

Departure Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan

PHOTOCOPY
PRESERVATION

**FIRST LADY HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON
KYRGYZSTAN DEPARTURE STATEMENT
BISHKEK, KYRGYZSTAN
NOVEMBER 12, 1997**

I want to thank President and Mrs. Akayev -- and the people of Kyrgyzstan -- for their extraordinary hospitality. Though my time in your country was far too short, I feel privileged to have had the opportunity to see how you are preserving your rich cultural heritage, while charting a new course for the future. I was especially impressed by the strong steps that citizens are taking to expand educational opportunities, advance private enterprise, and foster civil society.

At the airport, I was pleased to observe the arrival in Kyrgyzstan of a shipment of medicines for hospitals and clothing for children donated by volunteer organizations in the United States. While at the airport, I also had the opportunity to speak with members of Kyrgyzstan's community of non-governmental organizations and to tell them how important they are to strengthening civil society. In Bishkek, I visited a FINCA microenterprise initiative, which sees to it that hardworking people -- mostly women -- have access to credit so that they can start small businesses. My pleasure at meeting the people involved with this venture was deepened by the fact that I was able to do so in a traditional yurt. I also had the honor of visiting the Kyrgyz-American University to reiterate America's support for an independent university that will open the minds of young people and inspire them to make a difference in the future. Finally, I was pleased to meet with President Akayev to reinforce the strong ties between our two countries.

I hope that in my brief time here I have been able to convey the warmth and friendship the American people have for the people of Kyrgyzstan. When I return home, I will bring with me wonderful memories of the people I met here, excitement about the progress I have seen, and an even greater sense of the common bond that unites our two countries. Americans will continue to stand with the people of Kyrgyzstan as they courageously work for a new future of democracy, prosperity, and freedom.