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**“From Violence to Dialogue”  
Conference  
Tel Aviv, Israel  
11/10/99**

**PHOTOCOPY  
PRESERVATION**

**"From Violence to Dialogue" Conference**  
**Remarks by First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton**

**Tel Aviv University**  
**Tel Aviv, Israel**  
**November 10, 1999**

Thank you so much. Thank you, Nava, for that extremely strong and powerful statement.

I am delighted to be here at the university, to be with the president, our old friend the rector. I want to thank Professor Segal for your description about the moot court. Leah Zinder, thank you for your role here. I am honored and delighted to be back in Israel. This is my fifth trip since 1982 and the fourth since my husband took office in 1993. We first came as private citizens and tourists and pilgrims. We have come back since in times of hope and joy, as well as tragedy and despair. I am so pleased that our dear friend, Leah Rabin, could be here as well today. But I have always felt welcomed and at home in a country whose people share so many of the dreams and aspirations of my own, and whose children and families face many of the same challenges posed by social and cultural change. I am very honored to join you today in this search for dialogue and solutions to the problems of violence.

I am delighted to be hosted by such a distinguished university, and I thank the Prime Minister for placing the issue of youth violence at the top of the national agenda here in Israel. But I especially thank my friend, Nava Barak. One of the experiences she and I share is public life. Because of our husbands' positions, we have the opportunity to shine a spotlight on issues that we care deeply about.

As I said earlier when we were together at ELEM, we began talking about children and youth and youth violence when we were together last summer, and I don't think we have stopped since, because she is determined -- as we have just heard from her eloquent statement -- to shine a spotlight on the needs of children and youth, and particularly to bring violence out of the dark into the light of day so that all of us cannot turn from it, but must work together to combat it. This is not a new issue for Nava. As a teacher and a mother, as an advocate and as the president of ELEM, she has long been a champion for children and young people.

When we began talking together last summer, we both knew that there had to be a national campaign against violence; that it would be important if our husbands, the president and the prime minister, and government officials spoke out against violence, but that ultimately what needed to be done in both of our countries was to change the attitudes, the behaviors, the values of every aspect of our societies.

I am very impressed to see that what was just an idea a few months ago, has come to life here. The pledges against violence that Prime Minister and Mrs. Barak signed, and that I then signed, earlier are a way of enlisting every citizen in this effort. I also appreciate greatly the passionate and careful consideration given to youth violence during the moot trial earlier today. I told the prime minister that a year of community service is not a bad outcome--as long as it is a year of community service joined by the entire nation.

I want to thank ELEM for not only helping to host this important conference, but for the work that it has done every day on behalf of children and youth.

I just came from one of the youth centers where I met some of the teenagers who come to the coffee shop, or who go to the van that stops by the park, who feel they are in a safe haven as they speak with one another, and with the young counselors, even some of the young soldiers, who volunteer their time. They're helping these young people make sense out of their own lives, giving them a sense a direction, but mostly validating - validating them as human beings worthy of this attention and concern. For these young people, the youth

center or the van is an oasis of help and understanding; a place to turn to, to get away from violence; or to be in order to avoid committing violent acts. So I thank ELEM for never giving up on any child.

This campaign against violence comes at a critical moment not only here in Israel, or in the United States, but worldwide. We know that throughout the world today, the bonds of family, the respect for authority, the influence of others on children is growing and growing. Here in Israel, I know that half of all Israelis are under 25. In my own country we have record numbers of students enrolled in our public schools. This large and pivotal generation of young people throughout the world is coming of age in perhaps the most exciting time of human history. We can look around us and see the results of all the advancements in science and medicine, and the movement of technology in the way that it is affecting every aspect of our lives. It is certainly not unthinkable that here in Israel this generation of children may finally live out the majority of their lives in a land secure and at peace, free from the terrible shadows of terrorism and war. So we know our children may very well live healthier, longer and, in many ways, materially richer lives than we or certainly our parents or grandparents enjoyed. But we also know that that inheritance is far from certain, and we understand deeply that material wealth is not spiritual wealth. The hopeful possibilities of the future are meaningless if our children cannot feel or be safe day to day. Everything does pale in comparison to our ability to keep our children safe and out of harm's way.

What good are jet planes like the one that brought my daughter and the Barak's daughter here overnight if our children live in fear and cannot walk safely down the street or even feel safe in their own homes? What good are all the consumer goods that we have and the ubiquitous tee shirts and jeans that children everywhere in the world wear when we know that race and religion continue to spark discord and blind us to our common humanity? What good are state-of-the-art machines and computers that, with a flick of a mouse, can take us into cyberspace if we know that there are children who are living with troubled and angry hearts?

In both of our countries, we have seen too many families shattered, too many hearts broken by senseless violence. It gives great pain to me and my husband and all Americans to know that the image of our country is often mixed with violent pictures and stories; that our schools are heard about and seen around the world as places not where children are reading or playing sports, but where teachers are comforting frightened children and police officers are rushing toward campuses and ambulances are carrying away the injured.

Violence by and against young people has shaken my country to the core. I know from my conversations with Nava that it has also undermined the sense of cohesion here in Israel.

We ask ourselves over and over again, "Why?" Why in these modern societies of ours are our children spurred to violence or why aren't adults doing more to protect children from violence? While it is easy to yield to the human impulse to assign blame and determine fault, the solution to the problem of violence lies not in pointing fingers, so much as working out what needs to be done, and then lending a helping hand.

The challenge of youth violence is a challenge to our entire societies. Our children exist in the world as well as in the family. Therefore, we have to look for solutions in the family, in the community, in the school, in the media, in the country.

From the moment our children are born, they depend on a host of other people. Some are those whose faces they will know and come to love or fear: parents and grandparents, neighbors and teachers, religious and political leaders. Others, they will not know their faces, but their actions will affect how our children live and how they see themselves and their world: the adults who police their streets or produce the programs that appear on their televisions or in the movie theaters, who write the laws, who teach them the lessons that will be carried throughout their lives.

I do believe it does take a village to raise a child, not because everyone in society is responsible for every child's daily upbringing -- we know that is the responsibility of the family -- but because what we do as adults in society helps to determine how well that family fulfills that primary responsibility.

The Campaign From Violence to Dialogue is really all about calling on each and every citizen to recognize the obligation and the power that adults have to protect children. I join you in that call. Every action we take, every decision we make, can strengthen or weaken the culture of violence in our country. We do have to teach our children to reject the path of violence and instead to embrace tolerance and understanding and dialogue, but we also have to recognize that our children alone cannot meet this challenge.

The campaign to raise awareness must begin in all of our homes. Empathy, respect for others, especially those who are different, must be taught and modeled. Parents have a duty to teach these values in a democracy by action and example.

As many parents in this auditorium could attest, our children are always watching, always listening, always mimicking what they see from their parents. What we think has been said out of earshot, or done out of a child's line of vision, is rarely missed. So parents have to be on the frontline of the national campaign against violence. We also have to do more to speak out against domestic violence and child abuse and to provide support for families under stress.

We now know from a wealth of research and, certainly, our common experience that children who see or experience violence in the home are more likely to become violent or become victims of violence as children and as adults. That cycle, which is so damaging, has to be broken. I have seen many promising examples of what it takes for all of us to break that cycle of violence, whether it is providing home visitors when a newborn child is in the hospital or brought home; or whether it is working with young parents, particularly in my country, who don't themselves have the skills to be good parents. A friend of mine in the United States has started "Mothers against Violence" in America, which is enlisting mothers in this campaign. So far, there are one hundred chapters nationwide and they are also working with students in a parallel organization. But it takes that one-on-one intervention in many instances to help a family move from the culture of violence to the culture of respect.

The media, too, must take responsibility. All around the world violence has become banal on our TV screens and in our films. Our young people are watching images and stories that depict the worst kinds of violence. More often than not, the violence they see is without consequence: a world where fistfights do not lead to injury and pain; where gunshot wounds don't lead to death.

I once met a psychologist who told me that children are little videocassette recorders. They repeat and act out what they see on television. We have seen the truth of that observation played out on playgrounds, and in classrooms, and on the streets of our neighborhoods throughout the United States.

Many times people say to me: "But so many young people watch these violent movies and television shows, and not all of them go out and commit a violent act!" And that is true, but it's like a disease. Some people are more vulnerable to the virus than others. Some people who grow up already in a violent, vulnerable state in their own homes, see these images and feel that it gives them a sense of power or, even, an example of what they can do to gain respect.

Time and time again, those who do research in our prisons in the United States come back with the report that as they talk with people on death-row, or people in life imprisonment, they find common attributes: low levels of education, usually some kind of child abuse, or severe neglect. And, because of that deficit in the human spirit, they sense that the world is out to get them, that they are constantly being disrespected, and therefore they must act, and by acting violently, they command attention in a perverse way, of what they see

as respect from others. So, it is not that everyone who watches these movies will become violent, but it is that too many who watch them are vulnerable to violence and do not have the internal discipline and control to guard against that what they see and hear, from becoming a reality in their own lives.

I know that a majority of these films come from my country. We have worked very hard in the last several years with the leaders of the entertainment industry to address this issue. Advertisers and filmmakers and television stations have agreed to join us in using the power of the media to educate against the abuses of the media and to try to persuade children to reject violence. But, that is not enough.

We have to do more to empower parents to prevent their young children from being exposed to such violence, and to that end we worked with the manufacturers of television sets to ensure that by January 2000, all TV sets sold in the United States will be installed with what we call the "V Chip" a device that will permit parents to screen out objectionable, principally violent material and programs. But the V-Chip will do no good if parents don't use it. We are also working with our nation's Internet industry to regulate the content of such programming that comes into our homes. Our top Internet companies are already developing a web site called "GETNETWISE" which parents can go to and learn how to make sure that the time their children spend on the Internet is productive and educational.

But we have so much more work to do with respect to the media. This is an area where our two countries and others who face the same challenges must work together.

We also have to do more work in our schools. That is after all where many of our children spend the majority of their waking hours. They have to be given more support, and be taught how to respect each other and resolve their disputes with words, not fists. I applaud the efforts you are taking here to introduce conflict resolution into the schools. I have seen first-hand where efforts at peer mediation really make a difference, in training children to help to mediate the everyday disputes that all of us remember from our own childhood, and particularly our teenage years. I am pleased that our Embassy here in Israel is helping to translate into Hebrew and Arabic a successful U.S. program called, "The Program for Youth Negotiators." We need more of this kind of intervention. Many of our children in the schools that I have visited, because of their experience at home, because of what they see on television, are quick to strike back if they feel they are disrespected, or they think someone is taking advantage of them. They have to be taught how they can sit and reasonably work out their differences, not that they will end up liking or loving their peers, but that they will respect and work with one another. We can also support the work of NGOs like ELEM to keep our most alienated children from falling through the cracks, to divert them from violence and help bring them back into the mainstream of society. As Nava and I were meeting with the young people earlier, several of them said they live at home, but they don't feel they can talk to their parents about their feelings and their attitudes. They really need a safety valve, so they go to the vans that ELEM sends out into the community, and there they can talk and say what is on their minds and know that they won't be shut off or judged, but can have a chance to express those feelings, that if left unexpressed, could cause problems. Some of the other children slightly younger said that they come to the coffee shop because they need to feel that they can say whatever they want and so they can have some feedback. One young girl talked about how she was someone who everyone had given up on. She was only fifteen, but already had been written off. Thanks to ELEM, she now feels she has a second chance at life.

No child, no child should be left alone and that any of us should walk away from a child is not acceptable.

In the days to come I know that you will be looking at ways to make this campaign as broadly based as possible. I know that young people themselves have to be the leaders and the shapers of such a campaign. I have visited with young people from all over the world and particularly in my own country. They do have a lot to tell us. Many of them don't believe in the political process, which is a serious problem for democracies like ours, and we have to reconnect them to the understanding about what happens in politics affecting their

lives. But many of them do believe in service, whether it is serving as a mediator, whether it is someone who is there to lend a helping hand to a friend in trouble. Any opportunity we have to add to their understanding of service and to provide those chances for them will enable many young people to avoid a life of violence.

We are very proud of the program that my husband started in the United States called "AmeriCorps" which is a national service program. A few weeks ago we celebrated its fifth anniversary. More than a hundred thousand young people have served. One young man who had dropped out of school, who was in a gang, who was abusing drugs, really with nowhere to go, heard about Americorps and decided to join. His first assignment was to go help hurricane victims in Puerto Rico who had been devastated by one of our large hurricanes last year. By giving him an opportunity to serve others, he found meaning. This is what he said: "I learned to open my heart and care about others; to put others above my selfish needs and desires. I realized that I could help other people and that I wanted to do more."

The opportunity for military service that is offered and required here in Israel is an important way for young men and women to be connected with the society that has given them so much and which needs their protection and devotion. In addition to military service, we have found that community and civilian service can also turn around young lives. Often, if we don't reach young people before the age of military service, we lose them. We lose them to violence; we lose them to drug abuse. So, providing such opportunities for even younger teens is one way of helping to connect them with a larger society. Most young people who find themselves in despair don't know they have anything worthwhile to give to anyone else.

There are many programs here in Israel that are already providing such opportunities. The program called "Personal Commitment" that encourages tenth graders to volunteer two hours a week enables them to help new immigrants or the elderly, the blind and disabled, to protect the environment and to provide health services. Probably the one thing our youngsters need more than anything, I find in our land of plenty in the United States, is a sense of meaning and purpose. All of the consumer goods, all of the beautiful clothes, all of the new cars and computers cannot substitute for that sense of purpose and meaning in one's life.

There are many inspiring stories that I've been told about what is happening throughout Israel in response to this national campaign. One sixteen year-old girl, who is working with an organization called "Nissan" to help prevent date rape at schools, to educate young women about their capacity to say no and to make responsible decisions, said she could not any longer remain silent. "I decided to take action and be responsible for my society," she says. Another young woman is working to break the never-ending circle of sadness created by violence. She works to bring young women together and for girls to talk about what they can do to be responsible, and to act against violence in their communities. These hopeful young people are really the front-line soldiers in the campaign against violence. Grassroots movements, such as the one that has started here in this campaign, and that I pledged to support when Nava and I signed together, is the wave of the future in societies such as ours. We sometimes take our democracies for granted. We sometimes take our blessings for granted. But as we end this century and begin another one of our highest callings is to ensure that our children feel at home in these societies, that they know they are valued, and that they will become the responsible citizens and leaders of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

As I was leaving for my trip, a friend of mine reminded me of the famous story told by Rabbi Meir when the Israelites came to receive the Torah and God asked them to offer up good sureties to ensure that they would observe it. The people answered that our fathers would be our sureties. But God said that he had found fault with those, and then the Israelites offered up their prophets. But God said he had found fault with them as well -- God can be very particular, you know. Then, the Israelites offered their children. That proved acceptable, and God gave to Israel the Torah.

We are at such a point in our history, where once again we have to reaffirm that our children are indeed, our greatest sureties. They are our gifts and works -- a testament to our faith, and our hope and humanity, and

the future. This campaign against violence is not only in and of itself an important undertaking, but it stands for the values and symbolizes the hope that all of us must have in the future we are attempting to build together. There is no more important work than ensuring safe passage for all of our children into a future we hope gives them the blessings we are working to provide.

Thank you very much. (Applause).