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17TH ANNUAL MOTHER OF
YEAR AWARDS LUCHEON-- NY

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**Remarks by First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton
at the Mother of the Year Awards
New York, NY**

MRS. CLINTON: Thank you so much. I am delighted to be here and to have this honor is very touching to me especially because of the kind comments of Donna and the other women who I share this with. It is always a great pleasure for me to be with Barbara Boxer. The end of that story that Donna started is that her daughter and my brother got married. And in fact, Barbara is on her way shortly to becoming a grandmother, as well as a mother.

I want to echo the words of support that Carolyn McCarthy deserves from all of us. She and Kevin have courageously demonstrated what one does in the face of unspeakable tragedy, and how to take that and turn it into a positive determination to try to help other people, and we are very grateful for that. And, Jane, thank you for your enthusiasm and your support for causes that are a concern to so many people.

I would also like, with the other women on this podium, to really thank all of the millions and millions of mothers whose faces and voices will not be ever heard from a podium like this but whose lives are every day, compelling examples of unwavering, unyielding, uninterrupted commitment to their children and families.

Someone asked me recently whether I thought I was a good mother, and before I had a chance to think about it, I found myself saying that I hoped I was as good a mother as my mother was and is to me. I am very fortunate to have been blessed by a mother and a father who gave me the unconditional love, the respect, the nurturing and the strong family values that every child needs and deserves. And I am sure there are many American women like me who identify with Jo March, the oldest daughter in *Little Women*, who said, "What do girls do who haven't any mother to help them through their troubles?"

My mother has always been there for me, and that is the greatest gift any child can receive from a parent. Of course, we don't always appreciate what it entails in being there with a child until we become mothers or fathers ourselves. I have discovered, certainly over the past 15 years of my own daughter's life that being a parent is a continuing learning process, a humbling experience, a continuing challenge and one that evolves and grows as your child does. I understand so much better a friend's description of mothers as "every family's designated worrier." Or as the old Jewish proverb says, "God could not be everywhere so he therefore he made mothers." Thankfully my daughter indulges me, and puts up with my rather constant fretting.

In thinking about my own mother and daughter, whose wonders I could regale you with for hours, I come back to a central thought that I have been pondering in many places over the last month. My mother, a homemaker, who never had a career outside the home, inspired me to make the most of whatever opportunities came my way in life. My aspirations turned out to be different from hers, but with her support and encouragement, I was able to fulfill them. She respected my choices. She supported me at every step. And I suspect that if we went around this room, and asked the women here about their own mothers, many of our stories would be the same. Tillie Olsen wrote in her book, *Mother to Daughter, Daughter to Mother*, "My mother is a poem I'll never be able to write, although everything I write is a poem to my mother." That one sentence sums up the powerful, enduring and intangible qualities of motherhood.

And yet today we all know that our society is grappling with the still evolving roles of women and mothers and parents. And it's important to remember there is no prescription for being a good mother. There is no full-proof formula for being a successful parent. One is not necessarily a better mother for staying at home, nor a better mother for having a career. I remember so well when Chelsea was a tiny infant, probably about a month old, and crying all night long, and as I was walking her and then rocking her, I finally just looked at her, and I said, "You've never been a baby before, and I've never been a mother before. We're just going to have to figure this out together." And that is what many of us do every single day.

Yet too often we fall into the trap of blaming many of society's problems on the fact that now 70 percent of American mothers work outside the home, and at the same time, when mothers stay at home to care for their children full-time, they are often criticized or disrespected for wasting their education and their potential. It's another one of those classic female binds -- You get it whichever decision you make. The fact is that mothers in America today whether they work outside or inside the home, have more responsibilities, obligations and expectations placed on

them than ever before. Somehow, while handling child-rearing, the care of aging parents, career decisions, economic pressures and all of the accompanying exhaustion and stress -- mothers are supposed to live neatly integrated and balanced lives.

Yet we all know, that in reality, modern motherhood is seldom neat. It is a constant and delicate juggling act. As many of you may know, I just had the extraordinary opportunity to travel to South Asia -- speaking to Carolyn and Bernie about that during lunch. That's a part of the world, where, certainly, women appear to have far fewer choices than we have here. And what struck me over and over again, during my stay, was not only the differences that clearly contrasted our experience with the experience of women in the countries I visited, but also the universality that I found among womens' experiences no matter what country they live in. I will never forget one woman I met -- in a small village in Pakistan -- outside Lahore. This woman was living in a village with no electricity, no televisions, no telephones -- virtually no connection to the outside world, down the road forty minutes in Lahore. She told me after I had visited a girls' school that was the school for the young girls in that village -- that she had ten children, five sons and five daughters. And she was despairing over the fact that while her sons could continue their education after finishing in the local village school, her daughters would not be able to go further -- because there was no higher level school for girls in that area.

That, of course, was a sad fact that I found in many of the countries I visited. This mother's concern for her daughter's future, was not political, was not ideological -- it was not motivated by anything other than a powerful maternal spirit that makes us want the best for our children. And although separated by half a world geographically, and even greater distances from my own mother, her concerns for her children were essentially the same.

In coming back from South Asia I realized that just as that mother I met in the village in Pakistan was yearning to be heard, our jobs here at home, is to listen to the concerns -- the real concerns of mothers here -- to hear them, not to silence their voices, not to marginalize their concerns. Because the concerns of mothers and daughters, women and girls, are central to the quality of life in any society. As I said in a speech that I made in New Delhi, India, the concerns of women are not "soft" issues. At best, on the edge of serious debate about all the problems which confront us at the end of this century -- but rather, they are central to our political and economic challenges. So whether mothers are talking about child care or the minimum wage, family leave time, good schools, safe streets-- or the need for close-knit communities -- their issues, our issues are in many ways the central issues at this time.

They are the issues that will define our culture for many years to come. They are the issues that speak our collective concern about the erosion of family values and the importance, as Senator Boxer said, of investing in our children and securing our future as a nation. As daunting as the challenges we face, and certainly as the ones I saw in South Asia, this is a very exciting time for mothers and women in America and around the world. Leaders on every continent are beginning to recognize the vital role that women play in the political, economic and social life of every nation.

Our joy and opportunity, at this moment in our history, is to help do for future generations, what mothers and women have done before us. And hopefully to do that with the same grace, courage and compassion of our mothers. We owe it to them, we owe it to our daughters, we owe it to all of us -- to do what we can --to make it possible for every woman, every girl, every mother, to feel that the future for her children is one that will give hope and opportunity for years to come.

Thank you very much.

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