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CHILDREN FIRST**

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**REMARKS BY FIRST LADY HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON
VIA SATELLITE TO CHILDREN FIRST: A GLOBAL FORUM
ATLANTA, GEORGIA**

MRS CLINTON: Thank you. And thank you, Bill for your leadership. I also want to thank President Carter and Mrs. Carter who have done so much over so many years to make all of us pay attention to the issues that are at the core of how we live and work together. I also want to express my appreciation to the Carter Center for its sponsorship of so many important efforts and particularly to this Task Force for Child Survival and Development. I am grateful that you have given me this opportunity to speak to so many people who care so deeply about our world's children.

As Bill said, I only wish that my plans could have remained the same and I could be there with you in person and under happier circumstances. As many of you know, it is a very sad time here in Washington and across our country. We are mourning the deaths of Commerce Secretary Ron Brown and the public servants, private leaders and good citizens who accompanied him on his mission of peace to the Balkans last week.

The deaths of these Americans and the two Croatians with them remind all of us of the fragility of life and of our powerlessness at the hands of fate, and none of us know what may happen to our lives. Yet even as we grieve for what we have lost, let us celebrate what these lives were -- their public achievements and their private acts of kindness, love, and devotion, and especially because the lives we celebrate were devoted to increasing opportunity for people all over the world.

I am delighted that so many of you are working and speaking out on behalf of opportunities for children. And I am particularly glad to see that young people are attending this forum on behalf of themselves and others like them around the world.

We all owe a special debt of gratitude to the Carter Center for its leadership in promoting efforts to end poverty and malnutrition, suffering and disease worldwide. And there are few people in history who have done more than Jimmy and Rosalynn have

on behalf of children. Their work stands as a testament to what people of faith and optimism can do. Children across America have been immunized because Mrs. Carter understood the importance of preventive health for our youngest children. People have access to mental health services because she championed their cause. There are countless children who owe the roofs over their heads to the Carters and their support of Habitat for Humanity. People can see because of the work on river blindness, and I could go on and on.

I want to commend all of you gathered in Atlanta for the work you do every day. Your efforts remind us that securing the physical and emotional health of our children should be at the root of every decision made by families, communities, the media, businesses and governments. As I have said in a book I've written and as people have said for generations, it takes a whole village to raise a child, and all of us have a responsibility to do what we can do to make life better for not only the children we are directly responsible for, but every child whose life we touch.

Today, we live in an age of great promise and great peril for the world's children. Great promise because we know more about what children need to thrive than ever before, but great peril also because there are still so many forces working to stifle the potential of children on every continent and in every country in the world.

Today, there are, gratefully, millions of happy, healthy children whose futures are filled with hope because of the efforts of their parents and family members and other citizens, their teachers, as well as international organizations and governments who help create societies that sustain and support children. We can look to simple, low-cost programs such as salt iodization, immunization clinics and the distribution of oral rehydration therapy kits and know that literally millions of lives of children have been saved. Polio has been eliminated from the western hemisphere because of a concerted effort of so many people.

But for each child we reach, there are many more who are still suffering from hunger, poverty, homelessness, inadequate health care, preventable disease, illiteracy, violence and abuse. The cries of desperate children are sadly heard in every nation represented at this Global Forum. And it is the plight of those children that brings us together as people who believe that every child in every country deserves a fair chance in life.

We are on an urgent mission. By the turn of the century, nearly half of our global population will be under the age of 20. Ushering children into the world is, of course, the province of families. But building safe and nurturing communities for families to raise children to allow them to grow up in, making

sure they have access to schools that teach them to read and write and prepare for the global economy, protecting them from avoidable diseases, training them for productive adulthoods, honoring their rights in the face of violence and abuse -- these are our collective responsibilities.

While parents have the primary responsibility for the well-being of their children, few parents can do it alone. All of us must pull together to care for all our children, and particularly to help mothers and fathers be the kind of parents they want to be. Every time we dismiss the potential of a child because of skin color or parental income or family background, we betray our own futures and the futures of our own children.

Every nation, whether rich or poor, has a stake in this issue. And every segment of society has the duty to consider how their actions will affect children. Schools, non-governmental organizations, businesses and governments can and must play a part in responding to the needs of children.

Last fall, for example, in Brazil, I visited a program where runaway children, many destined for a life of drugs, crime and violence, were learning self-discipline, teamwork and the value of hard work as part of a youth circus. Along with regular rehearsals, they also received basic schooling, vocational training and counseling to re-unite them with their families. If not for that one project, a child said, "I would be dead or in prison now."

Multiply that around the world and you can see that programs like this one, which receive support from the public and private sectors and some international organizations, can be replicated widely. But only if we share information and are honest about our successes and failures in supporting families and children.

Investing in children also means investing in their mothers and the women who raise them. Empowering women with access to credit, to quality health care, education, political and legal rights, is not only a valuable step forward for women. It is an important step forward for the children they must nurture and the families and societies in which these children will grow up.

We now have seen evidence, as you heard yesterday, of what educating girls means around the world. In my own travels, I have seen how the education of girls has transformed societies. I have also seen how inexpensive prenatal care has saved the lives of mothers and children and reduced infant mortality in places like Nepal. I have seen how family planning services in countries from Indonesia to Turkey to Brazil have helped women control the size of their families -- thus increasing the chances that the children they do have will be fed, healthy and educated.

I have also seen how small business loans for women can transform entire families, villages and communities. In Bangladesh I saw how the Grameen Bank's small loans had given women new senses of their own potential and worth as members of society. And in Chile I met a seamstress who told me how a small loan from a village bank had allowed her to buy her first sewing machine and expand her business. "I felt like a caged bird set free," she said. And with her extra income, she could afford medical care and education for her children.

I have learned what many of you already know: An educated woman is more likely to have smaller, happier and healthier family because she is more likely to be aware of good health practices, sanitation, family planning options and even where to find medical care. She is more likely to have an income and be able to afford care for herself and her children. And she is much more likely to exercise her power as a citizen to provide care and security for her family and community.

Simply put, if women and girls are healthy and educated, their families will flourish. If women and girls are free from violence, their families will flourish. And if women and girls have a chance to work and earn as full and equal partners in society, their families will flourish. And when families flourish, communities and nations flourish as well.

I am proud that the United States has continued to help children and women around the world through the Agency for International Development. Some of you may have been involved in projects supported by USAID, and I'm sure you have seen how these modest investments have helped children, women, and families escape the web of poverty, illiteracy and inadequate health care.

But there is so much more that we can learn from each other at this Global Forum, whether we come from industrialized or developing nations. No nation's prosperity and interests can be divorced from the political, economic, and social cross-currents swirling through and around us.

Technology has made our world a smaller place. Whether they are children starving in the shadows of great skyscrapers or babies abandoned in makeshift shacks in the countryside, we can no longer ignore the cries of children. Those cries must be answered by all of us. We often say that children are our future, and that is true. But if that is all we say and we think we have fulfilled our responsibility, we betray our commitment to that future. Children are not only our future, they are our legacy. how we care for them, how we invest in them says more about us than them. It really says what we value in society, and today, when the world seems to be moving so quickly at such a hectic pace, we have to slow down. We have to think about what is

important. We have to give children the time, the love, the attention, discipline and resources they need.

Thank you for what all of you are doing and all you will continue to do on behalf of the world's children. we need you voices now more than ever. Thank you for being part of this forum.

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