

Rajiv Gandhi Foundation
New Delhi, India

The White House

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**Remarks by First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton
to the Rajiv Gandhi Foundation
New Delhi, India**

MRS. CLINTON: Thank you so much Mrs. Gandhi, Ambassador Wisner, Ambassador Hussain. I have not seen Mrs. Gandhi's introduction, but I must say after hearing it, she and I have been thinking very much alike as you will notice.

It is a great honor for me to join you here today, to be in New Delhi, in the company of men and women who keep alive the high ideals for India and the world that Rajiv Gandhi helped to sustain.

I would like to thank the people of India for extending a warm and gracious welcome to me and my daughter who is here with me. To President Sharma and Prime Minister Rao, I owe special thanks for their warm hospitality. The Prime Minister's visit to Washington 10 months ago opened a new chapter in Indian-American relations, one that promised to build on the many values and aspirations our peoples share. We greatly appreciate the energy and wisdom he has lent to strengthening the friendship between our nations.

Although my journey here is far too brief, it is the culmination of a life long desire to visit India. I hope these days will be the first of many I spend in this country, learning about your extraordinary past and your vibrant and exciting future; and exploring the shared dreams we hold to the future of the human family.

I can think of no more fitting setting in which to reflect upon these shared dreams than here at the Rajiv Gandhi Foundation-an institution dedicated to the realization of Rajiv Gandhi's dream of a better life for all people of India.

Programs of this foundation such as assisting children orphaned by terrorism, or promoting literacy and health among women and children in rural areas or providing fellowships for women entrepreneurs are inspiring examples of how to translate dreams into reality.

Our meeting today occurs at an historic moment. As we

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approach a new century, we are also on the frontier of a new world. It is different from the one we have known for the past 50 years. It is a world in which many old divisions have diminished or disappeared. The long reign of dictators and controlled economies has given way to democracy and free markets in country after country.

The opportunities for peace and prosperity are greater now than every before. But this is also a world of profound change that exacerbated old challenges and creates new ones: the challenge of deep poverty still confronts us. The challenge of living together in peace and harmony in the face of ethnic, religious and other tensions among peoples has never been greater. The challenge of putting people first--of including all of our citizens as full participants in our economic and political lives--men and women, rich and poor, people of all races and creeds--remains fundamental to all of us.

These ancient challenges are compounded by the stresses inherent in a time of rapid change. The so-called Information Age holds great potential that the virtual reality created by the media and computers can not only help us communicate more quickly but understand each other better; yet we also know technology poses difficult problem: a vast majority of our world's people are not prepared with the skills needed for the new global economy. And, if consumerism is the primary message being transmitted, the explosion in material expectations will put additional demands on institutions ranging from the family to the government that are unlikely to be met quickly or fully. The alienation spawned by disappointment with the promise of change is likely to increase.

So, together we must address both the opportunities and difficulties that confront us today--for ourselves, our families, and the future of our children.

I want to talk with you today about what I consider central to a good common future that we can create together and that is--the importance of ensuring that women are invested in their own lives and able to participate fully in our national lives. Women represent over half the world's population. And yet in country after country, they lack access to education, to health services, to jobs, to political and civil rights. Where women lack access to education, health care and economic opportunity, children tend to be less educated, less well nourished and families tend to be both larger and poorer. Where women are illiterate, experience has shown that the environment is often poorly managed and democracy remains fragile. One lesson the experience of the last several decades teaches us is that where women prosper, countries prosper.

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But the education of women has even greater benefits for societies. Education helps us understand and tolerate differences and so holds out the promise that we can live together more harmoniously. Education helps us comprehend the unsettling changes in our lives today and helps us better manage those changes. Education is as important to peace as it is to prosperity.

But what is it that we must do to bring women fully into our national lives, among other things, we must be able to attend school and learn, not just to be literate but to acquire the knowledge and skills--of medicine, of engineering, of management, of computers and so forth--that will contribute to the prosperity of their families and nations. Women must have access to health care, especially the care they need as expecting or new mothers. Wives, together with their husbands, must have access to family planning services to enable them to make voluntary, responsible and informed choices about the size of their families. And, children--girls as well as boys--must have access to preventive and curative medical care that will enable them to grow into healthy adults.

I recognize that discussion of such problems as education and health care for girls and women is viewed by some as "soft," labeled dismissively as a women's issues belonging, at best, on the edge of serious debate about all the problems we confront on the cusp of the 21st century. I want to argue strongly, however, that the questions surrounding social development, especially of women, as discussed at the recent social summit in Copenhagen, are at the center of our political and economic challenges. Governments, business and citizens must recognize and act upon the truth for the betterment of nations and our global family. But even assuming you would agree with my argument, what is to be done to bring about strategies for such development? That is a question that deserves far more analysis and discussion than I can offer here today, but let me suggest there are five key commitments needed to achieve this worthy goal of social development for women.

First, governments must continue to expand the general conditions required for democracy and market economies that we know can unleash the creative energies of millions of people if they are prepared to take advantage of the opportunities available to them.

The Indian government has recently undertaken major economic reforms and these reforms have already helped stimulate investment and more rapid growth.

Such reforms are essential. But they are rarely sufficient

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to achieve sustainable development in any country. Where social services and women's access to those services remain limited, growth will prove uneven and unsustainable. My own country is debating vigorously the role of government in supplying social services because of the recognition that a significant number of our own citizens are not equipped to share in the rewards of the newly emerging economy.

In addition, every government should invest more resources in the education and health care of children, especially girls. This should be a priority that takes precedence over competing budgetary demands. For some countries like those in South Asia, it means providing schools and clinics where they are needed and incentives for persuading families to educate and provide health care for all their children. For a country like the United States, it means delivering existing services more efficiently with greater accountability for outcomes.

Second, although governments have primary responsibility for creating environments that encourage economic growth and social development, businesses also have a role to play. But at a time when businesses are increasingly pressured to perform on the basis of quarterly results, they have to recognize that the social costs of doing business often have medium and long term economic consequences. Depleting natural or human resources destroys markets and undermines people's confidence in them. The world needs socially responsible business leadership now more than ever.

Third, although the role of commitment of government and business is key to development, they alone cannot achieve these social goals. Citizens, cooperating together in non-governmental organizations, like this foundation, must also take the initiative and even provide the lead.

NGOs are often created by individuals with a dream--like Mother Teresa whose renowned compassion--even tenacity--on behalf of the world's most unfortunate moved us deeply when we visited her home for children here in New Delhi yesterday.

NGO leadership--often volunteer--is typically highly motivated and energetic in pursuing a vision of a better world. Tomorrow I will visit with Ela Bhatt, that soft-spoken visionary whose work is infused with the ideals of Gandhi. From her, I hope to learn more about SEWA--the Self Employed Women's Association-- and how it has empowered poor women to take control of their futures and make better lives for themselves and their families.

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NGOs can give voice to the aspirations of people who are left out of the modern economy and whose influence on government may otherwise be small. The Prayas School which I visited yesterday embodies the idea that health, education, and economic development go hand in hand, and that learning must begin at the earliest stages of life and progress throughout it.

NGOs, where their members must debate and implement programs and elect their officials, are among the most effective training grounds for democracy. Their activism strengthens democracy by holding governments accountable for the way their policies and practices affect people.

As Alexis de Tocqueville observed in the last century, voluntary citizen associations are one of the vital foundations of American society and democracy. That is equally true of India where the long experience and success of NGOs inspires us.

America recognizes in our partnership with India, our NGOs and yours must play a central role. Our bilateral aid program relies on NGOs to implement programs and projects, and we are committed to increasing that partnership.

We recognize, that in no area are NGOs more important than in efforts to educate and empower women. At the Social Summit in Copenhagen two weeks ago, I announced a new ten year, \$100 million USAID Girls and Women's Education Initiative. I am happy to announce today that India will be the first country to benefit from this program. (Applause) We will soon provide an initial grant to support NGOs--US and Indian--to expand girls' education in this country.

The fourth area for concern is that of the family, for it is the family that determines primarily how daughters are treated. Deeply rooted attitudes about the value of girls are hard to change, but we must try to persuade mother and father to invest love, attention and resources in their girls, starting with education and health care. The success of that persuasion will rest on a new vision of a world in which the distinctions between men and women are not viewed as reasons to demean each other, but as complementary parts of a greater whole.

In this new world, both boys and girls are loved and cared for, first by the family they are born into--by parents who want them and invest in them; then by their extended family; then by the families they build as adults and by the children whom they, in turn, invest with love; and finally by societies that value every child as a gift to be nurtured and remember, in the words

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of Rabindranath Tagore: "Every child comes with the message that God is not yet discouraged of man."

Finally, women have to be responsible for our own lives and our own futures and work together to provide opportunities for themselves and other.

All of us must participate in a conversation about how to shape the changes we seek in the world we share. It is particularly important that women find their own voice and become participants and decision-makers in the home, the work place, community, and nation. We must develop a new language to replace the deafening silence that still sounds too often when women's concerns are raised.

I have never seen a better description of the reason why women's silence must end than in a poem I received yesterday. This was not how my speech was to end, but when I was handed it by Meenakshi Gopinath, the principal of Lady Sri Ram College in New Delhi. (Applause) A poem entitled, "Silence" written by a student, Anasuya Sengupta of the Class of 1995. I wanted to share the words of this young woman who speaks for countless other young women here in India and throughout the world. Because if we listen to the voices of women and pay particular heed to the voices of young women, the goals we have for women will be more likely achieved. And this is the poem I received, it is entitled "Silence":

"Too many women in too many countries speak the same language-of silence. My grandmother was always silent--always aggrieved--only her husband had the cosmic right (or so it was said) to speak and to be heard.

"They say it is different now. (After all, I am always vocal and my grandmother thinks I talk too much) But sometimes, I wonder.

"When a women gives her love, as most do, generously--it is accepted. When a woman shares her thoughts, as some women do, graciously--It is allowed. When a woman fights for power, as all women would like to, quietly or loudly, it is questioned.

"And yet, there must be freedom--if we are to speak. And yes, there must be power--if we are to be heard. And when we have both (freedom and power) let us not be misunderstood.

"We seek only to give words to those who cannot speak (too many women in too many countries) I seek only to forget the

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sorrows of my grandmother's silence."

As we work together on behalf of our grandmothers, mothers, sisters, daughters, and ourselves-let us avoid the false debate that says, on the one hand, only powerful institutions like government or business, or on the other, only individuals, are responsible for solving their own problems that we confront. In fact, we all know we need partnerships to achieve social changes. Governments, businesses, NGOs, families, and women themselves can either support or undermine people as they face the moral, social and economic challenges of our time. Individuals can either take initiative and responsibility or fall into hopelessness and despair. Simply put, no government, no businesses, no NGO, no person can remain idle given the magnitude of the challenges we face and the uncertainties of the world we live.

If all of us could take our responsibilities seriously. If we use our voices to seek ways to achieve the goals that really underlie the political and economic aspirations that are now being sought around the world and women and men will create a better world-for boys and girls-and that ultimately is what the point of political and economic activity should be here, in America, and around the world. Thank you all very much.

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