

6/19/95  
Mother Teresa Home

WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

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**Remarks by First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton at  
Mother Teresa's Home for Infant Children  
Washington, D.C.**

MRS. CLINTON: Thank you all. Thank you very much. And I too am so pleased that this day has come, and it has come with the support, and caring, and love and contributions of so many people. I want to begin by thanking His Eminence, Cardinal Hickey, Monsignor Duffy, Sister Sylvia, Mayor Barry, Congresswoman Norton, and all who have participated in bringing this day to fruition. I also want again to greet and thank Mother Teresa. We take great inspiration from your work and from your ceaseless pursuit of what you believe in.

Earlier I was speaking with Mother and she looked at me and said, "This is a gift of love but I've been told I cannot give the gift of peace because I don't give peace to anyone." And I told her that one of my favorite sayings from another woman whom I admired, Eleanor Roosevelt, when she too would be criticized for pursuing what she believed in, she would often say, "I consider my job to comfort the afflicted and to afflict the comfortable." And so today we have one of those rare moments when the afflicted and the comfortable come together on behalf of the future.

I'm often asked what it is I would like to see happen above all else in our country and in our world and there are so many things to wish for, aren't there? So many things to pray for, so many things to work for. But certainly at the top of my answer would be a world in which all boys and girls are loved and cared for. First, by the families into which they are born, then into families-- if those families are not able to take care of them, and assume the responsibilities for raising them-- then by extended families and by really the family of us all who more and more we have to recognize are all interconnected. And then, finally, by the families that those boys and girls grow up in, whom they in turn invest with love and caring to create societies that value every single child as a gift to be nurtured.

We know we are a long way from that even in our own country, and some days I fear we are retreating from that vision instead of moving toward it. But we have to continue to work to build

those kinds of conditions for every child. That is why most of us, I believe, are here today because we do recognize our own blessings and we do believe that each of us has a responsibility, not only to our own children, but to all children.

When I visited the home run by the Missionaries of Charity in New Delhi, I was struck forcefully by the love that emanated from every corner of that building. Near it was a home that wouldn't pass inspection in any town in America. There were too many cribs with too many babies too close together. I am sure there were not enough toilets or enough space for what was being done there, by some kind of regulatory formula, but all I knew was that there was enormous love and care and concern being given to those children. You can sense it when you walk into buildings where children are cared for, can't you? You can feel the difference when you walk in the door of a child care center, school, or a hospital, or a shelter where children are cared for and you can know in the gut of your soul whether or not you would leave your own child there.

That is the test for every single facility that we have for any child in America. I call it the "Chelsea test." Some of you might call it the Jane or the Jack or the Mary or the Charles test. But that should be the test. So by that test this house passes with flying colors. You can already sense it is a place where not only those who come here get the care and love they need but it will have ripple effects throughout this neighborhood and community.

This has been about 16 months of hard work. As the Cardinal said, I first spoke with Mother Teresa about this after the National Prayer Breakfast and then we both agreed that each of us could work together to help promote better conditions for our children, that each of us could do what we believe our own purpose sets us to doing, and that we could, by working together, create this opportunity.

The truth is that this is just a beginning and it will grow and have meaning in people's lives as lives here are saved and changed and allowed to go forward. I'm particularly pleased that this house will serve as a place from which children will be adopted under the responsibility of Catholic Charities, and I would personally plead that everyone who knows of this house, everyone who knows of other places like it, will do all that can be done to promote adoption of the children here in our own country. We have more than 400,000 children languishing in foster care in America.

Many parents are discouraged from adopting because of the high profile cases that unfortunately demonstrate that on a rare occasion an adoptive family may not be able to keep the child whom they have adopted. Those are rare occurrences. They should

not be permitted to discourage Americans from adopting American babies and children. So please use this occasion to do all that you can to promote adoption, not only of the babies who will come here, but of all babies and children. They all deserve homes and families in America today.

I want to join in thanking Mayor Barry and the District government and especially Hampton Cross, who worked miracles. It is not easy under any circumstances to get the necessary permission to do this and I join in the Mayor's plea that the example of this house will serve as an example for the rest of the District government so that we can all begin to cut through red tape on behalf of human needs and services for our people.

I also want to commend Catholic Charities for forming a partnership with the Sisters on behalf of children in this district and I want to thank the lawyers who worked so hard donating their time. Many more hours than they ever thought when they agreed to do this to bring about all of the necessary changes that were required. I particularly want to thank Marna Tucker and Debbie Pollock for your countless hours of help on behalf of this effort. And I also want to say a personal word of thanks to Melanne Verveer on my staff for helping to coordinate this effort.

Let me end by saying that this home will be an extraordinary place for the children and mothers who come here. I know that it will serve as an example of what all of us can do if we're willing to work on behalf of one another and particularly on behalf of our children. I want to thank Mother Teresa for this gift of love and for the work that she and the Sisters are doing throughout our community here in America and around the world.

It is my hope that all of us will think in our own ways about what else each of us can do to ease the passage, to help soothe the troubles of people around us. There is so much need and as we rethink what government's responsibility is let's remember we are our government. In a democracy, there is no "us" and "them" and if we say we want government to do things other than what it has been doing in providing direct services to people, then we have to govern ourselves in such a way that we make up the difference. Otherwise we will live to see a society in which our dreams for all of our children, instead of becoming closer to a reality, recedes further and further away and that on this day is something none of us should want to see happen. Thank you all for being part of this.

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