

UN Conference
One Year Later

FIRST LADY HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON
REMARKS FOR "THE U.N. WOMEN'S CONFERENCE ONE YEAR LATER"
WASHINGTON, DC
SEPTEMBER 28, 1996

Thank you very much. Thank you. Thank you all for gathering here and thank you who are gathered all over our country at the more than 400 sites. Thank you Judy for moderating this program. And I particularly want to thank the distinguished members of our panel as well as our audience here in Washington. And all of you for sharing your time and insights and for taking part in today's discussion. When I think about the thousands of women and men across America who are gathered today, I know that your actions speak louder than any of our words could.

One year ago, I had the privilege of joining the U.S. delegation to the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing. It was an historic gathering -- a celebration of the contributions women make in every aspect of life.

It was also a call to action. A call to action on behalf of women and girls around the world who are being denied the opportunity to live up to their own God-given potential -- being denied education, health care, jobs and credit, the chance to enjoy basic legal and human rights and to participate fully in the political lives of their countries.

I remember, as I spoke in Beijing, looking out at the delegates and seeing women of all colors and races, dressed in everything from Western-style business suits to saris to boubas. Women from 189 countries, so different on the surface, yet united in a single urgent message: "Women's rights are human rights -- and human rights are women's rights."

It was a simple and straightforward message. But as I recently discovered, it sometimes requires further explanation. When I did radio call in show on the Voice of America, a caller from Iran asked very earnestly what I had meant when I said in Beijing that "women's rights are human rights -- and human rights are women's rights." The only thing I could say to explain it to him was: "Just close your eyes and imagine all the rights that men have always had. Now imagine women having all those same rights."

Today, we see that the message of Beijing is being heard around the world. In classrooms. In factories. In offices. In seats of power.

The platform for action that 189 nations agreed to at that women's conference did not just generate excitement and momentum, it generated results.

Women in Namibia now are afforded equal rights with men in marriage. Women in Fiji now can work past six in the evening. Women in Nepal may soon be allowed to own property. Women in Guatemala now can take advantage of scholarships to study political science at the national university. Women in India and Cameroon may now be better represented in government because of efforts to increase the number of women elected to office in those countries.

As we consider these achievements, I realize there is a tendency to assume that the Beijing conference had little relevance for American women because we enjoy advantages in wealth, health, education, and political and legal rights compared to women elsewhere in the world.

Yet if, like me, you have had the chance to travel around our country talking to people about their lives, you know that American women share many of the same aspirations and concerns as women in other countries.

And you also know, there is more we can do here at home on behalf of women and girls.

There is more we can do to protect women from violence at home and on the streets.

There is more we can do to ensure that women receive equal wages for equal work.

There is more we can do to provide retirement security for women who spend their waking hours on assembly lines, behind cash registers, and working at computers.

There is more we can do to help women fulfill the responsibilities of family and work.

There is more we can do to promote the health of women throughout their lifetimes.

And there is more we can do to make credit and other economic opportunities for self-sufficiency available to women.

And we are doing more, thanks in part to the conference in Beijing and the blueprint for action it gave us. Whether we are working on domestic violence, or reproductive rights, or job security, or pay equity, or workplace discrimination or on any other issue affecting women and girls, our actions are founded on the knowledge that women's rights and human rights really are one and the same thing.

Here in America, we are committed to build on the progress that is being made on behalf of women and girls. As soon as the Beijing conference ended, the President established the President's InterAgency Council on Women, which brings together representatives from each federal agency to develop policies that support the

young men and women college students held a march to protest domestic violence.

These activities are taking place in part because the agenda presented in Beijing resonated deeply with men and women across our country and around the world.

But I want to make one additional point.

Because we are talking about issues that matter in the lives of women and girls, it does not mean that we are ignoring issues of concern to men and boys.

If, as a nation and as a global family, we truly care about strong families, strong communities, and strong societies, we have to recognize that economic, political and social progress depends upon women and girls having access to the opportunities they deserve.

As I said in many different settings, including Beijing: When women flourish, families flourish. And when families flourish, communities flourish and nations flourish. And every one of us -- men and women, boys and girls -- stands to gain.

I am convinced that Beijing was a historic step toward achieving equal rights for women and girls here at home and around the world. And I am optimistic that we will make even more progress because so many Americans -- especially young women and young men -- are determined to mobilize their friends, neighbors and co-workers to make progress together.

Women have always been at the forefront of social, political and economic change in our country. We have all benefited from the courage and leadership of women like Susan B. Anthony, or Sojourner Truth, or Jane Addams, Ida B. Wells, Eleanor Roosevelt and so many others who led the struggles for women's suffrage, child labor laws, public education, civil rights and so much more. Now it is our turn to lead the way -- for our daughters and sons, for our granddaughters and grandsons.

Just this week, we got a glimpse of how far women have come when astronaut Shannon Lucid touched back down to Earth after a record-breaking stay of six months in space -- the longest tour in space of any woman or any American in history. I think that all of us gave a silent or maybe a quite loud cheer of congratulations.

Today, women can reach for the moon, literally and figuratively. That doesn't mean our work is done. But it does mean we can celebrate both how far we have come as we work together to continue progress and when we work for a day, I hope, when achievements like Sharon Lucid's and so many other women are the rule, not exception. The day when we don't need any more international women's conferences or InterAgency Councils or platforms on women's issues.

What we are striving for is the day when every person who graces this earth is able to pursue his or her dream to the fullest because the opportunities and encouragement are there and barriers have been torn down.

So, on behalf of all of us here in Washington, I want to thank everyone who has gathered and especially all of the you who have worked so hard for this past year to put into practice, the hopes and dreams and plans that hundreds and thousands of women worked so hard on, that came to fruition in Beijing.

I believe we have much to show for this one year and that with our continued commitment and dedication, we will continue to see accomplishments grow and barriers fall.

I hope that all of you take the kind of pride I do as I travel around our country in seeing women and men working together to build a better future for themselves and their communities.

Thank you all very much.

###