

Manila, Philippines

PREPARED TEXT

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FIRST LADY HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON
REMARKS TO WOMEN OF THE PHILIPPINES
MANILA, THE PHILIPPINES
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Greetings to the women of the Philippines. And greetings to the women of Asia. Listening to the musicians play and the choruses sing, and hearing the incomparable voice of Lea Solonga, I feel very welcome here.

I want to thank Mrs. Ramos for her warm hospitality. All of us owe a debt of gratitude to Mrs. Ramos for her leadership on behalf of social, health, environmental and cultural causes. I am also pleased that other First Ladies who have accompanied their husbands to Manila for the APEC Summit are with us this morning and will be sharing their insights and ideas during this discussion.

And, as a former Girl Scout, I am delighted to know that several thousand Girl Scouts are in the audience. They and the other young people here represent our brightest hope for the future.

It is a privilege for me to be in Manila today. This is my second visit to this wonderful country and I'm discovering that I feel at home here. Perhaps it's because of the long and strong ties between our nations. Perhaps it's because Filipinos have contributed so much to the United States and to American culture.

I see every day at the White House the values of hard work, love of family, and respect for human dignity that are hallmarks of the Philippine people. Among the President's most dedicated personal assistants are Philippine-Americans -- Lito Bautista, Fred Sanchez and Bayani Nelvis -- whose service brings distinction and pride to America and to your country.

You may not know that the President's personal physician, Dr. Connie Mariano, was born in the Philippines and still has family here. Her father, like many in his generation, joined the United States Navy, moved his wife and children to America and became a citizen. Connie is the first woman and the first Philippine-American ever to serve full-time as an American

President's doctor. She is with me today. And I know that my husband joins me in saying that we are blessed to have a person - and a woman -- of such talent, commitment, integrity, and professionalism in this important job.

I want to thank the National Council of Women of the Philippines and its president, Nona Ricafort, and the Congressional Spouses Foundation and its president, Gina de Venecia, for inviting me to be part of this gathering. I join in congratulating the Council on its fiftieth anniversary and for leading efforts here and across Asia to further women's progress and to continue the work of the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing.

Let me also express my appreciation of -- and admiration for -- several women whom I have had the privilege of knowing and working with in the past: Senator Leticia Ramos-Shahani, who headed your country's delegation to Beijing -- one of the largest delegations at the conference -- and, as chair of the Group of 77 countries, helped forged consensus among delegates of many different points of view; Irene Santiago, who so ably chaired the NGO Forum at Huairou during the Beijing conference; and Dr. Patricia Licuanan who headed the committee that produced the Platform for Action in Beijing and now chairs the United Nations' Commission on the Status of Women. All of these women are leading voices on behalf of women around the world. And all of them are daughters of the Philippines.

This year, of course, marks the tenth anniversary of the People Power Revolution. The people of the Philippines didn't just make history ten years ago, they furthered the cause of political freedom, democracy and human rights for millions around the world. Their success would not have been possible without the courage and commitment of Corazon Aquino and other women too numerous to mention.

It seems that everywhere we turn, women are at the forefront of change and progress. Next week, I will join Mrs. Frei of Chile and other First Ladies from throughout the Western Hemisphere for a conference in Bolivia, where we will address the challenges still confronting women and families in our region.

Wherever women meet -- whether here or in South America or on any other continent -- we come together at a time of great hope and promise. A little over a year ago, representatives from 189 countries met in Beijing to draw attention to the issues that matter most in the lives of women and their families. It was an historic gathering -- a celebration of the contributions women make in every aspect of life and in the development of their

societies.

It was also a call to action. A loud, clear, and unequivocal call to nations around the world to recognize that their progress and prosperity depend on the progress and prosperity of women. That the strength of their political systems depends on the inclusion and participation of women. That the vibrancy of their economies depends on the contributions of women. That the richness of their civic life depends on the experiences and wisdom of women.

It was a call to nations around the world to recognize that democracy, free market economies and civil society will not thrive and survive if girls and women are denied access to the tools of opportunity: health care, education, credit and jobs, legal protections and the chance to participate fully in the political life of their countries.

And finally, it was a call to all countries to honor a simple moral principle: that women's rights are human rights -- and human rights are women's rights.

Today we take comfort in knowing that many countries have responded to that call:

Tanzania, India and Argentina have taken steps to increase the number of women at high levels of government. Recent elections in Bangladesh, Japan, Mongolia, and Australia illustrate the increasing number of women running for and winning political office.

And in my own country, where we have just completed our presidential elections, it was women who shaped the issues and drove the political debate throughout the campaign.

We see our call to action resonating in the legal realm as well. In Panama, the family code has been reformed, giving women more say in alimony, child support and child custody cases. In Namibia, women are now afforded equal rights with men in marriage. Women in Fiji now can work past six in the evening. Women in Nepal are challenging the country's strict inheritance laws. Thailand has passed a new anti-prostitution law. And Denmark has launched initiatives to ensure equal pay for women in the workplace.

In the areas of health, education and family life, so vital to women's advancement, we see encouraging signs of progress. The government of Chile has committed itself to tackling AIDS and adolescent pregnancies and to expanding educational opportunities

for girls. Egypt has banned the practice of genital mutilation in government health facilities. In South Africa, efforts are underway to ensure free health care for pregnant women and children under six. And today, thanks to a new government program, more families in South Korea are able to take advantage of child care facilities.

From Central America to Central Asia, women are pushing governments to lift the veil of secrecy that for too long has concealed the tragic crime of domestic violence. Here in the Philippines, you have done pioneering work in helping the government set up centers to assist women and children victimized by domestic conflict. Your government also is working to raise awareness among police officers and judges about this problem.

And I am pleased to report that in the United States we, too, are actively working to end violence against women. My husband's Administration has established a well-funded Office on Violence Against Women in the Justice Department that is strengthening prevention and enforcement efforts in all fifty states.

Women are also seeking and gaining more opportunities for economic self-reliance in countries East, West, North and South. Even as the APEC leaders gather here, efforts are underway through non-governmental organizations and networks among senior women leaders throughout the Asia Pacific region to ensure that women are full participants in the economic progress that the APEC arrangements represent.

On my last trip to Manila I took great pleasure in meeting with Philippine NGOs, including some dedicated to women's issues. Thanks to the extensive network of NGOs that has flourished here in the past ten years, we have witnessed new progress in the areas of women's health and safe motherhood, female literacy, sexual violence, and microcredit.

I have seen for myself the pioneering work being done to improve conditions for women in the Philippines. I had the chance when I was here before to tour the Fabella hospital, where innovative, low-cost techniques are used to help new mothers bond with and breast-feed their infants. When it comes to giving women and children the right start in life, the hospital is a model for the world.

I also applaud President Ramos for addressing the difficult and sensitive issue of family planning. Despite the challenge this issue poses, your nation is contributing to the well-being of Philippine mothers, fathers and families.

Your president and your government also deserve praise for their urgent campaign to end the illegal recruitment of Filipinas for overseas jobs in which the rights of women and girls are routinely violated in other countries. Women deserve to be respected and compensated for the work they do -- wherever they do it.

Each achievement in each country I have mentioned would be significant in and of itself. But together they represent a remarkable and unprecedented effort to create more balance within our global society and in people's individual lives.

A few days ago, I had the chance to speak in Sydney, Australia about the role of women in the 21st century. I said that building and sustaining democracy has always required a balance of power: a balance of public political power, private economic power, and the power of civil society, those formal and informal networks that bring people together to make decisions for themselves and for the common good.

Every generation faces the task of achieving that balance of power so that democratic values continue to flourish. But whether we succeed is particularly important for women who, despite the enormous strides we have made, still find their voices silenced and their potential stymied in too many parts of the world. In country after country -- from the most advanced democracies to those newly emerging, from the most dynamic free market economies to those reeling from the pace of global change -- women are still striving to define and attain their rightful place in government, the economy and civil society and claim their share of personal, political, economic, and civic power.

They are seeking balance in their lives and in their societies.

That is what the Beijing conference was about. That is what our work today is about. And that is what our mission will remain as we move forward into a new century.

Because there is no balance of power in our lives or in our world as long as poverty wears a woman's face.

There is no balance of power in our lives or in our world as long as the health of women and girls is compromised and their hopes for education shortchanged.

There is no balance of power in our lives or in our world as long as women are banned from the bank lending office, barred from the ballot box and blocked from taking their rightful place

in government.

There is no balance of power in our lives or in our world as long as women are denied equal pay for equal work and an equal chance to climb the ladders of opportunity.

There is no balance of power in our lives or in our world as long as the rights of women and girls continue to be violated:

As long as women are exploited, abused and endangered when they search for legitimate work to support their families.

As long as girls are sold to brothels and enslaved in child labor.

As long as women and girls are subjected to physical violence in the name of cultural tradition.

As long as rape is accepted as a fact of life instead of the crime that it is.

Most of us in this audience are old enough to have made many of the decisions defining the contours of our lives. But for the young women here today, most of those decisions remain on the horizon. Decisions about family and work and personal fulfillment.

Young women are relying on us to leave them a world that encourages their dreams, nurtures their talents, and respects their choices.

So let us go forward from this day to do what we have been called to do -- just as women have risen to challenges and triumphed over adversity for generations before us.

This is our opportunity. This is our responsibility. This is our challenge.

Thank you very much. And may God bless you, your country, and the work you do every day.

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