

**PHOTOCOPY
PRESERVATION**

Women's Program Center - Microcredit
Beach Camp, Gaza
December 14, 1998

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**REMARKS OF FIRST LADY HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON
AT WOMEN'S PROGRAM CENTER**

Speech on Women's Economic Security (Microcredit)
Beach Camp, Gaza

MRS. CLINTON: Thank you very much. I want to thank Mrs. Arafat for her introduction and her friendship. It is a great honor for me to be here at Beach Camp, and especially at your Women's Program Center, a truly special place. I want to thank all of you for making it clear that when we lift up the lives of women, we lift up the families they love and the communities they live in. I want especially to thank our host. Madame Arafat has been very interested in children and children's problems, and today she took me to her Avenir Foundation which supports children with disabilities and has inspired them again by her extraordinary compassion and assistance to Palestinians in need.

I also want to thank Mona Sarraf and the other credit officers, Save the Children, and the women on stage with us, all of whom are the real success stories of microcredit. The embroideries that cover me and are on our curtains here are not only preserving a unique history but representing a future as well.

I also want to thank the United States Agency for International Development for making these microcredit loans possible, and I particularly wish to thank the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees. The work that you have done for so many years here in Gaza and throughout the Middle East is so important, and I salute and thank you for it. It is in large part because of UNWRA that people here have places to go to learn, to heal and to improve their lives. I know that for many in Gaza, life has been hard for many years. There has been too much suffering and too few opportunities for too long; too few jobs to support families and, as always, women and children have borne the brunt of conflict in difficulties. But I have also seen in the leadership of Chairman Arafat and in the commitment of the people who live in Gaza, determination, courage and ultimately hope that you will live in peace and prosperity in the twenty-first century. We saw that leadership and determination recently at Wye where Chairman Arafat negotiated and worked very hard on behalf of the Palestinian

people. We saw that hope this morning as my husband and daughter and I landed at the new Gaza International Airport which will connect Palestinians to goods and people all over the world. And I have seen the courage in the faces of the women here at Beach Camp. When I arrived, I was greeted by women who, through good times and hard times, have kept tradition and families alive. I met women in a legal literacy class who are learning about their fundamental rights. Women's rights are human rights, and women's rights are as important here in Gaza as they are anywhere in the world. Women, for example, have the right to live free from domestic violence, and they have the right to have their fundamental needs and personal dignity respected. One of the ways to do that is to give women opportunities to earn good incomes for themselves and their families. Sharing this stage are women who have received small loans to start and expand their micro-businesses. Some have used the profits to open new businesses for themselves and family members. Many were, at least temporarily, the sole breadwinners in their families. All of them have come together, as women have always done, to make major contributions to the livelihoods of their families and the economic strength of this region. I know that one of these women is a dressmaker who learned her skills from her mother. She has received three loans for fabric and a sewing machine, and with the profits of her business she was able to add two rooms to her house and send two daughters back to school. I particularly salute you for sending your daughters back to school. Girls need to be educated as well as boys. She dreams one day of turning her project into a small factory run by her daughters, and that will be a very important business here in Gaza.

We know from much research around the world that the overall progress of any society -- whether it is in North or South America, in Africa or Asia, Europe or the Middle East -- any society's progress depends more on women receiving the education and the health care that they need. When a woman is educated, that in turn helps to create opportunities for children, families and communities. Women also need the respect and recognition of their human rights to reach their God-given potentials. I have met such women all over the world -- women who, with small loans and big dreams, are transforming their lives and the lives of their families. I have seen it in countries as far away as Bangladesh, or India, or in Africa, or in South America. I have met women who were able to speak up for themselves and help change attitudes toward women because of the income that they earned. Because of the importance of these microcredit loans, I am pleased to make two new announcements today. Ten Palestinian entrepreneurs will receive new USAID microcredit loans and the United States government will contribute \$73 million toward UNWRA this year, an increase of 4.3 percent. And I am pleased to have two members of our Congress with us today, Congressman Hastings and Congressman Gaveson, and I would like to thank them for supporting the United Nations. This money will help provide health care, education and social services to 3.5 million refugees in the West Bank, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon and Gaza. I want to thank the dedicated staff of UNWRA, many of whom are refugees themselves, and it is my hope that other donors will increase their own contributions as well.

I know that over the next few days Ramadan will begin for most of you, and with it will come a time for self-reflection and reaffirmation of dedication, family, community, history and faith. This is the holiday season for the three great religions that call the Middle East home. Whether we celebrate Ramadan or Christmas or Hanukkah, we share common values, common experiences and, above all, a common future. If we honor one another's traditions, if we respect each other as human beings, if we make sure that women can be full participants in their societies, then we have the chance to pass down to our children a world of peace. And I can think of no better promise this holiday season.

In a few minutes, Mrs. Arafat and I will join our husbands where our husbands will address the Palestinian National Council. This is part of the agreement reached at Wye. It is a continuation of the hard work to achieve peace. I have been told that a common Muslim prayer tells us, "No struggle is easy unless you make it easy for us, and only you, my Lord, can make a hardship easy to overcome." With God's help and with your determination, courage and hope, I believe you will build a better future for yourselves and your children.

God bless you all.