

PHOTOCOPY
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Hillary Rodham Clinton's Address
American University in Kyrgyzstan
Bishkek, November 12, 1997

Thank you so much. I am extremely honored to be here, and I must say, somewhat overwhelmed by this occasion. I want to thank President and Mrs. Akayev for their very warm, gracious hospitality. And I want to thank the Dean, the Provost, the Faculty Administrators, and especially the students of the American University here in Kyrgyzstan.

I am very honored to be your first honorary professor, and there will not be a test on my remarks at the conclusion of the ceremony.

I have come to Kyrgyzstan and to Central Asia on behalf of my husband, President Clinton, and the American people to reinforce the very strong ties between our two countries, and to witness firsthand the important progress you are making as you move toward becoming a full democracy, civil society, and an economy that helps all citizens reach their full potential. And there is no more important endeavor to realize all of these goals than education. You know that or you would not be here as part of this university. You know that education is essential to the health of democracy, for a democracy's success is contingent on citizens having the ability to make informed choices. You know that education is essential to building civil society, for civil society depends on learning to live with, tolerate and respect those with whom we disagree. And you know that education is essential to the success of a country's economy, for economic growth especially in the global economy depends on a skilled workforce. It could not be clearer, a country's success in today's world, more than ever, rests largely on its ability to educate its people, to give them the tools they need to fulfill their promise. That is why I am so pleased to be part of this ceremony, the founding of an independent American University in Kyrgyzstan.

Since your independence, under the President's leadership, Kyrgyzstan has sought enhanced cooperation with the United States and the West. It was in this context, that your President asked our Vice President, Al Gore, in 1993, for assistance in establishing a center for training future business and government leaders. The United States was proud to join you in partnership in creating that faculty. Over the last several years, through faculty and curriculum development, through your library and internet access, the faculty has grown into a thriving institution. That is obvious, because of the example of the university's first graduating class. It is from these dynamic

and motivated young people, that the future reformers and business and political leaders of this country will be drawn.

Today, we lay the groundwork for a university which will continue to make contributions to the future of Kyrgyzstan. We look forward to reaching a framework agreement with you that will define the university's independence--and thereby assure its continued support. We know from our own long experience in the United States that only an independent center of learning can fulfill a university mission to open the minds of students, to teach them to think critically, and to inspire them to make a difference in the future.

We also strongly endorse the role of the Open Society Institute as an effective advocate for democracy here and throughout the world. We hope that this university grows into a place that nourishes the bedrock values of free thought and expression, respect for human rights, support of strong and independent community institutions and opportunity for all citizens.

I think this partnership which has resulted in this university is one of the most important results of the alliance between our two countries. And we want to further that alliance. One of the ways we intend to do that is to recognize excellence in teaching. The Teaching Excellence Awards will go to outstanding teachers of English and American Studies from around Kyrgyzstan. These awards will bring teachers together to share techniques. The schools from which these teachers come will receive important educational materials. And the teachers who are selected for these awards will have the opportunity to visit the United States--to teach us about your educational system and to see ours in action. I am also delighted that as part of this program, The Teaching Excellence Awards, award-winning American teachers will come to Kyrgyzstan to meet with students, fellow teachers, and members of the educational community.

I have only been here for a very short time. In fact, I'm quite sad that my schedule does not permit me to stay longer, to visit with the students and the faculty here at the university and to see more of this beautiful country and to meet more of the people who are building its future. But I can say that based on my very short impression, what I have heard about the progress that has been made, the political and economic reforms that have taken place is certainly borne out by my own eyes and experience. This country has an extraordinary past, but I believe that it has an even more extraordinary future.

I have read about your great national epics, "The Manas," and I spoke with the President about them at lunch today. These are stories about the steadfastness and courage of your ancestors in

ancient times and they are very inspiring. But I must tell you, from my perspective as an American who was watching what you were doing from very far away, I am even more inspired by what you have accomplished in six short years. I am more convinced than ever that you will not only demonstrate your commitment to the future, but in so doing, you will keep faith with the glory of your past.

It is not an easy time to chart a new future. The world is changing very fast around us. Today at lunch I met the President's son, a fourteen year old young man, who told me very proudly that he was communicating on the internet with other young people all over the world. That is something I could not do when I was his age; I will not even be able to imagine what he will do when he is my age. Just as I cannot imagine as I look at the students here, as I have listened to you address this audience in English, what accomplishments will lie ahead of you. But I want to commend you for taking advantage of this educational opportunity, and I want to say how pleased we are in the United States, that we can work together with you to establish this American University, because we want to be, now and in the future, allies, partners and friends, in charting the journey that we will take together into the twenty-first century. That journey is far more important to you who are students than to those of us who have already gone through much of our lives. So to you who are the students, I commend you for taking the risk of doing as much with your lives as you possibly can. I urge you to continue to explore with you minds as many frontiers of knowledge as you can possibly reach, and I challenge you to put your education to work to build your country, to make it the best possible place to live and raise children that you can imagine. And I ask you to do so in a way that honors the democratic values and the hopes that bring us here today. Thank you very much.