their examples, by the stories that they tell them as they tuck them into bed at night. . . It makes a very great difference whether a parent passes on the biases, the bigotry, the prejudices, the fears, the insecurities that struck the past, or helps the child look toward the future with hope. What better way to renew and strengthen our commitment to keeping these lessons of the heart than here in Palermo? The lessons of citizenship could not have a better form.

I've been told that when the mayor talked about how to go about creating the society in which we should all want to live, he talked about a cart with two wheels—that to move forward in a democracy and to create a kind of lawfulness, you need law enforcement and civil society to work together. If one wheel moves too fast, the cart spins around instead of moving forward. Again and again, in my country, here, and around the world, we have seen that law enforcement cannot work in isolation, or lose its accountability to the people it serves. It must work hand in hand with citizens to change the culture of violence and to strengthen the rules of law.

I too have a metaphor, like the mayor, that I use to describe the challenges we face to building and maintaining democracy. I talk about a three-legged stool. One leg is government, which of course includes law enforcement as its primary obligation to people. The other leg is the economy that provides opportunities for people to fulfill their own aspirations. And the third leg is what we call civil society. Now we cannot sit on that stool if there are only two legs or even just one. We cannot sit on that stool if one leg is stronger than the other two, or longer or shorter. Creating the balance that we must have in society requires that each principle institution work together; that the government be efficient and effective, honest and transparent; that it helps do for individuals what individuals cannot do for themselves and what market economies cannot do or produce.

We need government that protects our freedoms and defends our lives. But the government—no matter how well functioning, how honest, how transparent—cannot by itself create citizens. We know we also need a free-market economy which creates jobs and wealth and gives consumers choices that unleash potential for families to pursue their economic goals. But the market economy, no matter how much wealth it produces, cannot create citizens. Only civil society, which exists in that space between the government and the economy, can do that work. It is in that space where we live our lives; where much of what makes life worth living occurs; where our families are born and raised; where our faith gives us support and meaning; where arts and culture, such as those from this magnificent stage, lift our spirits and expand our minds.

So what we must do as we meet with our educators for democracy is to understand how special it is to build up civil society. So Mr. Mayor, whether its image is a two-wheeled cart or the three-legged stool, we are speaking the same language. We understand that a vibrant civil society is as essential to human progress as the institutions of government and the economy. We need them to balance and reinforce each other and remain strong enough to support us all in the years to come. That is truly at the heart of our words today.

Today, whether we look at the on-going violence in some of our cities, or the age-old hatred and conflicts that still tear communities and nations apart, or the struggles that new democracies face to keep moving forward, we understand the past we've had. You have come with a great deal here in Palermo, and we have much to learn from you as we stand in solidarity with you. Palermo teaches us about the emerging role that women are playing around the world in ending violence in our societies.

You saw the video that was at the beginning of the program; the white sheets hanging from balconies; the words, the feelings, the shouts from these women. I have seen the role that women are playing all over the world—standing up against hatred and violence, standing for peace and security. I have just come from a meeting at the mayor's office with women from around the world who represent an initiative in our government called "Vital Voices," where we have brought together women who are on the frontlines in the struggle for democracy. Every time I meet with such women leaders, I am awed by their courage and commitment.

It is the same here in Palermo, with the women of Palermo who helped spark the rebirth of citizenship. They knew full well that years of violence and bombings had left hundreds dead and people without hope. The voices of the people of Palermo were silenced, and the symbol of this great city's history and culture were hidden or abandoned. But the brutal slayings of two of the good and honest and courageous magistrates sparked a level of outrage that people understood; they had reached the end of their tolerance.

We helped women first with those sheets. I'm sure many thought it wouldn't amount to very much, but those anti-Mafia slogans touched a deep place in the hearts of women, men, and children. The community of the sheets was one of the first physical signs that the people of Palermo were going to stand against the violence and corruption that held this city captive. Those voices were not just women's, they belonged to everyone. "Enough is Enough" became a slogan of shopkeepers, religious leaders, business leaders, political leaders, and even elementary school students who began, in their own way, to lay their stake in the future right in the heart of Palermo. They began to adopt the many monuments here in Palermo, and demanded they be restored and opened to the public.

Educators played such an important role here in Palermo. They've created a "lawfulness" group and began to promote activities that promoted civic conscience among their students. To the teachers, the parents, and the students who rallied to demand money pocketed by dishonest officials to be used instead to construct new schools and repair old classrooms, we owe a great debt of gratitude.

You know, when I do travel around the world, I often go to places that are off the beaten track of visiting officials. I go to schools in villages or decayed urban centers. I go to hospitals that care only for the poor. I walk the streets of neighborhoods that are ridden with corruption and violence. And because I am coming, the local officials will repair the streets; they will pave them all. They will fix the school room facilities. I remember being in a school and being told it was the first time they had ever had electricity. And the only reason they had it was because I would pay a visit. I remember speaking to a teacher in that school and saying to her, "Now that

I have come and I will leave, I hope you will be able to keep your electricity." And she said something very interesting. She said, "You gave us the excuse for the electricity, but now we know we have power." Well it is that sort of power that needs to be spread.

People are standing up on behalf of democracy and against violence and corruption all over the world. Again, women often lead the way because they are tired of seeing their husbands, their fathers, their sons, their loved ones murdered, jailed, lost. So we are often the ones who do say, "Enough is enough." Whether it is in Northern Ireland where Catholic and Protestant women have come together to work to try to make the peace real; or whether it is in the Balkans where women are working to repair that tragic area; or whether it is in one of the poorer spots of the last part of the twentieth century, Rwanda, women are attempting to stand up against the forces of evil.

Think, if you will for a moment, of a place like Rwanda, where 800,000 men, women, and children were slaughtered in the space of just a few months. I have been there. I have met with women and men, with leaders and citizens as they attempt to make sense of a picture that seems so bloodstained. I recently met with women from Rwanda who asked me for one thing. They didn't ask me for help or resources from our government. Instead, they asked for my assistance in building a playground. Because just as the citizens of Palermo understood, they took small steps toward big acts of courage of bringing people together, of building a possible future; so too did these women from Rwanda by building a playground where children would play again and where adults would once again believe in the future.

I think of the courageous women I have met in El Salvador and Guatemala, who fought on opposite sides of those armed conflicts. They lost fathers, sons, and loved ones, but now they understand that they must work together to ensure that they have a peaceful future. They became the architects of many of these elements of peace agreements that brought the sides together. They are continuing to work to bridge the differences that have kept them apart.

Democracy is also taking root in China. I have met with women there who had all the laws they needed on paper. I have met with the human rights activists who again had all the laws they needed, but of course, they were not being enforced or respected. They didn't understand how they could keep moving forward with democracy unless they could stand and be heard and let their voices join the chorus of those who understand fully that China's future must include voices of all of its people.

So Palermo has taught us to listen to the voices; listen to the weak, the marginalized; listen to those who appear powerless but who, once they decide to be citizens, are part of the most powerful movement on earth.

Palermo teaches us another equally important lesson. If we are to ensure that we continue to move the forces of democracy forward so that they prevail, then we have to create the citizens of the future. That means education for citizenship in classrooms, but it also means education for citizenship in families and communities.

I have just come from one of the monuments that children have restored. I saw the excitement and the pride in their eyes and on their faces. I have seen how this church that was closed for decades and decades, which is now reopened, has helped to revitalize an entire neighborhood. The children were taught those lessons, they were taken there by their teachers, they were helped to create a CD-ROM about what they had done and what they had learned. They are on the frontiers as pioneers in democracy-building. One of those young citizens, a girl named Anna, wrote, "Let's not keep quiet. The death of the judges made us understand that we have to talk and not be as silent as fish. If we see young people drugging themselves, we have to speak out and not be afraid." I love that image: not being silent as fish. Think about what that young girl is telling all of us. Think about what she is asking of us adults. This simple statement she goes on to conclude by saying, "If we see someone who doesn't respect our city, we have to scold him. All Sicilians must learn that Sicily is wonderful."

If every child had that same sense of citizenship, we would not have to worry about the future of our democracies. Whether it is building a playground in Rwanda or in Belfast, Northern Ireland; or as I've also seen young children in Luzern, Switzerland being given responsibility and a little bit of money to plan a children's parliament in their city, we have to do more to involve our children. We are up against great competition. Yes, crime and corruption and violence are the worst enemies of democracy, but the consumer culture...

(SOME REMARKS WERE CUT OFF WHEN THE TAPE CHANGED SIDES.)

... activities—from participation, from being part of a collective effort—and democracy requires that kind of responsibility. So we must go into our schools and our communities, and we must as a nation do more to encourage democracy-building among children. One of our President's most important initiatives as president has been the Americorp Program—designed to encourage young people to serve their nation by tutoring children, helping the environment, providing healthcare, doing the work that citizens have to do. Through a program called "Learn and Serve America," we are integrating community service into the basic school curriculum. That is; I believe, an important kind of initiative that we should be looking at. Because all the studies show that when young people—like those I just saw in church, or those I see in my own country—feel that they are part of democracy, they will become the citizens we need.

I visited many places around my own country because, as I have said, this old democracy that I represent here does not have all of the answers. We are constantly learning as well. But as I roam in and out of communities, time and time again, I have been struck by the energy and the honesty of the children. Whether it is a young African-American girl in the poorest neighborhood in one of the toughest cities in America who is successfully tutoring a young child to learn, or whether it is a group of students who are coming together to solve an environmental problem, or here to save a monument—it is that kind of educational effort we have to pay more attention to. We cannot take for granted that the lessons of democracy will be passed on. Very little of consumer culture helps people to understand what it means to be citizens. So we have an extra responsibility that each of us must work to meet.

Many of you have heard the story of how, in the early 1980's, after yet another mafia murder, some unknown hand scribbled a message on a street here in Palermo. The message was, "Here dies the hope of honest citizens of Palermo." A very different message was written on a board after the murder of a magistrate a decade later when the people Palermo began to rise up together to end the culture of violence. "Today begins a dawn which will see no sunset." There can never be a sunset on democracy.

And so Palermo provides us a model of citizenship. These lessons are here for all to learn and follow. This message of hope is one that should light our way into the next century.

I was thinking, as I was standing behind the stage, ready to go on, about a very famous line that President Kennedy used many years ago. Remember when he went to Berlin when Berlin's freedom was under attack. And he stood there, in front of the Berliners and told them, "I am a Berliner." Now what he meant by that was that I am a lover of freedom. I am a person who will stand for those who stand for freedom. I will walk the long road with you.

Well today we are thankfully beyond the Cold War, but we have new challenges to face. Those challenges of violence and crime and corruption stalk us. Terrorism, international trafficking of women, drugs and weapons continue to threaten our democracy today. We do not have to worry as we did about the past, but if we do not pay attention to the present and the future, we will find ourselves behind a new iron curtain of fear.

So if you will, think with me about how we can ensure that the lessons of Palermo are built upon, and that we stand with the people of Palermo and brave people and leaders everywhere. That we stand with the forces of law and order and civil society—all the wheels on the cart. And if we do, then I think we can say, as President Kennedy said in another context, "Democracy is never a final achievement. It is a call to untiring effort, to continual sacrifice."

Then we can say not only, "Viva Palermo," but "Viva Democracy" as well. Thank you all very much.