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REMARKS BY THE FIRST LADY
AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CAPETOWN
SOUTH AFRICA

MRS. CLINTON: -- (in progress) faculty, students, distinguished guests and friends. And greetings to the people of the new South Africa. It is an honor for me to join you at this great citadel of learning. The University of Capetown is known the world over.

And I am especially grateful to be here with your Vice Chancellor, whose contributions to education, medicine, anthropology, and the struggle for human rights makes her a role model not only for young people in South Africa, but for young people throughout the world.

Little could have prepared me for the swell of emotions I have felt on this visit to your country. When I was last in South Africa for President Mandela's inauguration with the Vice President three years ago, I was moved beyond words by what I felt to be the spirit of forgiveness and reconciliation that seemed to embrace this land. Today, my heart is stirred anew by the patience and perseverance with which South Africans are united to build a strong and lasting democracy.

The human zeal for freedom, as you know so well here, is a remarkable thing. Just think, in the last 10 years we have seen men and women unlock the bonds of tyranny and seek their own destinies all over our planet. From the Czech Republic, where a velvet revolution peacefully loosened decades of ironfisted rule and paved the way for a newly democratic central Europe; to Estonia, where men and women yearning for democracy literally sang their way to freedom; to Mongolia, where nearly a century of domination and oppression at the hands of dictatorship could not suppress the popular will for self-expression and self-rule. And today on the continent of Africa we find country after country becoming a touchstone of democracy and freedom.

History has taught us that no nation and no continent has a monopoly on tragedy and evil. We have learned from instances too numerous to count that human beings of all backgrounds, persuasions and geographies have an equal capacity for depravity. But so, too, have we learned that from disaster and calamity can spring the noblest acts of courage, selflessness and human decency.

Who could have imagined just a short decade ago that the blood and tears of Uganda would soon give way to the embrace of peace and democracy? Who could have imagined that years of civil war in the Horn of Africa would lead to the birth of a new democratic nation called Eritrea and that women freedom fighters would help to lead the way? Who could have imagined that a country like Mozambique, whose people had known nothing but war and civil strife would itself become an example of national healing and unity?

Yet nowhere has the triumph of the human spirit, the power of love to conquer hate been greater than in South Africa. The spirit of reconciliation has enabled your nation of diverse peoples to overcome 40 stubborn and violent years of apartheid and begin the difficult journey to democracy. Just think of the progress we human beings could make if that same spirit of reconciliation echoed in all corners of the world -- in the streets of Belfast, the killing fields of Burundi, the countryside of Bosnia.

You, the people of South Africa, are teaching countless others that as interdependence is the inescapable condition of humankind, so is tolerance the greatest weapon for peace.

When he spoke on this campus 31 years ago, Robert F. Kennedy reminded us that it is from numberless, diverse acts of courage and belief that human history is shaped. And it is those acts by individuals, as much as any action by your government, that will determine the success of your new democracy.

South Africans and Americans live in countries which represent great experiments in multi-racial democracy, experiments that depend on the human hearts' deepest reservoirs of goodwill and forgiveness, and the human spirit's capacity for progress. The consciences of both our nations have been seared by racial inequality and injustice. And, yet, often against great odds our people have searched inside themselves and found ways to forgive the wrongs of an ugly past to create a future of promise and reconciliation.

In his second Inaugural Address delivered at the end of a civil war that claimed more American lives than all other conflicts in United States history combined, President Abraham Lincoln urged a divided nation to forgive, heal and unite around a common humanity. This is in part what he said: "With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in; to bind up the nation's wounds; to care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow and his orphan; to do all which we may achieve and cherish, a just and lasting peace among ourselves and with all nations." Surely American history would have been different if President Lincoln had lived to lead us on our journey of truth, forgiveness and reconciliation.

One hundred years later another great American, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., lent his words, actions and moral weight to a non-violent crusade for civil rights that moved our country ever closer to the ideals of democracy. Dr. King declared that "Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hatred darkens light; love illuminates it."

Here in South Africa the message of reconciliation and forgiveness has found many eloquent messengers whose names are well known to you and to the world. Among them, President Mandela and Archbishop Tutu. But the success of this great experiment in nation building depends ultimately on each citizen -- people whose names never appear in the newspaper, but whose acts of courage and belief are just as sure to guide South Africa's future. As President Mandela once explained, we are all warmed by the same summer and chilled by the same winter. And it is recognition of that common humanity that shall bind us into a nation.

To date, we Americans find inspiration in the generous and forgiving spirit that has won you this democracy. And we find inspiration in the democratic institutions that have come to light here in just a few short years. We find inspiration in your progressive new constitution, which is being distributed around the country this week; and especially the rights it enshrines for women and children. We find inspiration in the work you are undertaking in every sector of society to build your new nation. We have an old saying in America, that "idle hands are the devil's work." From what I have seen in just a few short days, the devil will have no help here. South Africa is a country that is too busy to hate.

In all of these ways your experience in South Africa reminds us just how precious freedom, peace and democracy are and how we all have a stake in their success around the globe. I hope that you, too, can find some inspiration in America's experience. For we Americans offer you a reminder, that democracy is a complicated business, as complicated and hard to manage as human nature itself. We have been striving to perfect democracy for more than 200 years, without any assurance that we will ever fully succeed. And, yet, we keep working at it because nothing is more precious to us than the freedoms our ancestors struggled to win and struggled to preserve.

Now South Africa is building a multi-racial society, rooted in human rights and nourished in the fertile soil of reconciliation and forgiveness. And I have been privileged to witness some of your efforts. Yesterday I had the chance to join Archbishop Tutu at a meeting of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission here in Capetown. In the most ordinary of conference rooms people are undertaking the most extraordinary of efforts. They are working to help complete South Africa's healing. They are seeing to it that South Africans fully understand their past so that they may also create a future in which every citizen finally has the opportunity to live up to his or her God-given promise.

As important as it is to weave history into your memory, it is just as important to be sure that we weave all people into the work of building this democracy. And I would say a special word on behalf of the involvement of women, for neither this democracy nor any other can flourish if half the population is unschooled, unskilled, unfed, unhealthy or unheard. It is clear that you and South Africa know that.

In Soweto I met a principal at a primary school who was working overtime to get much needed resources for her students; a teacher who will not rest until every child in her class has mastered the basics of English; a woman at an orphanage a few miles from the school who gave up her own job to keep that home for abandoned children open when the government cut off

funding in 1977. She was motivated by the belief that every child deserves love, a sense of belonging and the simple necessity of a safe place to sleep.

In Johannesburg I met with women social workers, psychologists, law enforcement experts and police, politicians and grass-roots activists who are working to end the plagues of domestic violence and child abuse which afflict not only your country, but mine and many others. And let me say that we around the world owe thanks to the women of Africa for focusing international attention on domestic violence and putting it on the agenda first at the United Nations Conference on Women in Nairobi and later in Beijing.

But perhaps the best illustration I have seen of how women are rooting democracy in South Africa is found in a patch of land here in Capetown that I visited yesterday. It's a brown, dusty place once occupied by squatters. Understandably, the women there were not satisfied with their situations. They wanted to do better for themselves and their children. So after hearing about a housing program that worked with poor women in India, they formed their own local housing and credit association. Before long, they requested and received information from government officials about how to lay a foundation for a house. They put in a sewer line. With money saved for the association and some support from the government they bought shovels and wheelbarrows, paint and cement. And together they worked and worked and worked. Today they have completed 18 houses and they are building more.

Now, some of you may be wondering, what does a house-building project for squatter women have to do with democracy. But as the women themselves sang in a song for me while I was there, "strength, money and knowledge, we cannot do anything without them." And here in South Africa you are showing the entire world that democracy will succeed only if every citizen -- black, white or colored; man, woman or child -- not only enjoys the full political, economic, social and civic power that he or she is due, but also engages in the task of nation building.

That is the task before all of your citizens. Whether you are in government or business, whether you teach, whether you minister, whether you farm -- it is to help translate one of the greatest political triumphs of this century, really of all history, into social and economic conditions that mean better lives for all South Africans. Forty years of institutionalized inequality and injustice are hard to overcome. Yet I have seen, even in this brief stay, men and women of all races and beliefs who are joining together to make this democracy work. They want to ensure that children are afforded the education they need to pursue their dreams, that women are not relegated to the margins of society, that relations among racial groups are expanded and strengthened, that the climate is right for businesses to prosper here, that all South Africans are free of violence and crime in and out of their homes, and that every man, woman, and child is treated with the respect and dignity they deserve.

President Mandela and his government should be applauded for pursuing a program of reconstruction and development that seeks to make the transformation of democracy complete on all fronts. They are working hard to erase inequities in health care and education, to assure that woman have a voice in charting the future of their country, to reduce crime and strengthen the economy and give people the tools they need to succeed in a democratic society.

their societies, they worked in a parliamentary system where the men and women with whom they work get to know them as a colleague and get to appreciate their strength and weaknesses.

And so, during that period of time in which they are involved in political life in their country, they get to be judged by their own merits as a parliamentarian, as a leader of a party, and they have a very small constituency, in effect -- a constituency of their fellow party members in the Parliament who choose them as their leader based on very personal knowledge. They do not have to go out and sell themselves to the entire country and face all of the myriad of questions that women in public life are often subjected to, because their constituency is one which they know and have helped to shape over time.

In contrast, in the United States, because of our system -- it's absolutely true, anyone can run for president, which is a wonderful openness about what we have in America, but it's also true that everyone, then, must go out and essentially persuade the entire electorate with very little personal knowledge. One gets to know someone over the television, over the mass media; they don't have the kind of working experience that will exist here in your parliamentary system, so it's very difficult for women to overcome many of the preconceptions and stereotypes that the public holds about them because of this lack of personal experience.

Now, having said that, I do hope and believe that sometime within the next 20 years we will have a woman president. It is possible that one or more women may run in the primaries in their parties in the United States, in the election coming up in the year 2000. There are some very well-qualified women who have served as governors, served in the Congress, served in the cabinet of various administrations, both Republican and Democrat, so I think that we will see women emerge and subject themselves to the electoral process. And I'm hoping that eventually we will see a woman in the White House and then I will follow with great interest how her spouse is treated. (Laughter and applause.)

Q (Inaudible.)

MRS. CLINTON: A wonderful question for a university audience, because certainly -- you don't pick the time of history in which you live; that is something that is thrust upon you, just as you don't pick your parents. There are some things that you are stuck with, for better or worse. (Laughter.) But if you believe in the spark of humanity and opportunity and life that lives in all of us, then no matter what your beginnings nor what time you live in, you have opportunities to shape your own life and hopefully contribute to the life of your society. And I cannot think of a more exciting time to be a young person than right now in South Africa, black, white or colored. The opportunities are extraordinary to break down old barriers, to subject yourself to new experiences, to sit with people you have never sat with before, to look each other in the eye, to learn what you have in common, to agree to disagree, to build this democracy on those individual acts that will really make it possible for it to withstand whatever difficulties lie ahead, and to do so not only individually, but through organizations -- religiously-based organizations, university-based organizations, economic and social ones -- to be players in this extraordinary effort of reconciliation and reconstruction that you are engaged in.

I think the same is true in a lesser degree even in our own country today. It is not a time of the civil rights movement or the Vietnam War, but America stands on the brink of its own difficult decisions about how we will treat one another, how we will engage in building our own communities for the future. And for young people who have more at stake in what happens in the 21st century, it is essential that you get the best possible education that will enable you to make your contributions and to keep your minds open to change, to continue to learn, and that you approach whatever you do with a dose of humility that is hard enough in life and difficult even more in youth -- (laughter) -- that we do not have all of the answers, that experience can teach you some things, and to take lessons from those who have gone before.

So I would hope that maybe in ways that are different from some of the great movements of the past, and certainly here in this country those who were involved in the struggle against apartheid, those who helped to forge the links that enabled you to break through in a peaceful way to the democracy that you now have, will do more to involve young people in that building process and that those of you who are students will look for ways to make your contribution.

I feel so strongly that we are on the brink of such enormous possibility in the world right now. I have no idea which way it will turn out. There's no guarantee that we will make the right decisions in the United States or in South Africa or anywhere else. But if enough people of good will continue to stress what we have in common with one another and the eternal values that stand the test of time, then I'm hoping that we will have a critical mass, the world over, to keep moving us slowly, fitfully, toward a future that really will live up to the ideals that we brought to our struggles in the United States and that you have brought to yours here. And I wish you and all of the students here the opportunity to participate in that great endeavor. (Applause.)

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