Address at the Shanghai Library
Shanghai, China
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PRESERVATION

First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton
Shanghai Library Speech
Shanghai, China
July 1, 1998

I'm so pleased to be speaking here at the gateway to China, the vibrant center of China's economic transformation, and the well-spring of great intellectual, creative, and political leadership. I'm also pleased to be speaking here at the Shanghai Library, which my husband and I had a chance to visit yesterday. I understand it is one of the largest municipal libraries in the world. It has vast resources, from ancient Chinese texts to the latest CD-ROM. It embraces both the past and the future of this great nation.

My husband, my daughter, and my party and I have only been in China a few days, yet in that short time, we have glimpsed both China's rich history and its promising future. We have visited some of your ancient sites, from the Terra Cotta Warriors to the steps of the Great Wall, and we have marveled at Shanghai's ultra-modern architecture. But we understand that this country's greatest treasures are its people, men and women like yourselves, who are seizing opportunities for progress and helping to transform your society for the better.

When I first came to China, three years ago, I had the privilege of participating, as did many of you, in the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women. It was an extraordinary gathering of women from 189 nations-- women of different colors, cultures, and different faiths, from small villages and urban centers-- who had come together from every corner of the globe to discuss our common concerns and our common future.

At the conference, in the Forum of Non-Governmental Organizations, I listened to women giving voice to the voiceless, strength to the powerless, hope to the marginalized. While we spoke different languages and came from different places, we shared a universal belief: that women's rights are human rights and that human rights are women's rights. What the Beijing conference made undeniably clear, and what we know from experience and history, is that development and progress depend on women having equal access to life's basic tools of opportunity: health care, education, credit, jobs, legally-enforceable rights, and full participation in the political, social, and economic life of our countries.

The Beijing Platform for Action provided a framework as the impetus for governments to make these tools of opportunity and rights available to women, and the extraordinary potential and energy of women unleashed at the Beijing conference has begun to transform lives and societies. Governments are being held to their commitments, and grass roots action is igniting reform in every corner of the globe.

I have seen the changes first-hand, from Senegal to South Africa, from America to Australia, from Chile to China. During the time I've been in China, I've had the privilege to meet women and

men who are working together to ensure that women are not left behind in the 21st century. I've heard the vital voices of your girls and women, and seen the flowering of independent organizations committed to transforming rhetoric into action, to achieve tangible results toward the empowerment of women across your country.

Last Saturday in Beijing, I participated in a spirited, lively and informative discussion with women leaders, about the challenges and changes and opportunities facing women in China today. Although there were only 8 of us around the table, I felt as if I was hearing the voices of millions of Chinese women committed to improving their lives. I listened to the publisher of a magazine for rural women speak of improving conditions for poor rural women through expanded economic opportunities. She told the story of a disabled woman who was made to feel like a burden to her husband. But through a micro credit program she received a small loan and set up her own bean curd shop. As she began to make money, the relationship with her husband improved, she also gained self-confidence and earned a position of respect in her village. I have seen similar results throughout the world, when micro credit loans are available to poor women, who work very, very hard -- *know* how to work hard -- and take that little bit of credit and begin to earn income and thereby participate more fully in the life of their families and their communities.

I've heard university professors talking about new efforts to educate women, and change old attitudes about women and girls. Participants told me about programs aimed at keeping girls in school and convincing drop-outs to return to school. They showed me illustrated pamphlets used to inform women and girls about their political and legal rights. On Monday in Beijing, I met with women lawyers and law professors, running the Center for Women's Law Studies and Legal Services at Beijing University. This center offers free legal counseling to women, arbitrates, mediates, and litigates significant cases with wider legal implications for society, and recommends changes in policies that affect women. I felt at the discussion as though I were a part of the many discussions I have had as a lawyer going back many years, talking about the best ways to try to secure rights for clients, and make changes in society that would eliminate the need for constant law cases on behalf of individual clients.

One of the Center's clients told me she had wanted to leave her abusive husband, but did not know what her legal rights were. She sought the help of the Center, and finally received a divorce and an award for child support. But then she went on to tell me that she and her 12-year-old daughter are still living with her ex-husband, because their apartment was assigned to his work unit, and she is unable to get housing on her own. This is a problem that has wider implications than for just that one woman. So the Center is pursuing ways for her to obtain housing and collect the child support to which she is entitled.

Another client explained how she, and the women she worked with in a factory, were denied their pay. They are suing the factory's manager for their back-wages, which he still refuses to pay. But she has the support and the advocacy of the Center, and expects eventually to win what is rightfully hers.

These stories and many others underscore, for me, what I have learned in my years of being a lawyer in the United States. That while we have laws on the books that protect women's rights, that are often very comprehensive on paper, they are frequently not enforced. Throughout the world I hear the same complaint: without the rule of law which includes open access to a legal system and judicial orders that are enforced, laws can be a cruel hoax on women. But based on what I have learned here, steps toward better implementation are being made in China. When I asked for a show of hands at the Center of those who are studying to be lawyers, all the hands that shot up were young women's. The extraordinary growth of the number of lawyers in China -- including women lawyers -- will further strengthen the rule of law that is necessary for expanding and enforcing women's legal rights.

Yesterday here in this library, my husband and I talked with more people here in Shanghai who are defining China's future. I was struck by their vitality and their very great commitment to their own particular professions and work, but also to the implications of what they do to the larger society. I also visited a retraining center where women, who have lost their jobs because of China's economic reforms, are learning new skills to prepare themselves for a more competitive job market. I have visited many such centers in my own country, because some years ago, starting in the 1980's, we went through some of the very same changes--particularly in the textile industry--in the part of the country where my husband is from. Many women lost their jobs because the textile factories in which they worked were no longer economically viable.

So I have seen women in my country and now, yesterday, in yours, who are working hard to learn these new skills. I watched as they were being taught tailoring or flower arranging and I was struck by how supportive they were of each other in face of the challenges they confront. I especially noted the emphasis that the teachers placed on changing a woman's attitude about herself. It is never easy to lose a job. It is especially not easy when you are a woman of 35 or 45, and suddenly find yourself without employment. So in addition to the skills, the center was attempting to instill in women self-respect, self-confidence, self-reliance, and self-improvement. I also visited a beautiful new children's medical center with state-of-the-art technology, and I met with the bright, articulate students at the Shanghai Number Three Girls School. These also were two snapshots of the new China.

My experiences here in this past week have convinced me how important personal exchanges are between our two countries. The more we know one another, the more we know about the problems we each face, the more we can work together and confront some of the same issues that affect both of us as we move into the future. So it is with great pleasure that today, I am announcing five new China-America exchange programs that will bring Chinese women to the United States next year, to share ideas and experiences with their American counterparts. These exchanges, sponsored by the United States Information Service, will include Chinese and American women leaders of all levels of society, including lawyers, business representatives, local government officials, and youth leaders, and I know that they will deepen the understanding and ties of friendship that continue to grow between our two peoples. They will also enable American and Chinese women, like those of us in this auditorium, women with education and position, to learn more from

each other about how we can continue to work for social change that benefits all women.

One of the great privileges of my position is to travel on behalf of my country, both with my husband and alone. Wherever I go, I speak with women and girls. I find that no matter what nation we live in, we face many of the same challenges and dream the same dreams. We all hope for the day when no woman is a victim of domestic abuse and other forms of violence, when no woman is a victim of economic discrimination, when no woman is denied the basic rights of health care and education. Yet we know, as we enter this new millennium just a few years away, with all of its possibilities for humankind, that too many women and girls around the world remain on the outskirts of opportunity. Daughters remain undervalued in societies from one end of the globe to another.

For as much progress as is being made on women's behalf here in China and around the world, deeply imbedded barriers remain. Because for every woman who needs more information, like the pamphlets that I saw at the roundtable in Beijing on Saturday, we know that there are not enough to go around, and there certainly is not adequate access to the Internet to reach every woman who would like to know more about what goes on beyond her own home. For every woman who needs her rights protected we know there are not enough legal clinics or lawyers devoted to helping the poor. For every woman who seeks an education we know there are not enough families who are able or willing to pay the fees, and for every girl who today dreams of a world of unlimited possibilities, there remain yesterday's attitudes that hold her back.

As some of you may know, I am particularly fortunate on this trip to have not only my daughter, but also my mother with me. We have, as the saying goes, three generations under one roof. And I think about how many changes the three of us, just three individuals from America, have experienced in our life times. My mother was born before women gained the right to vote in the United States. Thirty years ago, when I entered law school, there were not many women sitting beside me in the lecture halls. Today women in those classes are in the majority, and unfortunately too many American women take their hard-won right to vote for granted. Already in her life, my daughter has had greater freedom and opportunities and choices than I could have imagined at her age. They inspire me to think about ways that we can work together to ensure that *all* girls -- not just the girls who are daughters of privilege, but all girls -- have the ability and the right to make their own choices. That starts with valuing and respecting our daughters in our hearts and our homes, so that they can develop the strength and the confidence to move forward, for themselves and their families and their countries.

Since I have been here, I have heard several times from the women with whom I have spoken, the expression, "Women hold up half the sky." And I have seen firsthand the enormous reservoirs of talent and the boundless potential that exist within the women of China to shoulder this burden of holding up half the sky. This seems to me to be an image that applies not just to Chinese women but to women everywhere. In my own country, for example, sometimes many women feel they are holding up more than half the sky, as they struggle to balance their family responsibilities with their work obligations. Many of my friends feel that they hold down two full-time jobs, one to the family, one to their employer. As these women in America struggle to balance family and

work demands, they often do not get much help from the government or from business. They are left to their own devices to manage their own family affairs the best they can, while they still work so hard to make the incomes that they and their families need.

So each of us, in our different economic and social settings, should ask ourselves: "What needs to be done to equip and support women to hold up our half of the sky?" Some answers seem obvious to me.

Women can't hold up half the sky if as girls they are not loved and valued by their parents, and given the same opportunities as their brothers to fulfill their potential.

Women can't hold up half the sky if they make up, as they do around the world, the vast majority of those who cannot read and write.

Women cannot hold up half the sky if girls are still pulled out of school early, and robbed of the education they need to thrive in the 21st century.

Women cannot hold up half the sky if they are denied the jobs, loans and credit they need to lift themselves and their families up from poverty.

Women cannot hold up half the sky if they are deprived of basic legal rights and services.

Women cannot hold up half the sky if they are victims of violence and abuse in their own homes, or are kidnaped or sold into marriage. Women cannot hold up half the sky if they are denied the freedom to plan their own families.

Women can only hold up half the sky when our feet are planted firmly on the soil of freedom and social and equal justice. The United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, signed by China and the United States fifty years ago, states, "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights." There was quite a debate to get that language into the universal declaration. As you might expect, the first draft said, "All *men* are born free and equal," and the argument was that "men" included women. That's a convenient argument to make in such a situation, but it's not an accurate one. Men and women are different, and we deserve to have respect and dignity accorded to us as individuals. So the Universal Declaration did the right thing, by stating, "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights."

The platform for action adopted by the United Nations conference in Beijing in 1995 lays out a powerful agenda for the empowerment of women based on these principles of universal rights. Economic reforms here have lifted millions of Chinese men and women out of poverty -- an extraordinary accomplishment. But economic and social progress must go hand-in-hand with the strengthening of other freedoms, the yearning to be treated with dignity, to be able to choose one's religion or one's husband, to speak freely, to participate fully in the life of one's community. These yearnings know no national boundary, but are deeply rooted in the human spirit. I have met many

women and men in just the short time I have been here, and I know that many of you here today in this auditorium are also playing a role in the great transformation of China that we can see all around us. Based on my own experiences in America, I am aware of how hard progress can be. How sometimes, it feels that you take two steps forward and one step back.

One hundred and fifty years ago this month, at Seneca Falls, New York, a small band of women pioneers in America, and a few supportive men, adopted a "declaration of sentiments" that called for women's equal rights in America -- because you will recall that when our Declaration of Independence and Constitution were written, women were not specifically included. Now, we have made tremendous progress in the last 150 years, but we have learned that the work is never finished. For every law that the United States passed, from voting rights to equal pay for equal work, we have had to work hard not only to enforce the specific law, but also to change the underlying social and cultural attitudes that undermine its meaning. I remember how surprised I was to meet women as late as the early 1980's in America who said they did not vote in our elections because their husbands did.

Almost eighty years ago, in 1919, the voices of the Chinese young intellectuals in the May Fourth Movement argued passionately that women must gain social, economic, and political equality if China was to prosper in the 20th century. That message is even more compelling in 1998, as China enters the 21st century. As we stand on the brink of this new century, I believe no country will be as successful as it could be in the years ahead if it leaves half its population behind, or if it only tolerates a small, token number of successful women to whom it can be pointed out that they succeeded despite the odds. Rather, I believe that no country can reach its full potential until all of its citizens -- men and women, boys and girls -- have the freedom and resources to reach their potentials, as well. Only when we create a world where every citizen enjoys fundamental freedoms, and every child is valued and given equal opportunities -- only then will we be able to say with honesty, "Yes, women hold up half the sky, and we are proud to do so because we are full participants in all that goes on in the earth below."

That is a dream I hold for all of us, both Chinese and American, and it is a dream that can be fulfilled only by the concerted effort and action of all of us working together. And I hope and trust that in the years to come, we will have many opportunities for cooperation and partnership, not only between the governments of our two countries but between the people, and particularly between the women, so that we can support and understand each other's struggles better, and we can stand with each other as we attempt to do all we can to hold up our half of the sky.

Thank you very much.