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Press Conference

Petra, Jordan

11/12/99

**First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton**  
**Press Conference Transcript**  
**Petra, Jordan**  
**November 12, 1999**

Question: (garbled)

First Lady: Yesterday, the American delegation that was present with me heard the comments about longtime ecological damage and the carcinogenic effects and as I pointed out in my statement last night I do not believe that any kind of public inflammatory comments or rhetoric is helpful to the peace process and is, in fact, contrary to the agreement that Prime Minister Barak and Chairman Arafat made at Oslo to avoid such a public comment and instead look forward the negotiating table. Now I later learned that there were other translations or interpretations of the comments that were not apparent or known to us earlier, and of course if they were even more inflammatory and baseless that would cause greater concern on behalf of everyone who is supporting the peace process. I would reiterate, in the strongest possible terms, that the agreement that was reached at Oslo between the Prime Minister and the Chairman should apply to all of us and that everyone who supports this effort or is involved in the outstanding issues among the parties should refrain from inflammatory rhetoric and baseless accusations and from any public comment that could in anyway affect adversely what the parties are attempting to do.

Question: (Garbled) How do you see the situation of women in Jordan? (garbled) And, part two, how can we transform the region to one of milk and honey instead of blood and destruction?

First Lady: Well those are two very important questions. I believe that Jordan has made extraordinary progress in the last years under the leadership of the late King Hussein and that progress will continue under the current leadership. Certainly one of the areas that needs attention is the role that women play in Jordan and throughout the region. Because we now know that where women are granted the full opportunity to pursue education and to be able to participate fully in their society, that the society as a whole prospers and is more successful in the long run. So on behalf of the countless, talented, extraordinary women of Jordan- one of whom is standing right here, Her Royal Highness, Princess Aisha, I know that the government and the people of Jordan are looking for greater opportunities to include women in the full range of social and economic and political participation and I certainly applaud that because it is certainly in the interest of Jordan to do that.

Question: (garbled)

First Lady: I would go anywhere I can to help the peace process. I think that we have a special opportunity and obligation in the United States, as my husband has demonstrated by word and deed on numerous occasions, to support those who are willing to pursue peace and who are willing to turn away from terror and war. I went to Ramallah yesterday because I am a strong supporter of the peace process and I

believe it is in everyone's interest to resolve the dispute at the negotiating table and not behind barricades.

Now, having said that, as I said earlier, that I do not believe that any kind of inflammatory rhetoric or baseless charges are good for the peace process. I think that everyone should abide by the agreement reached between Prime Minister Barak and Chairman Arafat at Oslo, and that we ought to leave the talking to the negotiators and those of us who are supporting the process should be especially sensitive to what we say and how we conduct ourselves. As I said in the Rabin lecture last night, this is an opportunity that comes once every generation. Everything we hoped for in Israel, in Jordan, the West Bank and Gaza, across this region really depends now on whether those who truly wish to see a lasting peace in the Middle East are able to do the hard work of bringing that peace about. So I do not think that it benefits that ultimate outcome for anyone from any part of the Middle East or anywhere else in the world to engage in rhetoric or to make charges or statements that could adversely affect the process. You know, to the gentleman who asked the question before, the real issue is how do we, in the words of Yitzhak Rabin that I quoted last night in the lecture I made, how do we try to achieve that promised land of peace and security, milk and honey instead of blood and tears? It is not going to come easily, there will be many bumps in the road and obstacles, there certainly continue to be many enemies of peace who will do everything in their power to derail this process, and there will be unfortunate incidents when people say or do things that are not considered useful. But that should not in any way undermine our commitment to stand in support of those who are willing to take risks for peace. The negotiations that are currently being conducted are ones that the United States strongly supports, and that everyone of us who believes in the promise of peace and security for Israel, for Jordan, for the Palestinians, for everyone in the region, ought to be focused on that overall goal and should not let anything deter us from trying to do everything we can to support peace and negotiations.

Question: (garbled) hosts graciously invited you...to meeting in East Jerusalem?

First Lady: I don't think it's useful to comment on any of the issues that are part of the final status negotiations. I certainly will not.

Question: How do you respond to criticism that you responded too slowly to the comments of Mrs. Arafat and that the Mayor would have quickly denounce those comments. Do you feel you responded at the appropriate time?

First Lady: I believe that everyone in the American delegation that heard what was said, believed it was part of a very common pattern of complaints that have been heard for decades and were not worthy of any particular comment at that time. Now obviously if what had later been reported had been the translation that any of us heard, there might very well have been a reason to respond at that moment. But that is not the situation that occurred yesterday. So whatever the facts are about the translation or the mistranslation or what the words did or didn't mean, I think the overall point is to refrain from such rhetoric or such complaints while this process of negotiations is going on. And I don't think it's useful for anyone to engage in that kind of rhetoric or inflammatory statements at this point in time.

Question: Were you disappointed that the Palestinians used your visit to further...

First Lady: Well, I went to Ramallah because I do believe in the peace process and I believe that the United States has a very important role in bringing the parties together as often as possible and in demonstrating that we stand behind this process. And I also believe very strongly that the question of women, that promoting women's health and children's health is part of the peace process; it is a way of demonstrating clearly that a lot of people have better lives because peace. So that's why I went, and that's what I intended to do there, and that's what I did. So from that perspective it is unfortunate that there are any questions about what was a very straightforward occasion and the reasons for it. But you know, we're in the Middle East. This is a very complicated region with a lot of very strongly held feelings and opinions that people have and part of the great challenge that the leaders face is creating an atmosphere in which peace can take place not only at the negotiating table but in the words and deeds of all of the citizens of the Middle East.

I said last night in the Rabin lecture, this is not an easy task. This is as difficult an undertaking as human beings have ever attempted. I want to be on the side of those, along with the President, who will do everything we can to keep taking whatever steps are necessary to bring about a lasting, secure peace to the people of this region. That is up to the parties to negotiate, however, and none of us is in the position that any of them is. So I believe it is in our interest in the United States to do what the President has done so well in the past six and a half years, and that is continue to push this process forward, and not be deterred, and not turn back, and to do everything we can to make it possible for it to succeed.

Thank you very much.