

3/12/97 Int'l Women's Day,  
State Dep't

**PHOTOCOPY  
PRESERVATION**

THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release

March 12, 1997

REMARKS BY THE FIRST LADY  
INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

Dean Acheson Auditorium  
The State Department

MRS. CLINTON: We are gathered today to celebrate International Women's Day in the heart of the State Department. And we do, as Americans, have much to celebrate, starting with a Secretary of State who, yes, broke a barrier by virtue of her own gender, but who much more importantly is committed to defending the rights not just of Americans but of citizens around the world regardless of gender.

Not only has Madeleine Albright broken many a glass ceiling, she has brokered many a peace. Not only has she opened many doors, she has opened many minds. And since she mentioned it, I would say that in my last conversation with Mrs. Roosevelt -- (laughter) -- she told me how pleased she was that her husband had appointed the first woman to the Cabinet in United States history, and how pleased she was that my husband had appointed the first woman Secretary of State. (Applause.)

I thank Secretary Albright for her leadership, her courage and, on a personal note, her friendship. And I am delighted that she has agreed to serve as the new chair for the President's Interagency Council on Women, ably assisted on the issues by Teresa Loar and Tim Wirth and others of you here.

We all know that countless responsibilities face our new Secretary of State and all of us. Our foreign policy does not lack for challenges. We must continue to reduce weapons of mass destruction. We must realize the century's dream of a wholly united, democratic and peaceful Europe. We must work to capture new opportunities in Asia, to seize opportunities for peace in the Middle East and other areas that are strategic not only to the United States but to the entire globe. We must work with our partners in Latin America, Africa, and elsewhere to build an inclusive and expanding global economy. We must safeguard our people from the threats of terrorism, extremism, international crime, drugs, and environmental degradation.

While all of these require our attention and commitment, today I have come to advance a simple idea. That is the seamless inclusion of girls' and women's needs in American foreign policy. Despite the work they do, the families they raise, the communities they hold together, too many of the world's women, particularly in developing nations, live on the outskirts of opportunity and equality. But let me be clear: This challenge is not confined to the developing world. We still have plenty of work to do here in the United States and in other advanced economies of the world to ensure that women have a full stake in democracy. One goal in every country should be to see that all citizens, regardless of race or gender or ethnicity or religion, have a full place at their society's table.

If you'll forgive just a slight diversion -- yesterday I was in Arkansas. I visited people who had been hit by a terrible tornado in the morning. Even before that disaster struck, these were people already working overtime to build good lives, to reach their aspirations. The full benefits of American society were still a long way away for them. After this tornado, all that they had worked for, all they had hoped for seems lost.

Later that day I spoke at an event that helps raise funds to send single parents, primarily women, to college or vocational school. I heard stories from five women who told us what it had meant that their society, in the form of those who had raised these funds, reached out and told them that they could make something of their own lives, they could go to college, they could support themselves and their children. They had heard the message that is even still too often conveyed in America: that they weren't worth very much, that nobody really cared too much about them.

As one young woman said, five years ago I was in a battered women's shelter in Fayetteville, Arkansas. I had nothing. I not only didn't have a car, I didn't have a driver's license, and my face looked as though it had been run over by a truck. All of a sudden there were people there who convinced me that I could make something of myself and care for my nine-month-old son. I thought to myself, how can these people believe in me, that I could go to college, that I could support myself? How could these people care about me when my own husband didn't care about me?

Those stories, as I heard them, reminded me of stories that I have heard around the world. As women in Bangladesh or India or Nicaragua or Chile stood up and told me what it meant to them to have someone believe that they, too, could make a living for their family; that the skills they had would be valued in the marketplace; that their children, especially their daughters, could have a better life. The women last night were helped to return to school. And today they are citizens of the United States in the fullest sense of that word.

Whatever disparities of wealth exist in our country and around the world means that people are left by the side of the road, detoured off the Information Highway, unable to take advantage of democracy's opportunities. What America must do for its own sake, as well as for the sake of its leadership in the world we are in today and that we are entering tomorrow, is to promote democracy and civil society in every nation, so that all citizens -- every man, woman, and child -- can live up to their God-given potential.

But one may ask, well, it's fine for me to care about the women of Arkansas, but why should I or any American care about women in developing countries and around the world? Why should women, as Secretary Albright just eloquently explained, be a concern of ours and our foreign policy here in the United States? Well, what the Secretary said and what this administration believes is that if half of the world's citizens are undervalued, underpaid, undereducated, underrepresented, fed less, fed worse, not heard, put down, we cannot sustain the democratic values and the way of life we have come to cherish.

If as a nation Americans care about opening foreign markets for American goods and services, if we care about making our country secure in the face of new threats, if we care about widening the circle of peace and prosperity, then we must address the conditions and circumstances of the world's women.

You in this room know better than anyone else that our world is in a time of great transformation, heralding ever more democracies, leading, we hope, to ever more peace. But the great promise of this time is not without its challenges. Global competition, the information revolution, the rapid pace of change all create pressures on every society, from governments down to families. And these pressures pose unavoidable questions for us as we approach the 21st century. How do we figure out ways to balance individual and community rights and responsibilities? How do parents raise children in the face of the influences of the mass media and consumer culture? What do we make of what seems to be a conflict in many instances between personal identity and the work available in an age of globalization and high technology? What about the roles of women in society? How will people preserve their ethnic pride and value their national citizenship? And how will nations protect their sovereignty while cooperating regionally and globally with others?

Thinking about these questions and how a free nation like ours will respond to them, we may need to be reminded that democracy is not just about legally protected rights, elections, or free market economies. It is about the internalization of democratic values in people's hearts and minds. It is about how, in the absence of either hot or cold wars, democracy is rooted in people's everyday lives.

Given the changes that are going on around us, we can no longer gauge our interests around the world solely through power blocs and vast arsenals. Across the globe, here at home, at the end of the Cold War, we have been free to focus on issues that edge right up to our own front doors. How do we educate our children? How do we ensure that families have proper health care? How do we ensure that democracies and free markets produce citizens, not just consumers?

I have said before that at this time of challenge around the globe, we know we will continue to cope with what is often thought of as the traditional balance of power among countries. But I would also argue that we must now add to that balance of power equation, often called *realpolitik*, the idea that *real-life politik* may be just as intimately connected with whether or not democracies survive and flourish.

These issues that we speak of today should not be considered women's issues. But certainly it is fair to say that women often, by necessity, become the world's experts on the hazards and vicissitudes of life. And they, therefore, often understand and appreciate more clearly that they have a vested interest in ensuring that their societies and governments address these real-life challenges.

I have seen for myself on continent after continent the solutions that women are forging -- new mothers in Jogjakarta, Indonesia, who gather every week to learn about family planning and better nutrition for their children; doctors and nurses in Belarus and Ukraine who are caring for the children of Chernobyl; women from Santiago to San Diego who are working on issues as diverse as education, crime, and the environment. These issues are central to our global democratic interests. For what distinguishes democracy is fair and genuine participation in every aspect of life.

It should be too obvious to point out, but unfortunately it isn't, that giving women a stronger voice and fuller say over their futures is intimately related to the health of democracies because women are the majority in most countries and the world over.

America's credo should ring clearly: A democracy without the full participation of women is a contradiction in terms. To reach its full potential, it must include all of its citizens. Clearly, whether we succeed in strengthening democratic values around the world is of special consequence to women, who in our country and elsewhere are still striving to attain, and even define their rightful place in government, the economy, and civil society, and to claim their rightful share of personal, political, economic and civic power.

Raising the status of women and girls and investing in their potential means insuring that they have the tools of opportunity available to them. Education, health care, credit and jobs, legal protections and the right to participate fully in the political life of their countries. And that is why the United States must continue its bipartisan tradition of supporting initiatives that move our world closer to these goals.

Today, more than 600 million women worldwide are denied the opportunity of an education. Women make up two-thirds of those who can neither read nor write. Yet the single most important investment any developing nation can make is in the education of girls and women. We are discovering that in country after country the benefits of educating women go far beyond the classroom and the schoolhouse. They go to stronger families, better health, nutrition, wages, and levels of political participation.

I have seen how the support of the United States for the education of women and girls worldwide is paying off. I have seen how similar social investments, also many supported by the United States, can make a difference in countries as diverse as Brazil, the Philippines, Nepal, and Pakistan.

Certainly, as I travel around the world and as many of you do likewise, we have seen with our own eyes that investing in girls and women helps to transform communities which in turn can transform societies. Women will not flourish and neither will democracy if they continue to be undervalued inside and outside the home.

I have had many experts in economic development around the world say to me that women's work is not part of the economies of countries, that women do not participate in the economic markets of countries. And yet I have seen with my own eyes as I've traveled through urban areas and remote rural ones that women are bearing often the bulk of the load of the work that must be done -- to plant crops, to harvest them, to make it possible for small enterprises to flourish in market stalls. So I know that women are working. Their contributions may not be counted in the gross domestic product of their societies, but they are of value. If all the women in the world tomorrow said they would not work outside the home, the economies of every country would collapse. And it is time -- (applause) -- it is time that we honored and counted the contributions that women make, both in the home and outside.

Investing in women also means investing in their health and, in turn, in the health of their families. I am especially pleased that the United States has provided assistance through the United States Agency for International Development to assure that women, children, and families have access to a full spectrum of low-cost, high-yield health care services -- from safe birthing kits for expectant mothers, to basic immunizations for infants, to oral rehydration therapy to treat children suffering from diarrhea.

I want to say a special word about family planning and its importance in this larger effort. Family planning is fundamental to letting women take responsibility for themselves and their children. Right now, however, roughly 100 million women worldwide cannot get or are not using family planning services because they are poor, uneducated, or do not have access to care. Some 20 million women will seek unsafe abortions. Of these women, some may become disabled for life, some will have other health problems, but fundamentally, the rate of unsafe abortions is in itself a tragedy. High abortion rates do not represent women's equality; they represent a failure on all our parts to help women prevent unwanted pregnancies in the first place. If we really care about reducing abortions and fostering strong families, we must not back away from America's commitment to family planning efforts overseas. (Applause.)

If we really care about making women equal partners in societies the world over, we must do everything in our power to fight violence against women, whether it is a hidden crime of domestic abuse or a blatant tactic of war.

No single social investment is a panacea for women or for developing countries. Nor should every just cause of the world be America's to embrace.

But I do believe that as long as discrimination and inequities persist in a broad-scale way against women, a stable, prosperous world will be far from a reality.

Taken together, our investments in social development are vital to strengthening free market interests, spreading our democratic ideal and enhancing our security.

Over time, America has learned that our ideals and interests cannot be divorced from the political, economic and social cross-currents swirling around us. I hope we have also learned that engagement with the world represents opportunities at home as well as obligations abroad.

Let me just give you one modest example. I spoke recently at a conference sponsored by USAID called Lessons Without Borders. At the conference, Baltimore's Mayor, Kurt Schmoke, told how government leaders from his city had gone to Africa to learn about simple, low-cost strategies used on that continent to encourage parents to immunize their children. Now similar programs are in place in Baltimore, with community clinics, a vaccination van, door-to-door visits and the resulting higher immunizations rates for children under three.

We can learn from our neighbors around the world. And many of the lessons we can learn, we will find, are lessons that have been helped to be taught by our own foreign policy engagement -- less than one percent of our budget, yet countless lives can be improved and we can improve lives here at home.

Before I close, I want to say a word about my forthcoming trip to Africa. I was very honored to be asked to make this trip because I think that America's engagement in the world must include an engagement with sub-Saharan Africa. Contemporary history is a story that citizens and countries are writing. And there is a new story that must be told. Every region is contributing its own chapter.

Africa has a remarkable story if we will only pay attention to it. It is moving toward democracy. In the last six years, the number of democracies have jumped from five to 23. Africa is growing economically, moving from suffocating state-controlled economies to open markets that can give full life and scope to human endeavor.

Last year, 30 countries reported positive economic growth. Africa is beginning to forge a new relationship with the United States -- one based not just on aid but on shared ideals, mutual responsibilities, integration into the world economy, and partnerships designed to resolve conflicts and to meet common challenges. To be sure, many of the African democracies are new and therefore fragile. Hope remains tenuous. Too much of the continent continues to be riven by disease, malnutrition, poverty, injustice, corruption, perilous conflicts and their terrible aftermath, refugee crises that trap women and children especially in lives that go from bad to worse.

And yet -- and yet, in spite of these challenges, for the first time, we can say that, at this moment in history, there are in Africa grounds for far more hope than despair. And with the support of the United States, we can solidify that hope.

I will be privileged to visit Senegal, South Africa, Zimbabwe, Tanzania, Uganda and Eritrea. And I am pleased that so many of the ambassadors from those countries and other countries in Africa are with us today.

I hope to witness first hand and to highlight each country's efforts to build democracy and a strong civil society. I will focus particularly on grassroots initiatives and on efforts that affect women and children.

I hope this trip will give the American people a renewed sense of the importance of our commitment to Africa. I hope it will lay out exactly why we must do our utmost to support democracy and social investment in Africa and to strengthen Africa's place in the community of nations.

And I hope it will show that American engagement must be measured not just in aid dollars or humanitarian efforts in the wake of tragedy and crisis, but in the democratic values we reinforce, in the human rights we defend, and in the conflicts we help resolve preventively.

There are, to be sure, issues of America's national security at stake. Instability in Africa, whether it is rooted in war, in terrorism, in organized crime, in disease, in environmental degradation or poverty, it touches us too.

There are also economic issues at stake. Right now, the United States holds only 7 percent of the African market of 600 million people. By forging stronger economic ties with Africa, we will do much to secure the prosperity of our own people as well.

But finally, our greatest reasons for engagement with Africa are built on a positive foundation. Africa is on the move, with a new generation of leaders, the fresh air of political reform, and thriving multi-ethnic societies.

As we look at the future for America's engagement around the world, we can see that wherever we help to seed the ground for democracy, wherever we reach out to people out of mutual respect to help them help themselves, wherever we understand clearly that in this time of interdependence and interconnection that we all have a stake in the success of the other, we will make progress together. Whether it comes to assisting and working with our friends in the new democracies in Africa, or understanding the importance of our commitment to women and girls, America's interests are at stake.

But far more importantly, America's values are at stake. If we act upon those values, we will help to lead the world into the kind of new future we envision as possible for our children and all the children around the globe.

Thank you very much. (Applause.)

END

Yet we from America know that this is a long task before you. I want you to know that, as Americans, we celebrate your accomplishments and we want to be your partners in securing your democratic future. To that end, President Clinton has pledged an additional \$19 million through the United States Agency for International Development to assist President Mandela's teacher training initiative and \$87 million in USAID assistance this year for housing, health care, and business development initiatives.

One of the most tangible signs of our new partnership is the binational commission chaired by our Vice President and your Deputy President. Last year they signed an agreement to cooperate to fight crime. As a result, the United States is providing funding this year to assist South African law enforcement agencies with criminal justice expertise and training.

We are working together to improve the business environment by lowering taxes and tariffs so that bilateral trade can thrive, creating jobs for both the people of South Africa and the United States.

South Africans and Americans are also learning from each other, through education, medical, and cultural exchanges at colleges and universities, as well as fellowships at some of our leading scientific institutions. In addition to funding from USAID, many of these programs are supported by American corporations, foundations, and universities.

And let me deliver today another indication of our support for the work that you are doing here in this country. Today I am privileged to announce that the United States is expanding support for the campaign to eradicate polio in Africa by the year 2000. Initiated by the World Health Organization's regional office for Africa, the Kick Polio out of Africa campaign is a partnership in the truest sense. It involves national and local governments, nongovernmental organizations, businesses, bilateral donors. It is led by your President. And thanks in part to his leadership, extraordinary progress was made on this front last year.

Now the United States is committing an additional \$16 million through USAID to assist in this vital effort to bring better health to the people of Africa. With us today are representatives from key organizations in this important partnership: the World Health Organization, Rotary International, and UNICEF. In our hemisphere we have succeeded in eradicating polio, and now we wish to assist the people of Africa in eradicating polio on this continent as well.

Each of these and the many other investments between our countries reflect our belief that the future of this country and this continent are inextricably linked to the futures of countries throughout the world. It reflects our belief that peace and prosperity can and will prevail if we all work together. Most of all, it reflects the faith we have in you and in the democratic path you have chosen to follow at this difficult time of transformation.

That said, I must add, there are no panaceas. There are no quick fixes in the march to democracy and a truly free market economy. Democracy's success in South Africa will not depend solely on free elections, open markets, or government policies. It will not depend solely

on foreign investment. It will depend ultimately on the internalization of democratic values in people's hearts, minds, and everyday lives.

For those of you who are students here at this great university, perhaps your experience here can serve as a guide. Universities, after all, are where we who are lucky enough to attend them learn more about the importance of personal responsibility and community. They are training grounds for individual freedom and incubators of ideas. They are repositories of free speech and free thought. And they are a collective meeting place for individuals of very different backgrounds, different attitudes, interests and aspirations. They are places where we test the balance between individual and community rights, where we struggle to find the balance between "me" and "we," where we assume responsibility for ourselves and others.

This university has always been a vanguard of change; now you have a chance to help create a new South Africa. And you also have a chance to help shape the course of history. The world is watching, and the democratic world stands with you. It has been given to you as to few other peoples in history the opportunity to hold in your hands your own futures and the futures and dreams of countless millions of others.

May God bless each and every one of you and all the people of this great country as you work to realize your individual and shared destinies. Thank you very much.

Q (Inaudible.)

MRS. CLINTON: I think this is an extraordinary moment in time for any of us who are women, and particularly if we are fortunate enough to have the blessings of good health and education and to feel that we are able to make the choices that are right for ourselves in our own lives and as they impact our families and our societies.

I think that we have more opportunity than we've ever had, but so much of whether or not we seize that opportunity depends on two factors: first, how well prepared we are to accept responsibility for our choices and the consequences of our choices; and how supportive and enabling those around us, including families and the larger society, happen to be. So although we have made considerable progress, moving toward a point where individual women will hopefully have the chance to make those choices that are right for them, there is still a great deal of work to be done, in my own country as well as around the world.

Those of us who were fortunate enough to go to Beijing know that the majority of people who live in absolute poverty in the world are women, often the sole support of children; that women do most of the hard work in our world, oftentimes without any income being generated or even any recognition of their economic contributions both inside the home and outside the home -- and that is true in advanced countries as well as developing ones. So I hope that women as we move toward this new century will support one another in all of our various aspects of life; that we will not be tricked or seduced into a position of undermining other women's accomplishments and other women's opportunities; that we will work for a change in our societies, where appropriate, to have the kind of legal and other protections that are

necessary; and that every one of us will do what we can to make sure that little girls are given the same opportunities in every society as little boys. It makes sense. We don't have the human resources to waste. And we need to be sure that we enable all citizens of every country to live up to the fullest of their potential and make the contribution they are capable of making to their society.

And so I hope that the 21st century will see so much progress on this point that by the 22nd century we won't even ask the question anymore. (Applause.)

Q Mrs. Clinton, you and I share an alma mater you started a tradition that I would be glad to be a part of that -- the students speak at commencements. What did you take from your Wellesley experience that you use in your everyday life that you try to pass on to other people?

MRS. CLINTON: Both the questioner and I attended Wellesley College, which is a women's college outside Boston, and I feel very fortunate that I attended that college for many reasons. One, because it gave me four years of relative seclusion on a beautiful campus to study and learn and interact with my classmates and the faculty, and yet a big city, Boston, with lots of other universities and men was nearby. (Laughter.) In my view, the best of all possible worlds. (Laughter.)

And it also gave, I think, all of us who took those four years out the confidence that is sometimes drained out of even eager women in university experience that undermines their feeling that they can make their contributions because, from the moment they enter university -- I'm sure it's not true here -- they are battered about by the expectations for social success and relationships that make it more difficult for them to concentrate on what it is they're studying and learning, and to find their own path as clearly as they would like. And we did not have those kinds of distractions or difficulties.

And I think that the role of women's education is still one that has to be looked at very carefully around the world. There is a role, I believe, for single-sex schools for girls and for boys, at all levels of education. And I think a school -- a college like Wellesley stands as a very good example of the continuing commitment that must be made to women's education. Even though all of our other fine and competitive universities are now available to women, there is still something very special about that environment, and I'm very grateful every day that I attended there. (Applause.)

Q (Inaudible.)

MRS. CLINTON: We've had a long and difficult debate in our country about the role of welfare and the idea of a social safety net in the United States. And I have, along with my husband, worked in both the public and the private sector for many years on the challenges presented by the welfare system as it operated in the United States. When my husband was the Governor of the State of Arkansas, he worked very hard to provide people who were on welfare the education and training that they needed to be able to compete in the job market and was successful in helping to move a number of people off of welfare.

He has recently signed a piece of legislation that will end what we call the "welfare entitlement" and turn back to individual states the responsibility for implementing welfare policy. This was a very controversial decision in many quarters in the United States. But let me briefly describe what I see as the reasons why the President signed that legislation.

First of all, there is very little doubt in our country that the current welfare system, before this legislation was signed, was not working for a significant number of people who were trapped on welfare. There were large numbers of people, particularly women who had gone through a divorce and were left with very few financial resources, people who had other kinds of misfortune, who would be on welfare for a short period of time and then off. In fact, the average time that the vast majority of people stayed on welfare was two years or less.

But there was a group of people caught in welfare dependency -- second and third generation -- where, for reasons that had to do with all kinds of social and economic and even psychological changes, they were unable to break out of that welfare dependency. So there was no doubt that the system had not worked for them.

And the President believed that we had to make drastic changes in that system in order for people to be motivated to understand how they had to help themselves. He also believed that in our country we've had many people say that communities and churches and other institutions would be more helpful to people on welfare if the government didn't provide an automatic check. We are going to find out whether that's true or not. And the President has been working very hard to persuade businesses and various levels of government to hire people off of welfare. He's been working to persuade churches to, in a sense, mentor families on welfare.

So he has set as a challenge to America: If you are serious about caring for your fellow man, if you are serious about ending welfare as we know it, then you have to be involved. There are no more excuses. We can no longer say, well, we hate the welfare system, and all those people who are on it are people that we just don't understand. Now there is no more welfare system, except as we create it. So it is a bold and challenging step we have taken, and we will watch it very carefully to try to make sure it works to the benefit of the people it is intended to help.

Q (Inaudible.)

MRS. CLINTON: (Laughter.) Hope springs eternal. (Laughter.) You know, I have thought a lot about this, because -- (laughter and applause) -- strictly as a student of political science -- (laughter) -- I am curious as to why it is apparently easier for women to ascend to the highest ranks of national leadership in parliamentary systems. I met the speaker of your house yesterday here in Capetown, a woman, and I have met women prime ministers and presidents around the world who come out of a parliamentary system. And I have no real answer to this, but a few suggestions which reflect how difficult it is in our country, I believe. In a parliamentary system, whether it's Margaret Thatcher or Indira Gandhi or Golda Meir or any of the other countless women in this century who have succeeded to the highest political position in