

**Women's Rights and Empowerment:  
Gender Equality in the New Millennium.**

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I am honoured to make this presentation at the United Nations Day Banquet here in Dallas. And I am happy that my first visit to Texas, and to this fine city, is in the context of your commemoration of United Nations Day. United Nations Day marks the founding of the United Nations as an instrument of peace, human rights and development. The Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, pointed out recently that “we need an effective United Nations – one that reflects the world we live in today, and can meet the challenges we will face tomorrow.”

In this context, I am particularly pleased to speak to you on the important topic of gender equality and women’s empowerment since this is one of the major challenges facing the United Nations today. I would like to congratulate the President of the United Nations Association Dallas Chapter, Ms. Tina Patterson, other members of the board and all members of the Chapter, for making this issue the focus tonight. The work of the Association in the United States and other parts of the world makes an important contribution to achieving the goals of the United Nations, and the specific commitments to gender equality, development and peace.

A week ago, a high-level panel was held in the Third Committee of the General Assembly at the United Nations to commemorate 25 years of work to ensure ratification and implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), which was adopted by the General Assembly on 18 December 1979. Participants included four past Chairpersons of the Committee as well as the Governor-General of New Zealand, Dame Sylvia Cartwright, who is a former member of the Committee. 179 States are now party to this international human rights treaty, and are obligated to translate it into practice. Adherence to the Convention, which is of paramount significance to the practical realization of the principle of equality of women and men, and its implementation in practice, fosters a climate – both internationally and nationally - where violations of the rights of women will not be tolerated.

The CEDAW Convention has been instrumental in shaping the legal and policy framework and furthering the international agenda on the human rights of women. It has been an inspiration for women in all parts of the world and has been responsible for significant change at the country level, as well as in the international sphere. Women’s groups and networks have effectively used the Convention to combat discrimination,

including in the areas of violence against women, poverty, lack of legal status, inability to inherit or own property, and lack of access to credit. The Convention has had a positive impact on legal and other developments in support of gender equality in countries throughout the world. Developments include the strengthening of provisions in Constitutions of many countries guaranteeing equality between women and men and providing a constitutional basis for the protection of women's human rights; bringing existing legislation into conformity with the principles and obligations set out in the Convention; and use of the Convention by Judges in their decision-making.

In early 2005 we will commemorate the ten-year anniversary of the Fourth World Conference of Women in Beijing in 1995, and the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. It will also be the thirtieth anniversary of the First World Conference on Women held in Mexico in 1975. The First World Conference established the overall vision: Gender Equality – Development – Peace, which continues to guide us today. In the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, 189 countries unanimously adopted the Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action, which identified 12 critical areas for action. The emphasis of the Platform for Action is on the integration of women as full and equal partners in decision-making processes, and increased attention to their rights in all areas of development. With the adoption of the Platform for Action, Governments undertook to consider development issues from both women's and men's perspectives, before decisions were made and resources allocated, while continuing to carry out activities targeted to address specific gaps and inequalities between women and men.

The Platform for Action is described as an agenda for women's empowerment. Women's empowerment can be understood as a process whereby women, individually and collectively, develop awareness of the existing discrimination and inequality between women and men, and how it affects their lives; understand how power structures, processes and relationships produce and reinforce this discrimination and inequality; and gain the self confidence, capacities and resources required to challenge gender inequalities. The concept of empowerment arose from an understanding that increasing women's participation in development processes, without fundamental changes to these processes themselves, would bring about little change. Linked to this was the recognition that provision of resources and services could not tackle the root causes of gender inequality. Women need to be able to assert their own agency to break out of gender discrimination. Empowerment involves awareness raising, building of self-confidence, expansion of choices, involvement in decision-making and increased access to and control over resources.

In the context of reviewing ten years of implementation, it is important to honestly and constructively identify what has been achieved in the decade since the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action; what obstacles, gaps and challenges remain to be addressed; and what potentials for change exist that are currently being under-utilized.

There have been significant advances for women in many parts of

the world in relation to health, education and employment over the past decade. However, the persistent, and in some cases increasing, incidence of violence against women; the under-representation of women in decision-making in all areas and at all levels; the persistence of discriminatory laws governing marriage, land, property and inheritance; and the fact that women continue to be disproportionately affected by poverty, is unacceptable in this new millennium. In addition, new challenges for women's empowerment and gender equality have emerged over the past decade, such as combating HIV/AIDS; addressing trafficking in women and girls; and mobilizing the new information and communication technologies (ICT) in support of gender equality and women's empowerment.

Even in areas where progress has been made, there is still much room for improvement. For example, in many countries the gains made in terms of improved access of girls and women to education have not empowered women or translated into benefits in terms of increased employment opportunities. While access to health services has improved in many countries, in other countries women lack even the most basic reproductive health care. In some cases, women's increased access to employment is only to work of a part-time nature, and women's wages remain often significantly less than men's.

Let me briefly outline the progress made and some of the remaining gaps and challenges in a number of critical areas for gender equality and empowerment of women.

Despite global recognition of the fundamental right of women and men to participate in political and public life, women are underrepresented at most levels of government and have made slow progress in attaining political power in legislative bodies. Today, the proportion of seats held by women in legislative bodies stands at 15.4 percent, the highest world average reached to date. This figure continues a trend of gradual but sustained growth but the pace of change is far too slow. Despite the progress made, only 14 countries today have at least 30 percent representation of women in parliament, which had been established as a target for 1995. Ten years later this target has still not been reached.

In most of the 14 countries where the 30 percent target has been reached (namely, Rwanda, Sweden, Denmark, the Netherlands, Norway, Belgium, Costa Rica, Austria, Germany, Argentina, Iceland and Mozambique), some kind of affirmative action measure has been instituted. These can take the form, for example, of reserved seats in Parliament, or electoral candidate quotas endorsed by political parties.

It is encouraging to note that a number of post-conflict countries – Rwanda, Mozambique, South Africa, Namibia, Timor-Leste, Uganda and Eritrea - appear in the top 30 countries with regard to women's participation in legislative bodies, averaging between 25 and 30 percent of women legislators. Many of these countries have recognized the importance of including women in their reconstruction processes, and of their participation in new democratic institutions. In Rwanda women now hold almost 50

percent of seats in the national parliament, currently the highest percentage of women in parliament in the world.

Women's opportunities to exercise power are in many contexts greater at the local than at the national level. In India and France, policies to increase women's political participation in local legislative elections led to significant increases in women's presence in local office. Since 1993, one-third of seats in local councils in India are reserved for women. Studies of women's participation in village councils report on the empowering effects on the women themselves as well as the positive impact of women's presence on local politics. Women's presence has made the councils more responsive to community demands for infrastructure, housing, schools, and health; helped improve the implementation of various government programmes; and increased the likelihood that other women also feel empowered and take advantage of state services and demand rights.

Latin America and the Caribbean has made the most noticeable progress of any region in the area of women's political participation. In only one decade, the number of countries with very poor representation of women went down from 20 to seven. The Latin American experience highlights the importance of quotas, although it is necessary to keep in mind that quotas do not automatically ensure women's equal representation in legislative bodies.

In some cases, the international community has played an important role in ensuring these advances. In others, women's groups within the country have been the most important actors in promoting women's empowerment leading to positive change in women's participation in political decision-making. By offering generous provisions for childcare and other forms of family support, some states make the existing unequal division of family responsibilities between women and men less of an obstacle for women's participation in public life.

In 2006 the Commission on the Status of Women will consider in more detail the progress made in this critical area.

A third critical area is gender equality in health. I would like to focus in particular on sexual and reproductive health which remains very poor in many countries. Maternal mortality rates are high, particularly in developing countries where women's chances of dying from pregnancy related complications are almost 50 times higher than in developed countries. Women in sub-Saharan Africa have a 1-in-15 chance of dying from pregnancy-related causes. Every year, half a million women die from the preventable complications of pregnancy and childbirth and another 18 million are left disabled or chronically ill.

About two-thirds of all births worldwide occur outside health facilities. A critical priority is access to emergency obstetric care. Women in rural areas need access to skilled birth attendants trained in the use of safe and hygienic birthing techniques, and necessary drugs and equipment. The health of women and girls is also dependent on

adequate infrastructure, including good roads and transportation networks, electricity, and clean water. In the age of space travel, it is inconceivable that women continue to die in childbirth because of lack of transport, poor roads and other clearly preventable factors.

Women's unmet need for contraception is also high. Women are more vulnerable to sexually transmitted infections, particularly HIV-AIDS. Today, almost 50 percent of the infected population worldwide is female, and in sub-Saharan Africa, the rate is close to 60 percent. Women's health and wellbeing is dependent on their being empowered to make choices and decisions and have a voice in relation to sexual and reproductive health.

Adolescent girls are particularly vulnerable in relation to sexual and reproductive health. Adolescent fertility rates remain high, and young women have higher chances of suffering from complications at birth. Early marriage usually translates into early childbearing. It is estimated that between one quarter and one half of all young women in the developing world give birth before they turn 18. Underdeveloped physiology, combined with a lack of power, information, and access to services, means that young married women experience much higher levels of maternal mortality and morbidity than women who bear children when they are older. A disturbing fact reported recently by an International Committee of the Red Cross spokesperson was that a young girl in Sudan today has a greater chance of dying in childbirth (1-9) than of completing primary schooling (1-100). Girls who enter into marriage at a young age have little negotiating power and are exposed to greater risk of sexually transmitted infections. Adolescent girls have higher HIV infection rates, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa. HIV infection rates among young women aged 15-24 are approximately twice as high as those among young men. Despite the pressing needs of young married and unmarried girls, they are among the most under-served groups in relation to health care. There are too few programmes designed to specifically empower young girls and adolescents with regard to their health and wellbeing.

Men influence their partner's reproductive health, including contraceptive decision-making and desired family size. They should, therefore, constitute key allies in efforts to improve women's health. Promoting men's positive and responsible involvement in reproductive health is a key element in building gender equality and empowering women. Men can make important contributions by ensuring egalitarian and consenting sexual relations and by taking responsible roles in relation to pregnancy, birth and childcare. Many programmes seek to change gender roles and norms by challenging attitudes and behaviors of men and boys that compromise the health and safety of women and girls.

The ten-year anniversary of the International Conference on Population and Development was commemorated at high-level in the General Assembly last week. Despite continued controversy around some of the commitments made ten years ago, it is hoped that the review will lead to continued global attention to these critical issues for gender equality and women's empowerment and to enhanced action on the ground.

In his opening statement to the General Assembly this year, the Secretary-General focused on the rule of law as the all-important framework at national and international level. He reminded us that rule of law means first and foremost that no one is above the law and no one should be denied its protection. He also emphasized that rule of law as a concept is not enough: “laws must be put into practice and permeate the fabric of our lives”. Those who champion equality for women rely to a large extent on the power of the law, and the protection which it can offer, to overcome discrimination and disadvantage. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women has been used as the legal basis and as a powerful instrument for furthering the rights of women.

I would like to touch on one very specific aspect of women’s rights – the right to own property and assets. Women’s importance in food production underscores the need to provide them with security of tenure for the land they cultivate. Secure land tenure can increase women’s probability of accessing credit, finding supplementary wage employment and increasing productivity. This can be especially crucial in situations where women are the principal farmers. In the context of HIV/AIDS, ownership and control over economic assets can save women from total and complete destitution. When they are unable to inherit land after the death of a father or husband due to AIDS, women are rendered powerless and unprotected just when they most need protection and support.

Women in many countries around the globe, however, lack any claim to land and other property as a result of unequal inheritance practices; the registering of land and property in the name of the head of household (usually defined as a male); unequal access to land markets, based on custom and unequal economic assets; and gender-biased land reforms. Women’s infrequent control of land and other property exacerbates their generally low status, compared to men, and is directly linked to development-related problems faced by women across the globe, including poverty, HIV/AIDS, and violence.

The case of Rwanda provides a picture of promising change in empowering women through land rights. Serious gender inequalities in land rights were rectified during post-conflict reconstruction. Pathbreaking legislation was passed, which enshrines the principle that women may own property and inherit on an equal basis with their brothers. It also requires couples registering for marriage to make a joint commitment to a choice of options for the shared ownership and disposition of marital property.

The issue of violence against women and girls must be considered one of the greatest challenges in the coming decade. Violence against women exists in epidemic proportions in many countries around the world. In surveys conducted in various countries, between 10 and 69 percent of women reported having experienced domestic violence. By region, 10 - 35 percent of women in Latin America and 13 - 45 percent of women in sub-Saharan Africa have experienced physical intimate partner violence at some time in their lives. Non-intimate partner sexual violence also shows high global prevalence, with at least one in five women suffering rape or attempted rape during her lifetime. Worldwide, it is estimated that violence against women is as serious a cause of

death and incapacity among reproductive-age women as is cancer, and it is a more common cause of ill-health among women than traffic accidents and malaria combined. The disempowering effects of violence against women are enormous.

Violence against women is accepted as the norm in far too many parts of the world – a private business, a normal occurrence in the relationship between a man and a woman, where the state, community, or family should not interfere. It is a gross violation of women's human rights and widely recognized as having serious development impacts, including but not limited to negative impacts on women's health and wellbeing. Violence against women exists on a continuum, from domestic violence in the privacy of the home, to violence as a weapon of war, where rape and other forms of sexual exploitation committed against women are now acknowledged as a crime against humanity.

Violence against women cuts across socio-economic, religious, and ethnic groups, and across geographic areas. In many countries women are at risk of violence when carrying out essential daily activities – walking or taking public transport to work, collecting water or firewood - especially when these activities are undertaken early in the morning or late at night. Using public transport can make women vulnerable to rape, as reported in Papua New Guinea. Adolescent girls are also at risk of violence in schools, particularly in Africa.

The health-related, economic, and social costs of violence against women - on women themselves, on their families, and on social and economic development - are substantial. Most of the data that exist on the costs of violence refer to the experiences of Western industrialized countries such as Canada, United Kingdom, Finland, Australia, and New Zealand, where systems of information and services are well-developed. A few recent studies have, however, estimated the costs of violence against women in countries in Latin America. Canada has estimated, for example that the direct costs of violence against women – criminal justice and police costs and counseling and training costs, amount to over Canadian \$1 billion per year. This does not include the non-monetary costs of suffering, morbidity and mortality; the broader economic effects of absenteeism, decreased labour market participation and decreased productivity, or the broader social effects on interpersonal relations, such as the disempowering effects on the women themselves and the serious impacts on children.

The General Assembly considers the issue of violence against women on a regular basis in the Third Committee. The Assembly has requested the Secretary-General to prepare a comprehensive study of violence against women in all its forms to be submitted for consideration in the autumn of 2005. This study will be critical in raising awareness of violence against women as a serious human rights violation and a development issue, and in highlighting the steps needed to eliminate violence against women.

The discussion of violence against women leads me directly into the next aspect I would like to raise –gender equality in the context of armed conflict and its aftermath. Over the past decade women and girls have become prime targets of armed conflict and suffered its impact disproportionately; particularly as gender-based and sexual violence

have become weapons of warfare and are one of the defining characteristics of contemporary armed conflict. Women and children also constitute the majority of the world's refugees and internally displaced persons.

Women and girls are vulnerable to all forms of violence, but particularly sexual violence and exploitation, including rape, mass rape, forced pregnancy, sexual slavery, enforced prostitution, and trafficking. Sexual violence has been a strategy of armed conflict in virtually all recent armed conflicts. In post-conflict contexts, women are also extremely vulnerable to rape in refugee camps. One study found that 26 percent of Burundi women in a Tanzanian camp had experienced sexual violence since becoming a refugee. Easy access to weapons increases interpersonal violence, including domestic violence, which often continues and may even increase in the aftermath of conflict.

The Secretary-General recently stated: "The facts on the ground point to our collective failure in preventing such violence and protecting women and girls from the horrors of gender-based violence and heinous violations of international human rights, criminal and humanitarian law". One only has to look at the newspapers or turn on the television today to understand the devastating levels of on-going sexual violence against women and young girls in Sudan.

The health consequences for women and girls during conflict are enormous, particularly related to reproductive roles. A spokesperson of the International Committee of the Red Cross recently reported that around 25 percent of women in refugee camps are pregnant, and at great risk of maternal mortality because of inadequacies in meeting reproductive health needs. Gender discrimination can also lead to inequitable distribution of food to women and girls, leading to malnutrition and other health problems. Severe mental and social stress can be caused by witnessing or directly experiencing rape, torture, death, and separation from and disappearance of loved ones.

Women's daily tasks as providers and caregivers become increasingly difficult and dangerous, especially as the availability of and access to public services and household goods shrink. Armed conflict forces women to take on more responsibilities for family security and livelihoods. Lack of land and property rights, however, constrains their efforts. Women and girls may also be pushed into dangerous illegal activities, especially with the increase in trafficking in post-conflict contexts.

Refugee, returnee and internally displaced women and girls suffer human rights abuses throughout their displacement, flight, in camp settings and resettlement. Difficulties faced by women and girls are not always identified and addressed in planning and management of camps. Increased participation of women in decisions regarding the organization of camps, the layout of shelters and facilities and the distribution of supplies is critical for reducing the risks women and girls face in camp situations.

Many women organize locally and regionally for conflict resolution and peacemaking as well as disarmament activities. Grassroots women's organizations have organized across party and ethnic lines, advocating for peace, and have been active in



reconciliation efforts. They have campaigned against small arms, participated in weapons collection programmes, and disseminated information on landmines. Women's groups and networks have also begun to work at regional and sub-regional levels. For example, the Mano River Women's Peace Network, which brings together women from Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone, and has made a major contribution to peace and security in the sub-region, won the 2003 United Nations Prize for Human Rights.

Women's work in informal peace processes is seldom reflected in formal processes. Women are often excluded from formal processes because they are not decision-makers or military leaders or because it is assumed that they lack the necessary skills. If peace agreements do not explicitly address the importance of gender equality there can be difficulties in getting attention to gender perspectives and the concerns of women in the reconstruction phase, for example in relation to human rights provisions in new constitutions, electoral processes, land reform and legislation on sexual violence.

Next week, the Security Council will commemorate the fourth anniversary of the adoption of the pathbreaking resolution on women, peace and security, resolution 1325. The resolution has been translated into 60 languages and is used effectively, especially by civil society, to promote greater involvement of women and attention to their concerns and priorities in all areas of work on peace and security. While much has been achieved in the four years since its adoption much more remains to ensure full implementation.

This brings us to the important question – why has there been so little change in some critical areas and very slow progress in others – particularly when we are increasingly aware that promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment is not just important for women themselves, but is critical for effective development in all areas. Leaving out half the population will of necessity have negative impacts on development outcomes. The World Bank, for example, has highlighted that policies, programmes and activities which fail to take gender inequality into account, and fail to empower women, will have limited impact and can lead to serious costs to societies.

Among the main constraints to moving forward on gender equality and empowerment of women are deeply entrenched negative attitudes and stereotypes, which are institutionalized in society. Breaking down the discrimination and disadvantage that most women face in one way or another on a daily basis, requires tackling deeply entrenched values, norms and attitudes which work against women.

A further serious constraint is the lack of leadership and political will to ensure the necessary political changes and resource allocation. Gender equality and empowerment of women will require going beyond achieving equality in numbers of women, to a fundamental shift or transformation in the distribution of power, opportunities and outcomes for women as well as men. This requires attention to critical elements of rights, justice and freedom from the threat of violence or other forms of insecurity.

The required policy framework for gender equality and empowerment of women is already in place; it is not more recommendations that we need. The Platform for Action contains many critical recommendations which have yet to be implemented at national level. In most cases the needed legislative changes, policies, programmes and activities which are needed to ensure full implementation of the goals the United Nations has set for gender equality and the empowerment of women are already well known. What is lacking is implementation.

Positive actions have been taken in many countries with very good results. Efforts have, however, too often not been systematic and sustained. They have been ad hoc and marginal, and not developed as an integral part of efforts in different sector areas. The good practice examples that do exist are not shared systematically and the spin-off effects are poor. A large gap therefore continues to exist between policy commitments made at the Fourth World Conference and actual implementation at national level. The challenge ahead is to get the job of implementation done.

What can be done to move forward? A taskforce on Millennium Development Goal Three, in the context of the Millennium Project, has highlighted that gender inequality is a problem that has a solution. More than three decades of research, activism and innovation, have shown that achieving the goal of greater gender equality and empowerment of women is possible. It does, however, require explicit commitment, concerted action, adequate resources and clear accountability.

Two issues immediately come to mind as critical for improving implementation. Firstly, greater efforts are needed to engage and involve men and boys. Gender equality is not only important for women and girls. It should be of concern to men and boys, families, communities and nations. Promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment cannot be done in a vacuum; men and boys must be brought along in the process of change.

Secondly, there needs to be much greater attention to adolescent girls and boys. The empowerment of adolescent girls must be a priority in the new millennium. The vulnerability of the situation of adolescent girls, which I hope my address has illustrated, and the impact of the attitudes and behaviour of adolescent boys in this regard makes this age-group critical. In addition, the sheer numbers of adolescents in many parts of the world and the potential for changing values, attitudes and behaviour during this transition phase into adulthood, illustrates the importance of identifying their concerns and needs and addressing them specifically.

In addition, ensuring that the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) is used more effectively at national, regional and international levels would also move implementation forward. The Convention remains a critical instrument in promoting gender equality and empowerment of women. Often described as the international bill of rights for women, it is the human rights treaty that addresses most comprehensively women's equality with men and non-discrimination in the civil, political, economic, social and cultural fields. Only 12 Member States of the UN have not

ratified the Convention, including the United States. Good examples of the constructive use of the Convention to reduce inequality and empower women should be disseminated broadly and the Convention should be systematically used in policy dialogue with all States parties.

Establishing stronger partnerships with women's groups and networks at all levels could have a critical impact on implementation. Women's groups and networks have played a very strategic role in moving the global agenda on gender equality forward. Non-governmental organizations and civil society groups and networks have energized the debates on critical areas and contributed to increasing the visibility and recognition of the importance of gender equality and women's empowerment for development. A great deal of the sustained attention and the achievements made over the past decades has been due to their efforts. Their role in advocating for and monitoring implementation of the commitments made by Governments has been particularly significant. Stronger partnerships among civil society and between Governments and civil society could significantly enhance implementation.

In addition, we should also effectively utilize a number of important opportunities that will present themselves over the coming year to revitalize the global movement for gender equality and empowerment of women.

The Millennium Declaration and the Millennium Development Goals represent one of these important opportunities. The establishment of the specific goal on gender equality and empowerment of women sent a strong message on the importance of education – highlighting that investing in girls' education is critical for girls themselves as well as for overall development, as well as the unacceptability of continuing inequalities in education. The indicators on the share of women in wage employment and the seats held by women in national parliaments, address the fact that, without equal opportunity in the labor force and an equal voice in national decision-making, gender parity in education is unlikely to empower women. While the separate explicit goal has an intrinsic value in itself, it is critical to understand that gender equality and women's empowerment are central to the achievement of all the Millennium Development Goals.

A second major opportunity will present itself early next year with the ten-year review of implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action to be carried out in the Commission on the Status of Women. The focus of the review and appraisal will be implementation at national level. The programme of work contains a number of high level panels and roundtables for the exchange of experience and good practice. A Secretary-General's report on implementation at national level will be prepared, on the basis of responses to a questionnaire, as well as other information submitted by Member States. To date a total of 123 responses to the questionnaire have been received, a roughly 60 percent response rate. The review and appraisal provides an excellent opportunity to exchange experiences on achievements, gaps and challenges and required action and to renew commitments. It will be critical that the outcome of the Commission feeds into the high-level event to be held in 2005 to review progress in achieving the Millennium Declaration.

The taskforce working on Millennium Development Goal 3 in the Millennium Project recognizes that achieving true gender equality and women's empowerment requires a different vision for the world, not just piecemeal rectification of different aspects of existing inequality between women and men. *"The Task Force's vision is of a world in which men and women work together as equal partners to secure better lives for themselves and their families. In this world, women and men share equally in the enjoyment of basic capabilities, economic assets, voice, and freedom from fear and violence. They share the care of children, the elderly, and the sick; the responsibility for paid employment; and the joys of leisure. In such a world, the resources now used for war and destruction are instead invested in human development and well-being; institutions and decision-making processes are open and democratic; and all human beings treat each other with respect and dignity."*

This is the vision we must take forward into this new millennium and work tirelessly to ensure its achievement through increased commitment, action and accountability. The efforts of each one of us – men as well as women – are critical if this vision is to be realized. The United Nations Association can play an important role in raising awareness in this city, and in the United States as a whole, to ensure full commitment and all required resources to achieve equality, development and peace, and the fulfillment of the promise made to the women and girls of the world at the First World Conference in Mexico in 1975 and reiterated in Beijing in 1995.

I commend the United Nations Association Dallas Chapter for your efforts in this regard.

Thank you again for the opportunity to share these thoughts with you this evening. I want to particularly thank Kambiz Rafrat and Beth and Rodney Pirtle for their efforts to make my participation tonight possible.