

THE WHITE HOUSE
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**REMARKS BY THE FIRST LADY AT
DECEMBER 31ST WOMEN'S MOVEMENT DAYCARE CENTER**

Accra, Ghana

MRS. CLINTON: Thank you very much.

I am delighted to be here with all of you today. It is a great honor to be at one of the 31st December Women's Movement Daycare Centers and to be surrounded by so many women who are creating a new future for themselves, their families, and for their nation.

Before I begin, I want to acknowledge all of the dignitaries who are here. Thank you for coming and making me feel so welcome.

And I want to say a special word of appreciation to my hostess, Mrs. Rawlings. I remember so well our meeting in the White House in 1994. I knew when I met Mrs. Rawlings that I had met a very dynamic, creative leader. And I have looked forward to this day, along with my husband, ever since. We have wanted to come to visit Ghana, and I am so pleased that we are here finally today.

I cannot think of a better place to start with my husband on this historic trip to Africa, the first visit ever by a United States President to your country. And I must say that I cannot think of a better way to start my journey than right here with all of you --surrounded by women and men and children, because this is where a country is really judged isn't it? What do we do for our children?

And I have visited many, many different schools and daycare centers, not only in my country, but throughout the world. And I must say, I have never seen brighter, better behaving, more impressive children than the ones I have seen today. I would like to take all the children who danced and spoke home with me and tour them around my own country because I think their messages would be just as welcome in many parts of the United States as they were here today.

Everything we do as individuals, as parents, as grandparents, as citizens begins with our children --giving our children the chance to learn, to grow, to dance to sing, to become who they are meant to be, to give them the opportunity to fulfill their own dreams. And so much of what we give our children depends upon the opportunities and respect we give our women. Because if women are empowered, if women are respected, if women are given the chance to live out their own dreams, then boys and girls will as well. And so when I look out at this crowd of such distinguished women

in so many walks of life, I know that you share my belief.

We have what Efua Sutherland called a "sacred responsibility" to children. And you are showing the world the role of women in Ghana and across Africa are playing in transforming their lives, their communities, and their nations. Like many of the women throughout Ghana's history and throughout Africa, you have come together to help build a strong democracy, a strong economy, a vibrant civil society, with the dream that every woman will have the health care, the education, the jobs and credit, the opportunities she needs to make the choices that are right for her. That is a very important part of what we are attempting to achieve here in your country and in mine --not that we dictate what a woman's choice will be but that we empower women to make the right choices for themselves.

During my visit to Africa last spring --and I told Mrs. Rawlings I very much wanted to come to Ghana, but I also very much hoped my husband would come to Ghana. And I was told, save Ghana for the President. So I hope that I will be able to return again on my own to see what I have seen in other parts of Africa as well.

I have seen women building with their own hands their own homes. I have seen women working against diseases that are ravaging the children of your continent. I've seen women working with other women to end the sometimes deadly, but always inhumane, practice of genital mutilation. And I want to congratulate this nation for your leadership, not only by passing a law outlawing this practice, but by making sure that the law changes hearts and minds so that individuals understand what the law means and why it should be enforced in every village throughout Ghana.

We share common victories and also common challenges. Every day, women are managing the crops, feeding and caring for children, providing water and fuel for their homes, but every day in too many parts of the world, women are still being fed less and last. Too many are caught in a deadly cycle of conflict and violence, some in their own homes. Too many are treated as children under the laws of their nation, unable to buy land, get credit, or receive an inheritance. Too many cannot find good child care like that offered here for their children when they have to go out to work.

All of this is now changing thanks to leaders like you. And I want to commend you for everything you and your government are doing to ensure that the rights of women are protected and that the voices of women are heard.

All of us must speak out. We must speak out to ensure that no girl is ever denied an education. Can you imagine the tragedy of seeing these bright young girls whom I have seen, listening to them with their pride and confidence, standing and performing in front of such a large group, being told at the age of 10, or 12 or 14, you cannot be educated any further. What a loss. Not only a loss to the nation, but a loss to their families. So we must ensure that all girls are enabled to have an education, because when you educate a woman, you do educate a family and a community and a nation.

We must speak up to end violence against women in all forms. It does not matter if that violence is in our homes or on our streets. Violence against women must never be dismissed as trivial or explained away as cultural. Violence against women should be called what it is --a crime

--whether it happens in Ghana or the United States or anywhere else in the world.

We must speak with one voice --women across the world. And I'm pleased that my government, through the USAID and the Embassy's Democracy and Human Rights Fund, is working as partners with the women of Ghana.

And today I am pleased to announce that the United States government will provide \$1 million to create Powernet. Powernet will be a new electronic bridge, linking our two countries across the ocean, linking women from all walks of life in the United States and throughout Africa.

We know that in the United States that there is much we have to learn from you, and we want the opportunity to learn from you. You are finding new ways of resolving conflicts, creating micro-enterprises, improving the health of families, improving the legal system, educating girls. This new Powernet will use the Internet to create dialogue between us, to enable us to share road maps for successes and strategies for the future.

I am so pleased that this kind of opportunity will enable you and the women of my country to learn from each other so we can build a strong, better, more just world for our children.

Efua Sutherland wrote something that I liked very much. She said: Our fathers found us the paths; we are the road makers. They bought us the land with their blood; we shall build it with our strength. We shall create it with our minds.

With the women of Ghana continuing to lead the way, I know that will happen. And I want to thank you for your example and for your leadership, for your encouragement and for all that you are doing, not only to lift up the people of Ghana, but to give heart to women, men, and children everywhere.

Thank you all so much.