

**PHOTOCOPY
PRESERVATION**

2/21/97 5th Meeting of
WHO Global Comm.
On Women's Health

**FIRST LADY HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON
VIDEOTAPED REMARKS FOR THE FIFTH MEETING OF THE
WHO GLOBAL COMMISSION ON WOMEN'S HEALTH
FEBRUARY 21, 1997**

Thank you very much for inviting me to be a part of this fifth meeting of the Global Commission on Women's Health. I only wish I could be there in person to commend you on your efforts to improve the health of women and girls around the world.

I continue to follow your work with great interest and I thank you for the excellent reports you have produced, for the high-quality scientific data you and your NGO partners are collecting from all parts of the world, and for the vital advocacy role you have played over these past years.

As you take stock of your accomplishments and look ahead to your goals for the future, I urge you to continue your work to ensure that women's health issues are given the priority they deserve on national agendas, at international meetings, in research, and in practice. As we all prepare to meet the challenges of a new millennium, your commitment will be critical in our efforts to make sure that no woman or girl is left behind.

For too long and in too many places, the story of women's health has been one of human suffering and pain. Mothers, sisters and daughters have had their health compromised by inadequate and inaccessible medical care, by poor nutrition, family violence, and coercive and abusive sexual practices. All around the world, women and girls have been denied the very building blocks of healthy and productive lives: Education, economic opportunities, legal protection and human rights.

More than a year ago, women from all corners of the world came together at the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing to call attention to these issues, to help people and governments everywhere understand that efforts to strengthen families, to cherish all of our children, and to raise the status of women are crucial to every country's health and prosperity.

Our call hasn't fallen on deaf ears. From Africa to South America to Asia to my own country, we are witnessing positive efforts to raise the status of women. And those positive developments have occurred in the realm of women's health as well. New laws in countries such as Panama and Ecuador have lifted the veil of secrecy that for too long concealed one of the greatest threats to a woman's well-being: the crime of domestic violence. In some cities, all-women police units have become sanctuaries for thousands of women whose only defense from the blows of their husbands had been their own bruised and battered arms. In Brazil, the health ministry is providing free breast and uterine exams to help fight cancer. In Egypt, the practice of genital mutilation is now banned in government health facilities. And in my own country, we have passed a law that requires insurance companies to guarantee new mothers at least 48 hours to recover in the hospital after giving birth.

These are all important efforts. But there is so much more we must do to make sure

every woman and girl has the health and opportunity to fulfill her own God-given potential.

I know that one of the three very important areas you have decided to focus your energies on this year includes the reduction of maternal mortality and morbidity. This is one of our most urgent and fundamental challenges. In an age where we are witnessing so many advances in medical technology, treatment and research, it is unacceptable and shameful that women around the world continue to die in childbirth from preventable causes.

We must summon all our resources to make sure that childbearing and childbirth are safe and healthy stages in every woman's life. And we can begin by making sure that every woman has access not only to basic primary, reproductive and emergency obstetric health care, but also to the information they need to make important family planning decisions. In my travels around the world, I have visited new and expectant mothers and seen firsthand how investments in prenatal care and family planning had improved maternal health, reduced the number of abortions, and in some cases, saved lives.

So let us all work together to ensure that every little boy and girl that comes into our world is healthy and wanted; every young woman has the education and opportunity to live a healthy life; and that every woman has access to the health care she needs to fulfill her potential in her family, her work, and her community.

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