

10/12/95
NICARAGUAN INSTITUTE

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THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release

October 12, 1995

**FIRST LADY HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON
REMARKS TO THE NICARAGUAN INSTITUTE FOR WOMEN
MANAGUA, NICARAGUA**

MRS. CLINTON: Thank you all for gathering here this afternoon and honoring me with your presence. It is the first time I have been to your country, and it is one year to the day that Vice President Gore was here to attend the Central American Environmental Summit. We both happened to come to Nicaragua on Dia de la Raza, a day of celebration commemorating both the voyage of Columbus and the rich indigenous cultures of this hemisphere. I did not know before I planned my trip that your American visitors from Washington chose the same day in October to be here. But I am delighted to be able to come to this country, to see with my own eyes, the progress that you are making. This country and all of Central America is both the bridge that unites the continent and the crossroads of our many ethnic histories and traditions.

I feel especially privileged to have spent time talking with your President. She embodies the spirit and the will of the people of Nicaragua and of Central America, as all of you work together to find a future of peace understanding and cooperation.

We are living in a time of momentous change around our world, as dictatorships and tyrannies give way to more open, tolerant societies and new respect for human rights. Nicaragua is a vital force in the march to democracy that has transformed this continent and is transforming the world.

Over the past five years, your country, under the leadership of your President, has guided this nation from war to peace, from division to reconciliation, from conflict to tolerance, from economic stagnation to recovery. During the President's tenure, democratic institutions are taking root, instances of human rights abuses by security have greatly diminished and political violence has virtually disappeared. All Nicaraguans can be very proud of the progress that has been achieved in the face of great economic obstacles.

I know I speak for many in the United States and truly around the world when I say how much I admire your President's spirited and compassionate leadership and your people's courage and commitment to following this path.

I have come here today to convey in the strongest terms the United States' commitment to the people and government of Nicaragua. Many of you in this room have made great sacrifices to launch your country on the path to democracy, freedom, and prosperity.

Many of you have endured great hardship as your nation has struggled to shift from a closed economy to a market economy.

You have shown the resilience and determination needed to achieve true economic progress and political freedom. And I want to assure you today that the United States and the President will continue to stand by you as your nation works to improve the lives of all of its people and of the prosperity here and throughout our hemisphere.

I will be in Paraguay for a meeting in a few days with women from all over our hemisphere. The first time we met together was almost a year ago in Miami during the Summit of the Americas.

It was at that summit that the democratic nations of North, Central, and South America and the Caribbean region set forth an agenda to promote prosperity through trade initiatives, investments in people, and more effective government.

The United States' objective was expressed in the Summit's Declaration of Principles and Action Plan: support for democracy and democratic reform; the implementation of free market reforms; the alleviation of poverty; investment in people and the protection of the environment -- all principles to which our country remains committed today.

It was also at that Summit, and I think it was no accident, that the only woman President in the hemisphere, your President, urged her colleagues to commit to a goal of strengthening the role of women and girls throughout the hemisphere.

I want to thank your President and all of you for supporting her in that effort -- for reminding our political leaders that prosperity, democracy and social progress cannot be sustained in countries where women and girls are not valued as full and equal partners in society.

As the Miami Summit made clear -- and, as the recent United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women made clear again -- democracy, economic prosperity, and social justice go hand in hand.

Today, too many nations waste precious resources on building weapons of mass destruction, staging wars, and doing violence to basic human rights. Too often, natural resources are destroyed, and human ones exploited through socially irresponsible behavior. Today, too much time is spent in pursuit of power instead of in pursuit of peace and prosperity.

No single nation is to blame. Every nation needs to do more for its people -- especially for girls and women. And that means ensuring that women -- along with men -- have access to health care, education, jobs, credit, and are free from violence and allowed to participate fully in the political life of their countries.

Some of you, like me, had the opportunity to attend the women's conference in Beijing last month. It was an extraordinary coming together of women and men from all over the world -- an historic gathering that succeeded in bringing world attention to the issues that matter most to the lives of women and their families.

In doing so, it gave voice to the voiceless -- women in every country who are the backbone of their families, yet are denied the basic opportunities of comprehensive health care, education and training, jobs, decent wages, and access to credit, and even the chance to enjoy basic legal and human rights.

There were some -- even in my own country -- who doubted that anything significant would be accomplished in Beijing. But the conference did achieve a remarkable consensus about what is needed to improve the lives of women around the world.

The document that more than 180 nations endorsed reflects a new understanding that improving the lives of women makes for strong, healthy, and loving families -- and that, in turn, if families are strong, communities and nations will be strong as well.

As I said in Beijing, the single most important message echoing forth from that conference is that human rights are women's rights -- and women's rights are human rights.

Now, we must take that consensus and move forward with it. The vision of the women's conference will be realized only if we commit ourselves in our daily lives to addressing the challenges that still confront us here in Nicaragua, in my own country, and around the globe. Governments play a vital role in improving the lives of women, especially children, boys and girls. But governments cannot act alone. Strong partnerships with the private sector, the NGO community, have been essential in the past, and they will be even more so in the years ahead.

Individual citizens will have to play their role in families, work places, and civil society to support democracy's promise of positive change.

But I believe if we are committed to working together, much as your delegation in Beijing worked together, we can succeed in improving lives for all people, but particularly for girls and women and assure that they finally attain their rightful place and position in society.

Here in your country, strong women, like you, through your many accomplishments in the areas of microenterprise, education, health, business, government, academia have been instrumental in national reconciliation, democracy, and economic growth.

And your government, under the leadership of your President, has made a strong commitment to the kind of human investments in people endorsed in Miami and in Beijing.

Reducing maternal and child mortality through improved primary health care and prenatal care is a national priority of your government, and I am proud that the United States, through the Agency for International Development, is supporting that effort. That is a critical first step to ensure that all children are born as healthy as they can be and all mothers lives are protected.

Opening the doors of learning to girls and women is a critical step that Nicaragua has taken more quickly and boldly than many other countries. At the same time, I have learned that keeping children in school remains a problem. For that reason, one of our countries largest projects here is in working with the Ministry of Education, to improve the quality of primary education.

Because so many nations in our hemisphere share a concern about the quality of education, particularly that available for poor and rural children, it was agreed at the Miami Summit to create a hemispheric Partnership for Education Reform. It is called PERA, and it will create a network of public and private institutions working in concert to assure that children not only receive schooling, but are trained to compete in the modern global economy.

Your government has also committed itself to protecting and respecting human rights-- which includes the right of all women to live free from violence inside and outside of their homes. I was very glad to learn recently that the Ministry of Public Health has established a special commission to address the issue of domestic violence, which affects women not only in this country, not only in my country, but in every country around the world.

We are discovering here in Nicaragua and in many other countries, that investing in people, particularly girls and women, and I repeat that because this a relatively new lesson for many in the world to have learned, but those investments in girls and women, in their health care and in their education, yields greater dividends than any other kinds of investment a nation can make.

Earlier today, I visited a community bank here in Managua. That bank is controlled by 34 women who borrow modest amounts of money to invest in their own businesses. They also make sure

that everybody pays back what is owed. And, in stark contrast to the payback rates in my own contra, all these women have paid their loans back, their repayment rate is 100 percent, which should be the envy of any commercial bank.

On a small scale, but very significantly, these women are taking control of their own lives, and the destinies of themselves and their children. And in so doing, they are not only bringing greater prosperity to themselves, to their families, and their communities, but I could see the pride in their eyes, I could hear the accomplishment in their voices as they told me what they had achieved, as they had made these loans turn into businesses for themselves.

Women like that will become not only income earners, but will be more committed to their own families and their communities and will want to make a difference through the political process and in civil society.

The program I visited is run by a non-governmental organization that USAID is proud to support. It has proven that women are not only good credit risks, but that those small businesses can grow and adding one to the other, can contribute to national economic growth. Nearly 100 community banks, like the one I saw, have been established in only 18 months and some 6000 individuals, mostly women, are benefiting.

I have seen this kind of public-private partnership replicated in many other countries, including my own. This morning here in Managua, when I asked the women with whom I was meeting if they had any questions, one woman said, I know you met with women in India who are doing what we are doing, tell us about them. I could hardly catch my breath because for me the idea that women here were thinking about what was happening half-way around the world, that they were finding common ground, that they were seeing that women everywhere have so much in common as we attempt to make our own lives with dignity and pride, was very moving to me.

We took a picture of all the women I was with and I told them I would send it to the women I met in India, because I wanted the women in India to see the faces of the women in Nicaragua who themselves are building their own futures.

This is just one example of what we can do together, when we get beyond conflict, when we put away the terrible tragedy of war, when we overcome the obstacles that too often divide us, then we are able to work together to find ways to help lift each other out of poverty and dependency, and into self-reliance.

Nicaragua is also moving forward in another area, the participation of women in political life. Many women now claim places in the halls of government-- from the top, with your President, on down. This bodes well, not only for women, but for

the entire democratic process, because it does rely on the participation and experience of all its citizens.

My country has been an active partner of yours because we believe in the democratic mission you have begun. We also believe that as democracies in this hemisphere we share many of the aspirations and concerns for the future.

Our two nations, along with our neighbors, depend on each other in ways large and small. Decisions, for example, about the Central American forests can have serious consequences to the north and the south. An outbreak of cholera in Peru can threaten Central America just as outbreak of dengue fever here can threaten the health of tens of millions of people in the United States or Canada. Open markets and free trade contribute to the prosperity of all nations. The success of democracy in each country strengthens democracy in all countries.

Throughout the 1980's, Central America struggled to overcome the human suffering that accompanies war, injustice, and economic deprivation. Vast sums of money were spent to try to return stability to this region.

Now peace is here. Now democracy faces its truest test.

Now is no time for those here and abroad who support the Nicaraguan struggle for democracy and freedom to turn their backs on this brave country. We must remain steadfast in support of your efforts.

We must take the message that through better health, education, and good jobs, men and women can build stronger families, stronger communities, a stronger Nicaragua.

We must see that through democratic reconciliation and investments in people, Nicaragua is building a stronger national family.

And we must see that as the Nicaraguan family unites, and as your economy grows, your nation will continue to be a vital partner in the hemispheric family of democracies. We admire your courage and your conviction. We applaud your commitment as you move through these processes, that are not easy, cannot be accomplished overnight. But, as women, perhaps we have more of an understanding of how time sometimes must be given its due, that we have to continue working through the difficult times because we believe so strongly in the vision of the future we are trying to create.

Girls and women throughout the world are responding to the challenges of economic opportunity and democratic participation. I have seen in this very very short visit some of what you are doing here. I hope some day soon, to be able to return to see for myself even more.

I bring to you not only the strong appreciation, but the word of friendship and partnership, not only from women in the United States, but from all people who support and admire your country's passage and will stand with you as you make it.

God bless you all and thank you very much.

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