

**Remarks by First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton
United States Agency for International Development
Girls' Education Conference**

Ronald Reagan Building
Washington, D.C.

May 7, 1998

Thank you so much. It is such a great pleasure for me to be here at this conference with all of you who are committed to the education and well being of girls around the world. I am also pleased to have the first occasion to visit this new, very large building and see this auditorium in action. This is now the second largest building, second only to the Pentagon. So I think it is appropriate that while the Pentagon houses those who strive to keep us safe and secure and keep peace around the world, this building would host a conference about educating girls and building a future that we hope will be peaceful for all children. I hope that we are able to do that through the work that you are doing at this conference and that the results of this conference and what you carry away from it will enable you to be strong voices throughout the world on behalf of young women and girls.

The best description that I have ever read about why this conference is so important did not come from a think tank or a government report or a research study but instead from a college student, a young woman from New Delhi who gave me a poem she had written about why it was so important that she be the first young woman in her family ever to go on to college and have that opportunity. Here is what she wrote:

“Too many women in too many countries speak the same language -- of silence... There must be freedom -- if we are to speak. And yes, there must be power -- if we are to be heard.”

We are here today to make sure that all children have the freedom and the power to make their voices ring as loudly as the 75 members of the World Children's Choir we heard a few minutes ago. We are here because there are already powerful voices present in this room that are making themselves heard on behalf of education for all children. I want to thank everyone who made this extraordinary event possible, particularly Brian Atwood, Margaret Lycette, Susie Clay and the entire United States Agency for International Development staff. All over the world, I have seen the fruits of the Girls and Women's Education Initiative, that was pioneered by USAID, and I have been gratified to see the work that is being done to put quality education within the grasp of every child.

I also want to thank the co-sponsors of this conference: the United Nations Children's

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Fund, the Inter-American Development Bank, the World Bank, the Delegation of the European Commission, and the Lewis T. Preston Education Fund for Girls. Thank you all.

I, too, extend a warm welcome to the First Lady of Ghana and the First Lady of Peru. I also wish to welcome all Ministers and Vice Ministers, Cabinet Officials, Parliamentarians, Ambassadors, leaders of non-governmental organizations, the media, businesses, religious organizations, and other distinguished guests from the 42 countries represented here.

As I look out at this impressive gathering, I believe that we are truly at the beginning of a great international effort to give all children access to quality primary and secondary education. As I have been privileged to travel around the world, I have met many, many citizens who are struggling to find their voices in a time of increasing democracy, information, and globalization. I've met with many families who work hard everyday just to put a roof over their children's heads and food on their tables for meals. I have visited communities, where people have banded together to create healthier, more prosperous opportunities for all who live there. Often when I ask a very simple question, I get the same answer. I ask, "How is it that you are able to accomplish so much?" The answer usually in one way or another comes back to education. Education is recognized throughout the world, even by those who themselves have not enjoyed an education, as a powerful tool for a child, or a family, or a whole society to make progress. Education is no longer viewed as a luxury for some, but as a necessity for all. The World Bank has said repeatedly that education provides the highest rate of return of any investment in developing nations. And that is especially true of girls' educations.

Because we know that when we educate a girl, we improve the health of women and families. We know that a woman who has had even a single year of education has children that have a better chance of living. We know that as the years of schooling increase, the chances of the child living, and living well, increase as well.

When we educate a girl, we decrease poverty by helping women support themselves and their families. A single year of education usually correlates with an increased income of 10 to 20 percent for women later in life. In Senegal, I visited a small village where education for girls, and women's adult literacy programs, have been the first steps in helping the village understand how it could work together to create more prosperity, how it could take five hectares of barren land and turn it into an oasis of green, growing products that could not only support the village but be sold in the marketplace as well.

When we educate a girl today, we also help to create a leader for tomorrow, a leader within the family and the community, perhaps a teacher, an engineer, a lawyer, a doctor, a nurse, a mother of a healthy and educated child, a woman who is working hard to make her life and the lives of her family as good as they can be.

That's why at international conferences and summits in Paris, Cairo, Copenhagen, and Beijing, we have joined together to call for universal primary education. We called for ending the disparities between boys and girls that, for too long, have plagued primary and secondary schools making it very difficult for girls to attend. I want to thank all of you who have worked to

make the words that appeared on the pages of the declarations from these international conferences living realities.

In developing countries, the primary school enrollment for girls has increased by 50 percent since 1960. In the poorest countries, it has more than doubled during this period. But that is not enough, we have to do more. We have to see that we support governments and NGOs in reaching out to afford access to education to as many girls as possible. I have seen such activities bearing fruit all over the world.

In Bangladesh, I visited a school run by the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee, a non-governmental organization that believes that education -- especially girls' education -- is a pre-condition for economic development. Because of that belief, some of the BRAC schools have been burned by extremist groups. But the schools keep being rebuilt and families keep sending their children to attend.

I also saw where the Bangladesh government is attempting to provide incentives for families to keep their daughters in school. Families get food each week if they send their children, particularly their girls, to school. To help give girls the chance to go to secondary school, the government actually deposits a small amount of money in a family banking account as long as the daughters attend school.

I have seen the results of President Museveni's promise of Universal Primary Education in Uganda. I have been in classrooms that are absolutely filled with children -- 70, 75, 80 third graders -- a very big challenge to any teacher. But instead of being frustrated the teachers I have met have been proud. Proud because children are coming to school and everyone is working very hard to create the materials and train additional teachers to meet this challenge. Overwhelming pride is felt because for the first time, more girls than boys are attending school.

There have also been results in Guatemala where the government and the Foundation for Sugar Producers teamed up to offer small scholarships to girls in rural schools because they knew that the drop out rate between the first and second grades for girls in those schools with scholarships was only one percent compared to 30 percent nationwide. In another Guatemalan program, afternoon school sessions have been introduced to accommodate girls who must carry out domestic and agricultural work in the mornings.

In Malawi, the villagers were not only asked why girls are not attending school, they were asked to come up with solutions. They performed plays and skits. They waived school fees. They took responsibility for enrolling girls in school. As a result, enrollment increased from 50 to 83 percent.

In the Community Schools Program in Egypt, the number of girls enrolled in school increased from 2,000 to 35,000 because schools were located closer to homes, making them safer and more accessible. Curricula were designed so that they were culturally appropriate and approved by village leaders. Girls were trained to be sure that they were understanding how important this gift of education was and parents were asked to become actively involved as well.

As we look across the globe, therefore, we see success stories everywhere. Yet, right now, there are still 100 million children worldwide who are out of school, and two-thirds of them are girls. 900 million people cannot read or write, and sixty percent of them are women. Two-thirds of the children who complete less than four years of primary education are girls and countless others do not even have access to a primary school, let alone a secondary school.

Without the ability to read and write or do math, girls will be increasingly left out of the information age. Unable to compete, to increase their own incomes, or contribute to their families, they will have their own dreams and aspirations short changed.

So as you attend this conference, starting yesterday going through today, I hope you will continue to look at solutions and that you will share information about the best practices from each of your countries that have made a difference in making sure that girls are able to attend school.

I remember so well being in a small village about 40 minutes outside Lahore, Pakistan where I visited a school that had been built to give the girls in that area primary education. I sat out in the courtyard in front of the school and talked with mothers of children who attended. One mother told me about her 10 children -- 5 girls and 5 boys. Her worry was that she had sent all of her children to school, to primary school. And when her boys graduated from primary school they had gone on. They had gone to the nearest secondary school continuing their education. But when her daughters finished the village school, there were no secondary schools nearby for girls and she was not willing to send her daughters off alone to attend school far away. So, she asked me, and she asked all of the officials who were with me, if they could please have a secondary school built for girls near their village.

This one mother spoke, I believe, for countless millions of others -- women who know that their daughters will not live the same lives they have lived, that change is too pervasive, that they have to provide better opportunities so that their daughters will be prepared for whatever the future holds. As Brian mentioned in his remarks, a recently completed evaluation makes clear that the "second generation" of girls' education initiatives must continue to expand access to school, particularly secondary school, but we also must face up to the need to improve the quality of girls' education.

Because we've done a good job in reaching parents and telling them they should send their girls to school, we now have many, many girls and many, many boys crowding into the schools that are already available. These schools then face the tremendous challenge of trying to train new teachers, provide basic supplies, and maintain facilities. It is very hard, even for the proudest teacher, to get around to look at the work of 75 or 80 eight year olds. Because we have so many crowded classrooms, many children get lost in that crowd and many do not even remain to finish primary education. We have to make a commitment not only to providing access to education but to providing access to quality education as well.

We cannot think of girls schooling as something we put in a little box over in a corner It

must be part of the overall educational efforts of all of our countries. We have come to recognize that we must educate both boys and girls. We have to recognize that any child who goes without education in today's world may become a burden on the larger society. Therefore, it is in our interest to be sure that they all have access to quality schooling.

We also have to look at ways of reaching families so that they know how important it is to prepare their children for school and make sure that when those children walk through a schoolhouse door they are ready to learn. We now know, from scientific research, that the brain develops at an extraordinary pace in the first three years of life. Many of the traditions that we have all followed in caring for babies, holding them, rocking them, singing to them, caressing them, we have done because it was passed on to us generation to generation as to how we should care for a small infant. We now know that those habits, those forms of attention, are not just a wonderful way to develop a bond between a parent and a child but they actually create brain cells. The more a child is appropriately stimulated, talked to, read to, sung to, that child's brain is then creating more and more connections that will enable that child, when he or she is ready for formal academic learning, to be able to read better, to be able to do mathematics better.

We have to reach parents all over the world with this new scientific information to encourage them to pay attention to their babies, encourage them to space the births of their babies so they have the time and the energy to invest in each child. By doing so, we will better prepare children for the schooling to come.

There are many organizations throughout every society that have a role to play. Certainly the family bears the primary responsibility and the extended family must support the family in educating girls. But so too should religious organizations also understand how important it is to make sure every young girl is able to live up to her God-given promise as well. The media has a role to play in disseminating information such as the importance of the scientific research about paying attention to young babies. The media also can give us good examples of girls and boys going to school, learning, being able to go out into the world better educated.

Businesses can do things such as provide scholarships, help support schools, be willing to take the initiative to stand behind the idea of educating all citizens. Not only because it is the right thing to do but because it is a way for businesses in all of our countries to have better trained and educated workers and consumers. Certainly government leaders have to do everything within their power to make it possible for us to have as many good quality schools and teachers everywhere throughout every country.

With technology we can also leap frog over some of the obstacles that would otherwise prevent schooling from being available. In South Africa, I visited a school in Soweto where there were not enough teachers, where there were many children now coming back into the school with the end of apartheid and where they were attempting to teach English to as many children as possible. They were using tape recordings and the teacher could monitor individual students. In other schools there is even an effort to try to get one television with transmissions that can bring in distant learning so that we can expand the opportunities available even though the teachers are not present.

The computer, of course, is very expensive and in some of the schools I have visited there is not even electricity yet. However, if a computer can be made available you have opened the world up to students who live very far from any large city or large university and it is possible to provide access to the information age to those students. We have to be more creative and innovative in thinking about how to overcome the obstacles to provide for girls education.

I look forward to hearing the results of your deliberations during this conference. I am hoping that the ideas that you will discuss you can disseminate widely throughout the world. Certainly USAID and the United States government want to stand with you in helping to bring to reality our shared dream that we will see opportunities for every girl and every boy, everywhere in the world to receive a quality education that will enable them to take responsibility for their futures.

Thank you very much.

First Lady Hillary Clinton

Remarks at USAID Girls' Education Conference

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Thank you so much. It is such a great pleasure for me to be here at this conference with all of you who are committed to the education and well being of girls around the world. I'm also pleased to have the first occasion, to visit this new, very large building and see this auditorium in action. This is now the second largest building, second only to the pentagon. So I think it is appropriate, that while the Pentagon houses those who strive to keep us safe and secure and keep peace around the world, this building would host a conference about educating girls and building a future, that we hope, will be peaceful for all children. (Applause)

I hope that we're able to do that through the world that you are doing at this conference and that the results of this conference, and what you carry away from it will enable you to be strong voices throughout the world on behalf of young women and girls.

The best description that I've ever read about why this conference is so important, did not come from a think tank or a government report, or a research study. But instead from a college student, a young woman from New Delhi who gave me a poem she had written about why it was so important, that she being the

first young women in her family ever to go on to college, had that opportunity.

Here is what she wrote.

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All over the world, I have seen the fruits of the Girls and Women's Education Initiative pioneered by USAID, and I have been gratified to see the work that is being done to put quality education within the grasp of every child.

I also want to thank the co-sponsors of this conference: UNICEF; the Inter-American Development Bank, the World Bank, the Delegation of the European Commission, and the Lewis T. Preston Education Fund for Girls. Thank you all.

I too extend a warm welcome to the First Lady of Ghana and the First Lady from Peru. I also wish to welcome all Ministers and Vice Ministers, Cabinet Officials, Parliamentarians, Ambassadors, leaders of non-governmental organizations, the media, businesses, religious organizations, and other distinguished guests from the 42 countries represented here.

As I look out at this impressive gathering, I believe that we are truly at the beginning of a great international effort to give all children access to quality primary education, and secondary education.

As I have been privileged to travel around the world, I have met many, many citizens, who are struggling to find their voices in a time of increasing democracy, information, and globalization. I've met with many families who have worked hard everyday just to put a roof over their children's heads and food on their tables for meals. I have visited communities, where people have banded together to

create healthier, more prosperous opportunities for all who live there.

And often when I ask a very simple question I get the same answer. I ask "How is it that you were able to accomplish so much?". And the answer usually in one way or another comes back to education. Education is recognized throughout the world, even by those who themselves have not enjoyed an education, as a powerful tool for a child, or a family, or a whole society to make progress.

Education is no longer viewed as a luxury for some, but as a necessity for all. The World Bank has said repeatedly that education provides the highest rate of return of any investment in developing nations. And that is especially true of girls' educations.

Because we know that when we educate these girls, we improve the health of women and families. We know that a woman who has had even a single year of education, has children that have a better chance of living. We know that as the years of schooling increase, the chances of a child living, and living well, increase as well.

When we educate a girl, we decrease poverty by helping women support

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When we educate a girl today, we also help to create a leader for tomorrow. A leader within the family and the community, perhaps a teacher, an engineer, a lawyer, a doctor, a nurse, a mother of a healthy and educated child, a woman who is working hard to make her life and the lives of her family as good as they can be.

That's why at international conferences and summits in Paris, Cairo, Copenhagen, and Beijing, we have joined together to call for universal primary education. We called for ending disparities between boys and girls that, for too long, have plagued primary and secondary schools, making it very difficult to attend. And I want to thank all of you who have worked to make the words that appeared on the pages of the declarations from these international conferences

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I have seen such activities bearing fruit all over the world. In Bangladesh, I visited a school run by the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee, an NGO that believes that education -- especially girls' education -- is a pre-condition for economic development. Because of that belief, some of the BRAC schools have been burned by extremist groups. But the schools keep being rebuilt. And families keep sending their children to attend.

I also saw where the Bangladesh government is attempting to provide incentives for families to keep their daughters in school. The families get food each week if they send their children, particularly their girls, to school. And, to help give girls the chance to go to secondary school, the government actually

deposits a small amount of money in a family bank account, as long as the daughters attend school.

I have seen the results of President Museveni's promise of Universal Primary Education in Uganda. I have been in classrooms that are absolutely filled with children; 70, 75, 80 third-graders. A very big challenge to any teacher. But instead of feeling frustrated the teachers I have met have been proud. Proud because children are coming to school, and everyone is working very hard to create the materials and train the additional teachers to meet this challenge, but the overwhelming pride that is felt because for the first time, more girls than boys are attending school.

There have also been results in Guatemala, where the government and the Foundation for Sugar Producers teamed up to offer small scholarships to girls in rural schools. Because they do that, between the first and second grades, the drop out rate for girls in those schools was only one percent -- compared to 30 percent nationwide. In another Guatemalan program, afternoon school sessions have been introduced to accommodate girls who must carry out domestic and agricultural work in the mornings.

In Malawi, the villagers were not only asked why girls aren't attending school...they were asked to come up with solutions. And they performed plays and skits, they waived school fees, they took responsibility for enrolling girls in school, and as a result the enrollment from 50 to 83 percent.

And in the Community Schools Program in Egypt, the number of girls enrolled in school increased from 2,000 to 35,000. Because schools were located closer to homes, making them safer and more accessible. The curricula was designed so that was culturally appropriate and approved by village leaders. And girls were trained to be sure that they were understanding of how important this gift of education was, and parents were asked to become actively involved as well.

As we look across the globe, therefore, we see success stories everywhere. Yet, right now there are still 100 million children worldwide who are out of school. And two-thirds of them are girls. 900 million people cannot read or write -- and sixty percent of them are women. Two-thirds of the children who complete less than four years of primary education are girls...and countless others do not even have access to a primary school...let alone a secondary school.

Without the ability to read and write or do math, girls will be increasingly left out of the information age, unable to compete to increase their own incomes, or contribute to their family's, and having their own dreams and aspirations short changed.

So as you attend this conference, starting yesterday and going through today I hope you will continue to look at solutions. That you will share information about the best practices from each of your countries that have made a difference in making sure that girls are able to attend schools.

I remember so well being in a small village, about 40 minutes outside Labor Pakistan. Where I visited a school that had been built, to give the girls in that area primary education. I sat out in the courtyard in front of the school, and talked with mothers of children who attended. One mother told me about her 10 children -- 5 girls and 5 boys. Her worry was that she had sent her children to school, to primary school, and when her boys graduated from primary school they had gone on. They had gone to the nearest secondary school continuing their education. But when her daughters finished the village school, there were no secondary schools

nearby for girls. And she was not willing to send her daughters off alone to attend a school far away. So she asked me, and she asked all the officials who were with me, if they could please have a secondary school built for girls in their village.

This one mother, I believe, spoke for countless of millions of others.

Women who know that their daughters will not live the same lives they have lived. That change is too pervasive. That they have to provide better opportunities so that their daughters will be prepared for whatever the future holds.

As Brian mentioned in his remarks, he recently completed evaluations that makes clear that the "second generation" of girls' education initiatives must continue to expand access to school, particularly secondary school, but we also must face up to the need to improve the *quality* of girls' education.

Because we've done a good job in reaching parents, and telling them they should send their girls to school, we now have many, many girls, and many, many, boys crowding in to the schools that are already available. These schools then face the tremendous challenge of trying to train new teachers, provide basic supplies, and maintain facilities. It is very hard, even for the proudest teacher to get around

to look at the work of 75 or 80, 8-year-olds.

And because we have so many crowded classrooms, many children get lost in that crowd. And many don't even remain to finish primary education. So we have to make a commitment, not only to providing access to education, but providing access to quality-education. And we can not think of girl's schooling as something we put in a little box over in a corner. It must be part of the overall educational efforts of all of our countries. We have to recognize that we must educate both boys and girls. We have to recognize that any child that goes without education in today's world, may become a drag on the larger society, so that it is in our interest to be sure that they all have access to quality schooling

We also have to look at ways of reaching families, so that they know how important it is to prepare their children for school, and make sure that when those children walk through a schoolhouse door they are ready to learn.

We now know from scientific research that the brain develops at an extraordinary pace in the first three years of life. Many of the traditions that we have all followed in caring for babies, in holding them, rocking them, singing to

them, caressing them. We have done because it was passed on to us, generation to generation, as how we should care for a small infant. We now know that those habits, those forms of attention are not just a wonderful way to develop a bond between a parent and a child, but they actually create brain cells. The more a child is appropriately stimulated, talked to, read to, sung to, that child's brain is then creating more and more connections, that will enable that child, when he or she is ready for formal academic learning, to be able to read better, to be able to do mathematics better.

So we have to reach parents all over the world, with this new scientific information. To encourage them to pay attention to their babies. To encourage them to space the births of their babies, so they have the time and the energy to invest in each child. Because by doing so we will better prepare children for the schooling to come.

Now there are many organization throughout every society that have a role to play. Certainly the family bares the primary responsibility, and the extended family, must support the family in educating girls. But so too should religious organizations also understand how important it is to make sure every young girls is

able to live up to her God-given promise as well.

The media has a role to play, disseminating information, such as the importance of the scientific research about paying attention to young babies. And the media also must give us good examples of girls and boys, going to school, learning, and being able to go out into the world better educated.

Businesses can do things like provide scholarships to help support schools. To be willing to take the initiative to stand behind the idea of educating all citizens. Not only because it is the right thing to do, but because it is a way for businesses in all of our countries, to have better trained and educated workers, and consumers.

And certainly government leaders have to do everything within their power to make it possible for us to have as many good, quality, schools and teachers everywhere throughout every country.

We also with technology can leap frog over some of the obstacles that would otherwise prevent schooling from being available. In South Africa I visited a school in Soeto, where there were not enough teachers, where there were many

children, now coming back into the schools with the end of apartheid, and where they were attempting to teach as many children as possible English. So they were using tape recordings that the teacher could monitor, but individual students could work with.

In other schools there was even an effort to try to get one television with transmission that can bring in distance learning, so that we can expand the opportunities available even though the teachers are not present. The computer, which of course is very expensive and in some of the schools I have visited there isn't even electricity yet at the schools. But if a computer can be made available you can open the world up to students who live very far from any large city or large university. If it is possible to provide access to the information age to those students. So we have to be more creative and innovative in thinking about how we overcome the obstacles to providing for girls education.

I look forward to hearing the results of your deliberations during this conference. I am hoping that the ideas that you will discuss we can disseminate widely throughout the world. And certainly USAID and The United States Government want to stand with you in helping to bring to reality our dreams that

we will see opportunities for every girl and every boy everywhere in the world, to receiving quality education that will enable them to take responsibilities for their schools.

Thank you very much.