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Public-Private Partnerships

Supporting initiatives to encourage the full participation of women in the development of democratic societies and prosperous market economies offers the business community the opportunity to:

- Interact with a group of dynamic and successful women among whom can be found the present and future political and economic leaders of the region;
- Identify potential partners and colleagues with whom to build mutually beneficial relationships; and
- Shape a more positive climate for trade, investment, and commerce, as well as gain favorable exposure in the regional marketplace.

Implementing Change

Putting into practice the strategies and initiatives developed at the Conference will be key to its long-term success, and to the achievement of the broader goals it serves. Implementing partners are needed to participate in creating solutions and carrying out initiatives developed at the Conference. They will be drawn from governments, NGOs and the business community. Implementing partners can contribute expertise, technical assistance, training and educational opportunities or financial resources to support the initiatives discussed at the Conference. Examples of initiatives which implementing partners are supporting include:

- Internships, professional enrichment, and executive training opportunities;
- Technical assistance and advice;
- Support for networking activities (establishment of websites, computer and language training, etc.);
- Sponsoring scholarships, travel, and familiarization visits;
- Organizing regional seminars, conferences and other exchanges; and
- Job training and placement programs.

For more information about the Conference on Women and Democracy at the Dawn of the New Millennium in Conjunction with the *Vital Voices Democracy Initiative* contact:

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Conference on Women and Democracy at the Dawn of the New Millennium

In Conjunction with the **Vital Voices Democracy Initiative**

Reykjavik, Iceland
October 8-10, 1999

Conference on Women and Democracy

In Conjunction with the Vital Voices Democracy Initiative

October 8-10, 1999— Reykjavik, Iceland

The Government of Iceland will host a Conference on "Women and Democracy at the Dawn of the New Millennium *In Conjunction with the U.S. Vital Voices Global Democracy Initiative.*" The U.S. is co-sponsoring the Conference, along with the Nordic Council of Ministers. The Conference will bring together men and women from the Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden), the Baltic states (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania), Russia, and the U.S. Participants will come from governments, the non-governmental community, and the private sector to develop and put into practice strategies to address the challenges facing women and men as they work to build stable, prosperous societies in the Northern European region. Senior government officials from the Nordic and Baltic countries and Russia as well as the U.S. will attend, including the First Lady of the U.S., and the newly elected President of Latvia, Vaira Vike-Freiberga.

The U.S. Vital Voices Democracy Initiative

The *Vital Voices Democracy Initiative* is a public-private partnership which reflects U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright's commitment to promote the advancement of women as a U.S. foreign policy objective. U.S. First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton has actively supported the *Vital Voices Democracy Initiative*. Mrs. Clinton will be the concluding keynote speaker at the Conference to underscore her support for the Conference's objectives, and for implementation of projects drawing on the *Vital Voices* network.

Stable and Prosperous Democracies and Regional Cooperation

Nordic • Baltic • Russia • U.S.

The main objectives of the Conference are to:

- Develop practical solutions to issues that affect all citizens in the region working for prosperous and stable democracies;
- Promote regional integration and contacts through initiatives that build cooperation among the countries of Northern Europe as a basis for lasting security; and
- Encourage the full participation of women in the political and economic life of the region.

Focus on Women

The Conference will concentrate on strategies to enable women to fully participate in the political and economic life of their countries. It will address 10 broad areas:

- 21st-century learning skills;
- Developing leadership potential;
- Networking and mentoring programs;
- Participating in public life;
- Energizing entrepreneurship;
- Creating a quality workplace;
- Increasing NGO effectiveness;

- Promoting equality through legislation and practice;
- Mastering information technology and the media; and
- The changing roles of men and women.

Northern Europe in the 21st Century

The Conference in Reykjavik is designed to strengthen democratic institutions and prosperous market economies and to encourage regional integration in Northern Europe by promoting the status of women. Those are also the goals of the U.S. Northern European Initiative (NEI), which seeks to bolster the security and prosperity of the Baltic Sea area through enhanced regional cooperation in a variety of fields. Private sector investment and the activities of non-governmental organizations contribute to the evolution of stable, democratic, market-oriented societies where the rule of law is respected and entrepreneurship can flourish. By involving representatives of governments, the business community, and non-governmental organizations, the Conference will maximize resources available, and reinforce the impact of projects and initiatives to be developed and implemented over the coming years.



U.S. First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton and U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright

*File
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Unofficial Transcript

Vital Voices Global Roundtable
Reykjavik, Iceland
October 9, 1999.

U.S. First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton moderated the discussion. The participants were: Ms. Penelope Beckles, Senator in the Upper House of Parliament (Trinidad); Anita Gupta, Vice President and Director of Corporate Affairs for Citigroup (India); Marina Pisklakova, founder of the ANNA crisis center (Russia); Rasha al-Sabah, Kuwaiti Under Secretary for Higher Education (Kuwait); Pearl Sagar, the co-founder of the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition and Development coordinator for Vital Voices Northern Ireland Advisory Committee (Northern Ireland); and Vera Stremkoskaya, human rights attorney (Belarus).

Begin text:

HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON: Thank you very much Sigridur Duna. Thank you for the work you and have done on this conference and thank you for that kind introduction. I am very grateful to our hosts, the Government of Iceland, and the Nordic Council for cosponsoring this conference, and I am especially pleased that I could be here today for this roundtable. I was disappointed when my scheduled for the morning was cancelled because of weather, but it has a silver lining because I was able to come and hear these women, some of whom I have met before and some whom I have met for the first time, but all of whom are instrumental in raising their voices on behalf of democracy and human rights, women rights, and opportunities for all throughout the world.

There are women at this table with me who are Vital Voices - who represent the growing democratic network that we are attempting to knit together from one continent to the other. They are the voices for human rights, for economic development, for women in public life, for women in the community, for women in the family. In short they are voices for progress, peace and prosperity. I would like to have each of our panellists introduce themselves before we begin our conversation so that you will have an idea of who it is that is sitting here. And, I'd like to go ahead and begin with the introductions.

VERA STREMKOSKAYA: My name is Vera Stremkoskaya. I came from Belarus. I am the director of the Human Rights Center in Minsk, Belarus, as well as a member of the (unclear) union of Belarus. I wrote a book of poetry.

ANITA GUPTA: My name is Anita Gupta. I work for Citigroup. I work as Vice President and Director of Corporate Affairs and am based in Bombay, in India.

PENELOPE BECKLES: My name is Penelope Beckles. I am from Trinidad and Tobago. I am an attorney-at-law. I am a former senator and a former local government counselor and I am the vice president of the rape crisis center in my country.

RASHA AL-SABAH: My names is Rasha al-Sabah. I am the Under Secretary at the Ministry of Higher Education for the state of Kuwait.

PEARL SAGAR: My name is Pearl Sager. I am the Vital Voices development coordinator for Northern Ireland and I am very pleased to be here in Iceland.

MARINA PISKLAKOVA: My name is Marina Piskalokova, president of the Russian Association of Crisis Centers for Women.

HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON: Now let us start our conversation and I want to begin with Marina. You know Marina, I remember very well our conversation in Moscow. I was so impressed by the work that you are doing on the issue of family violence, and in many ways you are a pioneer, not only in Russia but also throughout the world in drawing attention to the continuing problem that domestic family violence causes for women and children. I would very much like to hear from you and hear about the progress you are making on the issues that you are still confronting.

MARINA PISKLAKOVA: (Comments in Russian.)

HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON: Marina I think that your commitment to giving other women's voices a chance to be heard is especially important and part of what we intend Vital Voices to mean. I know that you have received a lot of recognition for your work. But I'm wondering from your perspective how are the institutions of the society, the law enforcement community and the government, responding because as I travel around the world, the biggest problems often with domestic violence, even in my own

country are convincing the government institutions to take it seriously. So have you made progress on that?

MARINA PISKLAKOVA: (Comments in Russian.)

HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON: I applaud you for your work and thank you for being such a strong advocate, because we have to say over and over again that domestic violence is not a custom it is a crime and it should be viewed as a crime wherever it occurs across all societies and cultures.

I would like now to turn to Penelope. You can come a very long way from Trinidad and Tobago for this conference, and I know that you've just completed a very exciting Vital Voices Conference for the Caribbean. I would very much appreciate you telling us how the Conference went and what you think will come from it.

PENELOPE BECKLES: Well, first of all, I would like to say that I attended the Vital Voices Conference in Uruguay and Mrs. Clinton was present at that conference. The substance of her speech and her presence certainly energized us and encouraged us, so the women of the Caribbean decide that we would have our own Vital Voices Conference. 17 countries were represented in that conference. We focused on women in decision-making and leadership, women in the economy, and women in law. That Conference brought together women from all these different countries and we dealt with issues relating to domestic violence, mentoring, networking, continuing contact with our various sisters, and today it really a privilege for me to be here in Iceland and to be sitting at the head table with Mrs. Clinton and other distinguished sisters.

What I've recognized is that issues in the Caribbean are very similar to issues all over the world. And it's a golden opportunity for me to be here and to hear about my sisters from this region, and I look forward to continuing networking with you, and to ensuring that, in the words of Mrs. Clinton, that women's rights are human rights and human rights are women's rights.

HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON: Thank you very much Penelope. You know the countries of the Caribbean are small countries but they have distinct cultures, they have different languages, they face all of the same challenges that larger countries do. They are islands countries, most of them, as Iceland is, and it is especially important, it would seem, to try and create some linkage

among women who are interested in these issues across these national lines.

As a result of the conference have you come up with ideas for websites, for continuing contacts among the women of the Caribbean to make sure that these ideas and work continue?

PENELOPE BECKLES: Yes, we have. And what I'd just like to say very briefly is that we were supported by a lot of members of the private sector and by various United Nations organizations. And our own U.S. Ambassador in Trinidad and Tobago indicated that the process would continue. Similar to the other conferences we will do a report and a sort of post mortem discussion.

One of our decisions is to set up a regional leadership institute so that we can assist and train women, so that we can continue to be the best leaders in the Caribbean, and so that we can assist some of our sisters in terms of other areas like domestic violence and mentoring. We have set up a web site. Certainly using the modern technology of the Internet access will make things really a lot easier for us to keep in contact with each other, and ensure that we learn from each others solutions to the problems that women face in today's world.

HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON: Thank you very much Penelope. You know Vital Voices has always been a public-private partnership, and that is one of the most exciting aspects of it, because we have tried to bring together people from the private sector with their counterparts in the public arena in order to have much more commitment and energy to the issues that we are concerned with.

Anita represents the private sector commitment to the Vital Voices work. She has been very active in the area of microcredit, which I firmly believe is still an untapped resource for so many women around the world to gain access to the credit they need to pursue their own entrepreneurial dreams. And Anita, I would love for you to tell us what's happening with microcredit in India and the work that you've been doing.

ANITA GUPTA: At the beginning I want say that it's a wonderful opportunity for me to be here. I consider this occasion very important to get the conversation and dialogue going between private and public partnership.

Citibank, as you know, is one of the largest financial service organizations in the world. We operate in 100

countries globally. And in India, where I come from, we have been there for 98 years. And in the years that we have been there, significant sums of money had been given across a variety of themes. We did children, we talked about all kinds of things, but when we finally surveyed our customers we found we weren't seen to be very socially responsible. And that was a big question we all contended with.

And when we introspected, we realized that there was something we were not doing right. And the fact was we were not really giving in an area of strength. So all the corporate giving was viewed as check book philanthropy. And clearly our employees, through the voice of satisfaction surveys, told us clearly they did not feel that we were working for a very philanthropic organization.

So, in July of 1997, we launched what we called the Empowerment of Women Program, which was based on microcredit. And how did we come upon it? We really searched the national agenda, and what we realized was that India is a country with a very low gross domestic product of three hundred dollars -- unemployment was high, women continued to be a marginalized section of society, access to credit was not readily available -- then it was only natural that we developed our community support program around the themes of credit, women and the building up of self-reliance.

We have today in a matter of a short 18 months, partnerships with five NGOs across the country. And, Mrs. Clinton you may be affiliated with Sabre. We worked with an affiliate of Sabre called Friends of Women World Banking and other NGOs based in Bombay, Calcutta, Madras and New Delhi. We are also expanding to Sri Lanka and Bangladesh by the end of this year, and in the first quarter of next year we will also be in Nepal.

What have been some of the key successes we have met with in this short time? Number one, we have developed a microcredit software, which is the first of its kind in the region, I believe. Coming from a high-tech bank such as us, I think it is but natural that we should give to the community in an area of our strength. The second very unique program that we have implemented is a cross border low cost housing funding arrangement. This is the first time that a bank, a national NGO - one of our partners - and an international NGO called Women's International have come together to help in the

rehabilitation of slum women in one of Asia's largest slums in Bombay.

These are no small achievements, but I think the message that I want to enunciate loud and clear here today is that a lot more needs to be done. This is not an area of competition, but collaboration. Many more corporations must come forward and play a significant role in the development of the economies in which they operate.

HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON: I say amen to that. You know, Anita, one of the frustrations many of us have had who believe in the power of credit and increasing access to credit is how reluctant many of the commercial banks have been to pursue microcredit. And it is very heartening to hear that Citicorp is going into one of its areas of strength, namely the banking sector but extending services to the poor, who we know if given the opportunity and the technical support, repay their loans at above 95% repayment rates, which is higher than many commercial loan repayment rates.

So I am very, very pleased that you are doing this. Would you see this as an area now that Citicorp could really take a leadership role in and demonstrate to other commercial financial institutions that this is an appropriate means for philanthropy? Because this is good for business, it promotes self-reliance and it is a means of equal opportunity through credit.

ANITA GUPTA: Absolutely. I think all philanthropy must be based on self-reliance and microcredit is the way. And the most important thing that I didn't mention earlier is that what we have been able to achieve has been through the spirit of volunteerism. 10 percent of Citigroup employees in India have actually worked and implemented our successful program. So I think that true giving, volunteerism, is when you give of yourself to the community, of course supported by funding.

HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON: I hope that we will come up with even more ways of expanding microcredit.

I'm delighted that Rasha is here. I remember very well our conversation when we last met in Washington and the excitement among Kuwaiti women that the right to vote was going to be granted to them. I know that you still face challenges that the Emir's promise is fulfilled and that the vote is actually granted. Perhaps you could tell us a little of the background and where things stand today.

RASHA AL-SABAH: First of all, I would like to say what a privilege it is to participate in this roundtable that is moderated by the Honorable First Lady. What a pleasure it is to be in Iceland. Perhaps I am the first Kuwaiti citizen to have ever set foot in Iceland (laughter) and as you can imagine, your climes are far colder than climes back home. But, from the word go I felt an immediate warmth in my heart from the reception and the cordiality of the people of Iceland and by its traditions of democracy, the support for women and women's causes that is actually concretized by our meetings today.

Regarding the question that was posed to me, obviously the history of the fight or struggle for women's political rights go back several decades to when Kuwait became an independent state in 1961. And this struggle -- the historical background is that it ~~has~~ been bumpy, it has been seasonal in the sense that every time there has been a parliamentary election some people have thought, whether men or women, "well, perhaps we should be a little vociferous regarding women's rights." But really, there has never been a motion that was proposed to our parliament, to our national assembly, that would enable women to exercise their political rights, without the parliament always and consistently vetoing these motions.

During the Iraqi occupation - after the invasion and the Iraqi occupation of our country - when women played such heroic roles in the resistance - not only in the armed resistance and smuggling arms, but also in building the networks, in just supporting the people who were hapless and helpless victims of a huge aggression on their soil - the penny in a sense dropped, that women had reached a stage of political maturity that they should be allowed such rights. During that period, and while our legitimate government was in exile, there was a national convention in October 1990, where His Highness the Emir pledged that when Kuwait is liberated, we will study the issue of giving women their political rights.

But, if I may go back a little bit, our struggle for the giving of such rights, does not have the backdrop of the invasion -- the Iraqi invasion -- or such things. We have always based our demands on the Constitution. Article 29 of the Constitution of Kuwait stipulates clearly that all citizens are equal regardless of race, color, religion, ethnic origins or whatever. So we have always considered the electoral law which limits elections or the right to vote or to stand for election to males as basically anti-constitutional. Therefore,

when on Sunday, May the 16th, 1999, the Emir came out with a statement saying that women should enjoy full political rights, both the right to vote and the right to stand for election, we felt that it was really a fantastic, but long overdue rectification of our Constitution.

One can consider this as one stage and its over, but really the struggle has only just begun. Because when did the Emir bring on this edict? It was only during the suspension of our parliament. As I have just mentioned, historically, the parliament has never passed such a draft law. So, in a sense, it had to be done in its absence. Article 71 of our Constitution, enables the Emir, as the head of state, to enact laws that may be deemed as urgent or that urgency demands. But, they have to be ratified by our parliament. Now our parliamentarians are now already saying "what is the urgency of passing or enacting such a law." So again, we are entering a new phase in our struggle.

Of course there is an urgency, because, again I go back to Article 29 of our Constitution, which was promulgated in 1961. Don't you think it is rather urgent Article 29 be implemented? (laughter, applause)

And then the other aspect -- and I'm sorry for going -- the other aspect is, of course, the often repeated, you know, customs and traditions and Islam and Sharia and all that. And we feel that the state of urgency has always been there, and we will fight all the way out on that aspect. There is nothing in the Islamic Sharia and there is nothing in our Holy Koran that forbids women from exercising such rights. On the contrary, there are cases in Islam -- and in the companions of our Prophet -- of including women, who have always been consulted on political and social and economic matters. Certainly our traditions and our customs do not prevent us, Arab, Kuwaiti and Muslim women from participating and ensuring that our democracy is not a in-name democracy, that it is not a skim milk democracy, but a full cream democracy. And I should end at that.

HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON: You know Rasha I feel that we should send a petition to the parliament and commend your representation of the Kuwaiti people here. You may be the first Kuwaiti in Iceland, but you are certainly one of the most eloquent visitors who could come to Iceland. And we are very hopeful that the rights that you have fought for and that you deserve to have will be finally, legally, constitutionally accorded to you.

Someone else who has worked very hard on behalf of democracy and has had her own experiences with some of her fellow political participants in shaping the peace process in Northern Ireland and in ensuring a place for women within a peaceful future there is our next speaker. I have known Pearl for a number of years now and I have followed her activities with great admiration as she has constantly worked on behalf of peace. Perhaps, Pearl, you could tell us what is happening in the peace process, and the role that you and other women are continuing to play.

PEARL SAGAR: Thank you very much. That's an interesting questions, and I'm sure that people here know how difficult it is to become involved politically. I think it is interesting that Kuwait is about to get voting rights for women, and you are right, it is a struggle. Its going to be a very difficult struggle. And I have to say that I struggled for 18 months in negotiations in Northern Ireland. And I would describe the political arena as a playground for very large children who are extremely well paid (laughter). However, I loved every minute of it. And I would advise everybody to get involved politically, because we do live and breath it. It is part of our economy, it is part of our social life, it is part of our education, and it is part of our growing up and maturing. And it was a wonderful experience.

I am sad to say that peace hasn't quite come to Northern Ireland. I hope it does come in my lifetime, because women, particularly in Northern Ireland have worked extremely hard over the last 30 years. Women have had to hold communities together, not just from fighting with their neighbor, but also from fighting within the home. We have had numerous problems, which are happening in the world every day, and we have had to live with it. And it is surprising how flexible, how humorous, how wonderful women are. I'm not excluding men in this, because we couldn't survive without them either. You know, we do need to complement each other.

If it wasn't for women in the home in Northern Ireland, it would have been difficult. We would never have had peace in our country. The women of Northern Ireland, within a six-week period, came together for the first time in 1996 to stand as political opponents to our mainstream politicians in Northern Ireland. At that time we were about to have our peace negotiations. And the way the elections were being held, it was only the same people who would have been elected to discuss peace.

Unfortunately, at that time, the decision makers were all non-female. As it turned out, within six weeks we got a group of women from both cultures, from different classes, in Northern Ireland. Those who could never agree, as people kept telling us, managed to agree and managed to get two women elected to the Northern Ireland peace talks.

That was a wonderful achievement. We did make history. We proved that women can work together. We can work on issues from the economy, right down to the provision of childcare to education, to transport, even to security. They seem to think that women know nothing about security. So this was a great achievement for the women of Northern Ireland.

My interest in Vital Voices - as I said in the beginning I work for Vital Voices Northern Ireland - the most important thing in this world is that each of us has a vital voice. And our vital voice needs to be recognized. And the platform that Vital Voices: Women and Democracy gave to the people of Northern Ireland was in recognition to those women who gave everything, voluntarily, in our peace process. In our communities, we have provided childcare, we have provided elderly care. When our government was so busy with the security situation that they hadn't got time for the bread and butter issues, we were there to do the work.

And now we are paying those women tribute by using Vital Voices, not only to recognize the work and achievements they have done, but also to recognize the work of our businesses, and our political leaders, and also those within government. Because in Northern Ireland, like many countries, we like to slam the government. Its brilliant, you know, its not my fault its their fault. So, when I try to pay tribute, I try to use Vital Voices to bring all these people together to work together, to learn from each other and to share our experiences, and, hopefully, to enjoy the pleasure of having all of our voices heard.

I would love for everybody here to go to Northern Ireland. It is one of the most beautiful countries in the world. And we are actually fairly safe. We only damage each other we do not damage Iceland people (laughter). So you are more than welcome.

HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON: Pearl's work has been carried out in an atmosphere of some continuing tension and

difficulty but she and many of the other women with whom she works have persevered through all of that. They make progress step by step, sometimes below the surface of the headlines and the peace talks that are going on still, by building a strong community.

Someone else who labours under very difficult circumstances on behalf of human rights is our next speaker. Vera, I still remember very vividly your recent visit to the White House, where we talked about your human rights work in Belarus. It is very difficult and even very dangerous work. I was very pleased that you were able to come to the United States and receive a prestigious award for your work as a lawyer on behalf of human rights and you were able to come and attend this conference, because I want more people to know about your struggles and what is going on in the political life of your country. So, would you please tell us about your work.

VERA STREMKOVSKAYA: (Comments in Russian)

HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON: One of the great joys of the Vital Voices conferences and meetings and follow-up work that began really with Beijing and continued through Vienna and Montevideo and Belfast and Trinidad and Reykjavik and I hope in many other settings, is that it does provide an opportunity for people to come and not only share ideas about their common struggles but also learn about the very grave difficulties that confront women and men in other settings around the world, and to provide support for those who are on the front lines of democracy.

Those of us from the United States and the Nordic countries are blessed by the democracy and the peace and stability that we enjoy. The Baltic countries have seen tremendous progress in the last several years. I've been privileged to visit two of those countries -- Estonia and Latvia -- and I look forward to coming to Lithuania at some point to see the progress that has been made in a very short time.

We are so honored of course that the President of Latvia is a very accomplished woman, which speaks volumes about the progress that is being made there. But we also know that there are still many struggles that are being confronted -- some along the lines that we heard from Marina in Russia -- and I'm very, very pleased that we have such a large delegation from Russia. I know that the Russian people have such enormous strength and courage,

and facing the difficulties that come in this transition are ones that will be overcome over time because of the leadership of so many of you from Russia in this room.

Then we are reminded of the continuing struggle for peace in a place like Northern Ireland, where Pearl is much too modest about the contributions that she and others have made to ending the troubles that are rooted in decades and even centuries of hostility and misunderstanding.

And then we know that in very rich countries like Kuwait there are still struggles over the role of women. I'm so pleased that Rasha could very eloquently describe for us the constitutional and historic basis of the changes that we hope will be made in her country, because I remember the stories of great bravery and courage of Kuwaiti women during the Iraqi invasion. It was women who often drove the cars taking people to safety. It was women who sheltered their brothers and husbands and fathers from the invading Iraqi soldiers. It was women who were often on the front lines of the work that needed to be done to liberate their country. Certainly the Kuwaiti women have more than earned their right to be seen as full citizens. Then we are reminded about the very real dangers that someone like Vera faces because of her work on behalf of human rights.

So bringing together this diverse group of panellists and those of us here in this hall will I hope give voice and help us find ways that we can support the work that is being done on the front lines of political change, on the new ways of economic private sector involvement that Anita described to us, and in bringing people together in the way that Penelope described. That really is the whole point of the Vital Voices movement. The conference in itself is a wonderful opportunity for people to come together, but unless the conference leads to follow up action, to new ideas, to new energy and commitment, it will not have fulfilled its mission.

So I'm very grateful that we could have gathered here these six remarkable women, from literally all over the world, to share their stories and their struggles with all of us. I'm certainly always reminded of the great opportunity there is to assist around the world in helping people achieve their human rights, their dignity, their economic social and personal aspirations.

So, if I could perhaps just request a final word from each of the panellists, perhaps from the point of view of what -- in one or two sentences -- in what you would

like to see come from this Vital Voices gathering here in Reykjavik, a city that did so much when it hosted the Reagan-Gorbachev meeting in putting our world on a course for a safer future. So let me start here with Marina, and then just go this way, ending with Vera. Just one or two sentences about what would mean the most for your work, for your hopes, coming out of this conference.

MARINA PISKLAKOVA: (Comments in Russian.)

PEARL SAGAR: What I would actually like to see coming out of this conference is what we achieved in Northern Ireland, which is basically me. In a sense I'm a product of Vital Voices, as I come out of our conference. We had a three-day conference in 1998. We drew up an action agenda, we covered particular areas that were a priority to my country and to our partners in the United Kingdom, and we had a person to follow-up on this conference. So I would like to say not just this conference - the First Lady has already said this is just a conference, this is the starting point, this is where you say hello to each other and actually speak to each other. After that, you need to come up with a priority list and work together. So, it's a total building up of not just a global friendship or partnership, but a partnership between the various countries here who are actually here today. So, I would like to see this conference be more than a conference. Not just a talking shop, but see action come out of it.

RASHA AL SABAH: We are taught always to think locally, but act globally. And, this is the first roundtable or conference of the Vital Voices, that I have personally attended. But I have noted that the previous venues of Vital Voices have been held in some places such as Palermo, Vienna, Montevideo, Trinidad, Belfast and so on and so forth. Not one in the Middle East or in my neck of the woods.

I believe that, going back to the Emir's decree in the absence of our parliament, this decree, if passed, would enable Kuwaiti women to vote and stand for election in the year 2003. But as I mentioned, the struggle has just begun, because we have to fight the case of whether this decree was urgent or not. Whether it is against Islam or our customs and traditions. So, what I would like to personally see come out of this particular conference is that a future venue of Vital Voice be held in Kuwait, in order to help our cause for the attainment - not for the attainment of our rights, for the restoration of our

rights that are ours, that are actually enshrined in our Constitution.

In addition to that, I believe there will be a domino factor if it were held in Kuwait. Only last week, believe it or not, in a place such as Saudi Arabia, the Grand Mufti of Saudi Arabia said it is alright for women to at least participate in the Islamic attainment of consensus. This is a fantastically positive step. Also in our other Arab Gulf States, in Bahrain, in Oman in the United Arab Emirates, in Qatar, women can participate in nominated forums. They are nominated by the powers that be, but they are not actually elected. And I think that if we attain our rights or if our rights are restored, I think it will have a very positive effect around the region. So, personally this is what I would hope to achieve out of this particular venue of Vital Voices. I want to thank the Honorable First Lady once again and again the government and people of Iceland.

PENELOPE BECKLES: What I would like to see is the continuation of the process to ensure women's empowerment. I would also like to see the continuation of the global partnership, the sisterhood, and the support that we continue to give to each other. And it is certainly my expectation that at the next Vital Voices conference I would definitely be hearing that in Kuwait, certainly when there is the next election, that women would have voted in it and that they would have ensured that there was some women in the Kuwaiti parliament.

ANITA GUPTA: My wish is very simple. I want to have left a thought behind in each of you present here today that it is important for corporations to take another look at traditional philanthropy. It's time the formal sector joined hands with the informal sector and put in place infrastructure and institutions to build self-reliance for the empowerment of women. It could be microcredit, it could be any other institutional means, but for the empowerment of women we need to join hands. And we also need forums such as Vital Voices, to see if they could be present in all those places in the world where they are currently not to assist in this process.

VERA STREMKOVSKAYA: (Comments in Russian)

HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON: I want to thank all of our panellists, and I think that we have a very good cross-section of the kinds of issues and concerns that women are struggling with around the world. We have six

eloquent spokeswomen for their own experiences and the particular challenges of their societies.

Often times at these Vital Voices gatherings and at similar meetings that are focused on democracy and human rights, it is good to be reminded that one person can make a difference, one woman's voice one woman's actions may very well turn the tide and that our voices must always be heard. But in order for them to be heard we need to support one another. We need to stand with one another and particularly to pay attention to those who are truly on the front lines of bringing about peace and change and democracy and often put themselves at risk in doing so.

So it's a great pleasure for me to have been able to be here today to moderate this panel and to hear for myself each of these very important voices. I look forward to the rest of the conference and hearing more from the vital voices from this part of the world and those who have come to be with us. Thank you very much.

First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton
Remarks at the Vital Voices Conference on Women and
Democracy,
Reykjavik, Iceland
October 10, 1999

Good morning, I am delighted to be here again and to see all of you here as we conclude this important conference. It has been a pleasure being in Iceland - and it has been an honor hearing so many women's vital voices from across Northern Europe. These are the voices of education and economic opportunity. The voices of civil society and human rights. The voices of public life and political participation. The voices of democracy and freedom and progress. I want to thank the workshop chairs and co-chairs whom I had the pleasure of meeting with this morning, for the work they have done, for the reports they have given and for their commitments to follow-up activities. I am very grateful to those who spoke before me. They gave a full overview of what is possible when people come together as we have done in this forum, with a commitment to honest dialogue, to appreciating our differences but finding common cause together and ways to work towards the realization of our own aspirations and dreams.

It is amazing to think that just 10 years ago, this gathering would not have been possible. Many of the participants here today would not have had the freedom to talk publicly about their lives or governments. Many would not have had the right to create NGOs or start businesses. Many indeed would not have had the freedom to make this journey to Iceland at all. So, it is a great tribute to the many, many of you who were part of the struggle and transformation of the last 10 years and often for many years before that which made this moment possible.

I want to thank the women who are alumnae of other vital voices conferences, who have been lifting up their voices on behalf of their own aspirations and reaching out to help others along the way. I want particularly to thank the Russian delegation, which has sent a very powerful message by being here. I understand this is one of the largest Russian delegations ever to attend an international conference and I think it is fitting that it would be this conference to which so many would come, as the transformation that is occurring in Russia is of significant consequence, not only to the Russian people,

but to the entire world. And I thank the members of the Russian delegation for their leadership and their work. I am also very grateful to the delegations of the Baltic countries. When I was in high school, I learned about Lithuania and Latvia and Estonia from people who had been forced to leave their beloved countries to seek refuge in the United States.

They would often talk about their hardships but they equally spoke of their dreams for a strong and independent future. And those dreams are certainly being realized and it is a particular pleasure to welcome the distinguished women from the Baltic delegations and in particular the distinguished President of Latvia.

I want also to thank our partner, the Nordic Council, whose nations are models, many of us believe, for women's equality, not only for this region, but also throughout the entire world. And, I especially want to thank our Icelandic hosts. The government and people of Iceland have done a superb job in putting together this conference and Sigridur Duna has been a wonderful leader. I know we are very honored today to be joined by President Grimsson; the Prime Minister Oddsson and I want to thank them for being here as well. I want to thank the students and teachers at Reykjavik Business School who opened their classrooms to us; and everyone in Iceland who seems to be extremely enthusiastic. And people who have come here from Northern Europe and have made us all feel so warmly welcome.

It is only fitting that this discussion about the next millennium take place in Iceland, a country with such a rich history and one that has a tradition of building bridges between the East and the West. During my short visit here, I've had the opportunity to see some of the history and the beauty. This unique country has not only a great past, but also such potential for the future. I saw the ancient Parliament. I stood on the deck of a wooden Viking ship, that has been built for a commemorative millennial journey from Iceland to North America. I looked at some of the Icelandic Saga manuscripts, which are the heart and soul of the Icelandic experience. I learned about the central role that women have always played in the settling and building of this country.

Reading through the Sagas, I even found a new heroine - Gudridur, who grew up in Iceland at the dawn of the last millennium. And who as a young woman sailed off to America in one of those open Viking ships, one of the

very first expeditions. She gave birth to the first known European child in North America, returned to Iceland and decided to take a journey to see the Pope in Rome, which she did. She returned to Iceland, where she lived to be a wise old age and where she became a very important personage and the mother of many who still live here in Iceland.

A thousand years later, as I look around this auditorium, I see many women here who have made their own courageous journeys. You may not have climbed into a wooden Viking boat and sailed across the ocean or found your way across thousands of miles to visit a Pope, but you have. I can only imagine the courage it must have taken for Vilija to come here from Belarus -- at a time when newspapers are being closed down. NGOs shut down. People disappearing. To speak as she eloquently did yesterday about human rights, political right and the future she would like to be part of in her native land. When we met recently at the White House, she had been disbarred from her legal profession because of her work on behalf of human rights. She has not given in or given up.

And I can only imagine the commitment it must have taken for Vilija to first enter politics in Lithuania. When she spoke to us at the Vital Voices conference in Vienna two years ago, she told us how as a student of music, she wasn't even allowed to travel to the music festival in Poland. And, how when she was first running for office, a famous male doctor told her, that he knew quite a lot about women's hormones and could assure her that there was nothing for a woman to do in politics. Well, thankfully, she didn't accept that diagnosis. She was elected to the parliament, and told us in Vienna that: "The vital voices of women must break this silence."

I have met countless women as I've travelled throughout this region in Europe and beyond, who are breaking decades and centuries of silence. I met them in Estonia, where I visited the first ever clinic offering comprehensive health care to women. I met them in Russia, where time and time again I have been so impressed by the strength and courage of the Russian women. I remember the first time, I met Gallina Karelova first in Yekiterinberg, then in Moscow and now at this conference. Galina is a Deputy Minister of Labor and Social Development, who took the unprecedented step of listening and learning from the NGOs. She has consistently hosted listening sessions with them, working with them to make sure that the government is responsive to the citizens on issues like domestic violence.

And I met women breaking the silence in Latvia, where in 1994 I met two women doctors who told me, with great emotion, that they were tired of watching children in their country die from preventable diseases. They later wrote me asking for help to improve children's health care. And one year later, Latvians and Americans met at the White House to celebrate a new partnership between a hospital in Riga and one in St. Louis.

I know each of you could stand up and tell similar stories. And each of you represents millions of other women in your countries. And each of you and each of them is part of a never-ending journey that women have taken to build their societies and their families a better future, to ensure that their voices can be heard. It's a journey that is continues generation to generation, passed on to us from mothers to daughters to granddaughters and it is a tribute to the countless women whose names we will never know, who will never have attended a conference just like this. That so many have struggled so hard to keep their unique cultures, their families alive during years of great hardship, totalitarianism and communism.

And, it is a journey that is just as difficult - and sometimes even as dangerous - as the one that Gudridur took 1,000 years ago. I've thought a lot about the women who are not here. In particular I think of Gallina Staravotya from St Petersburg, Russia, who I last saw at a Vital Voices follow-up conference in Bulgaria. She came up after my speech to tell me what she was doing and the actions she was taking to further political participation and against corruption in her country. That was the last time I saw her. Shortly after that she was assassinated. She like many others who fight for justice and democracy, paid the ultimate price. That may be hard for those of us from Finland or Norway or Sweden or Denmark or Iceland or the United States even to imagine. But here today at the dawn of a new century at then end of the most violent and bloody century in recorded history people are still giving up their lives, losing all they hold dear to stand up for democracy.

A conference like this is so critical to give support to the women throughout this region and throughout the world, who have borne the brunt of the changes and the suffering that has occurred during this transition on the road to reform. As we've heard during this conference, to many mothers are asking, "What good is democracy when our children don't have affordable child care or health

care?" Too many workers are asking, "What good is a free market when we're the first to be fired and the last to be hired?" And yet, I also hear in all of these voices at this conference and others like it that despite the obstacles which stand in the way, you have not lost faith and you are committed to continued reform as the way to create the positive changes that will benefit ourselves and our children in the next century. You are also committed that women will be among the leading architects and builders and champions of democracy and freedom.

The American delegation came here with two important, inter-connected goals. It is a delegation that consists of government officials headed by Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott of private businesses, NGOs, philanthropic organizations, and individuals. And we are here first to strengthen our friendship with Northern Europe - to help our friends in Russia, the Baltic States and the Nordic countries create a northern neighborhood. And we are here to advance the causes of women and of democracy because we believe that the two are inseparable. Progress for women and progress for democracy go hand in hand.

That is the promise that was made at the United Nations 4th World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995. The platform for action that came out of that conference very clearly stated that democratic progress depends on the progress of women. Economic progress depends on the progress of women. Women's rights are human rights and human rights are women's rights.

Now, I have been amazed by the number of people over the last four years who asked me what I meant when I said that. I remember in particular being on a Voice of America call-in radio program when a gentleman called me from a faraway country to ask me just what I meant when I said that women's rights are human rights? And I asked him to close his eyes and think of all the rights men have: the right to food and shelter, the right to a job and education; the right to be able to vote and to hold elective office; the right to be heard and valued as members of families and communities. Those are the same rights women want. And those are the rights we must fight for at the end of this century wherever they are still lacking.

We have worked to fulfill that promise that was made at Beijing by ensuring that women's concerns were central not peripheral to United States foreign policy. Secretary of State Albright has shown through words and

deeds that America's international objectives include widening the circle of democracy and expanding the participation of women around the world.

One of the ways we've done that is by creating this Vital Voices Global Democracy Initiative - a public-private partnership that is dedicated to ensuring an audience for women's voices, for changing women's lives, and, for transforming families, communities and societies.

We are working to give women around the world the tools of opportunity. Because what does the promise of a free market mean to the millions and millions of girls who can't read or write, or to the women who can't plan their own families or their futures?

We are working to stop the trafficking of women and girls, because what does an abstract political proposition called democracy mean to the one million girls who are lured from home with the promise of jobs and security and instead wake up in a nightmare, trafficked like drugs across national lines and sold into prostitution?

I know that some of the countries and NGOs represented here have made commitments to do what they can to stop this tragedy. No government and no citizen, should rest until we stop this modern form of slavery, protect its victims and prosecute those who are responsible.

And we are also working to open up the political process to all women, because democracy will never be fulfilled while women are still barred by law or tradition from making their voices heard at the ballot box or on the soapbox, in the home or the workplace. I was thinking yesterday as we were listening to Rasha from Kuwait, that here we are in a great city with a woman mayor, and I just imagine the talent that could be put to use in Kuwait and in other countries in the Gulf region if women were allowed to participate as Rasha asked.

It is important for a conference like this that we hear from those who do not yet enjoy the full extent of women's rights, because we all have a stake in ensuring that they eventually do. At conferences such as this it is the stories of women that make the greatest impression, as we meet in a workshop or in a hallway or over a cup of coffee. I have heard such voices over the past years in conferences from Vienna to Bulgaria, in Northern Ireland, in Uruguay and now certainly here in Reykjavik.

Yesterday, a group of women, like the ones here before, sat around this beautiful table. I am told that it is shaped like a boomerang because ideas are supposed to be thrown out and bounce back. And that's what happened. We can still hear the very telling words that Rasha al Sabah left us with when she said "We don't want a skim milk democracy. We want a full cream democracy." I can still hear Pearl Sagar from Northern Ireland saying that politics is a playground for large children, but a playground that she loves and urges all women to join. And I can still hear Anita from CitiCorp talking about the microcredit programs in India and saying that businesses must become more involved in global philanthropy to create more cooperation, not just competition.

These are among the messages that I hope we will take back from this conference. I have looked through the reports and there are many, many recommendations to be acted upon. There are women in rural areas who desperately need computers to link them to one another, young people who need mentors, workers who need training, women who need protection from domestic violence as Marina reminded us of. I want to thank all of the partners who are committed to the follow-up that will flow from this conference, starting with our long-term Vital Voices partners McKinsey & Company and Discovery Communications, for their extraordinary commitment. I was delighted that Deputy Secretary Talbott announced the U.S. Government and the Nordic Bank will provide \$2 million in microcredit to expand small businesses in Russia and the Baltics.

I also want to thank a group of Washington political consultants who will train NGOs and legislators from the region on how to advocate for issues and draft legislation. The magazine, *Good Housekeeping*, will create a fellowship that teaches business skills in publishing.

Akin Gump, an international law firm based in D.C., had come to this conference originally planning to offer summer associate positions to promising law students. But after meeting the women here, and hearing your stories, they have decided to also offer free targeted legal assistance to women in Russia. The Supreme Court of Iceland will train people from the Baltic States and Russia to understand their legal and judicial systems. A Swedish NGO - Women CAN - is already supporting women NGOs in Lithuania. Now working with the U.S. Government

and the private sector, it will offer the same type of support to women in Latvia, Belarus, and northern Russia. And people from all over the region will be able to log onto the Internet and get information in Russian about how to start a business, thanks to our government's SBA Online Women's Business Center. I was told this morning that the Open Society Russia has committed additional resources specifically for Vital Voices implementation of the initiatives of this conference. And I very much appreciate the leadership role that the Open Society Institute has played. I hope others will join them in making this partnership a reality.

This last session of this conference has to be a beginning, not an end. All the governments involved have agreed to hold a follow-up meeting in Lithuania. When they come together, they will want to know how far we've come and how far we still must go. And what they say is dependent on what the rest of us will do.

The sponsors of this conference can open doors. But only we can walk through them. And only we can hold them open for others to follow. I am often surprised when women come to these meetings and meet their fellow countrywomen whom they've never met before, who are working in the same field or who have a good idea that they want to be part of. And, they often leave here, not only with new friends, but new ideas, new networks, and new partnerships.

I am told we could see this happening in the last few days, as women talked together and huddled together in the hallways of the Civic Center and compared notes in the classrooms of the business school. Women in the cybercafe surfing the web and sending messages home about the contacts they had made in Iceland. I hope this conversation continues - in markets and villages and boardrooms and schoolhouses, in our homes and in our parliaments. Not only among those who are here, but as many people as we can reach.

Think of the two women who addressed us earlier, Tatjana and Elena. They are here with energy and enthusiasm which was clearly conveyed in their words. They are not alone, because they stand in the wake of many who have come before. I was told that Tatjana got a great deal of help from her grandmother and her mother, who never had the opportunities she is enjoying, but nevertheless encouraged her to follow her own dreams. Isn't that what we want for our daughters and our sons? Isn't that what this journey we are on is really all about? At the end

Vital Voices Iceland

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P = Participant IP = Implementing Partner

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WOMEN AND DEMOCRACY
at the Dawn of the New Millennium

October 8-10 1999
Reykjavik, Iceland



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Feminist issues centre stage

Hillary Clinton has taken women's policies into mainstream politics

AUSTRALIAN politicians put women's issues on to the fag end of mainstream policy. The ALP pioneered women's launches in 1993. John Howard has rediscovered the virtues of home-making. Hillary Clinton breaks the mould: she has learned to mainstream feminist issues and, not only that, win elections.

One of the most senior social democratic thinkers in the United States told me in Washington recently that the thing Australian politicians had most to learn from the Clintons was "how to speak to women".

Women vote for Bill Clinton en masse. In 1992, it was the women's vote that pushed Clinton over the line against George Bush. In 1996, there was a 17 per cent gap in the women's vote between Clinton and Bob Dole. The most dynamic factor in the 1996 Democratic election campaign was Hillary Clinton's ability to mainstream women's issues.

When Clinton was thrown out of office as governor in 1980, one of the telling blows in the conservative South was the fact that Hillary did not change her name to Clinton. Two years later he was re-elected: in the lead-up to the election his wife had quietly changed her name to Hillary Rodham Clinton. During the next term she transformed herself from being an extreme negative to being, in the words of David Osborne, "more popular than her husband".

With her experience as a lawyer for the Children's Defence Fund and as a past veteran of the George McGovern presidential campaign and the Watergate impeachment committee, she became chair of the most difficult committee in Arkansas — the committee to recommend new standards

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for education and teacher accreditation. With a one-year timetable for legislation, she took her committee on the road and held hearings involving more than 10,000 people. In the face of treacherous opposition, she paved the way for new tax revenue to pay for increased teachers' salaries, new standards, and stricter employment guidelines and performance criteria.

THE tough 1980s Arkansas learning curve has been revisited in the first term of the Clinton presidency. After the failure in health-care reform, Hillary Clinton has buckled down to plan quieter and more effective revolutions. Her best-selling book, *It Takes a Village*, complete with Vaseline-lensed pictures, puts children and their interactions with the community on to the central political stage.

She pushes for widening the concept of child rearing to allow men to play a more active role, and fights for decent childcare and the primacy of family, community and socioeconomic development over "geneticists" such as Charles Murray and Richard Herrnstein, who in their book *The Bell Curve* (1994) put forward racial inferiority as an explanation for social inequality.

Despite the many achievements of the women's movement in Australia, there has not been a mainstream

Australian federal campaign manifesto that put domestic violence as a major national issue. In contrast, the 1996 US Democrat campaign document states: "When it strikes, nothing is a more dangerous threat to the safety of our families than domestic violence because it is a threat from within. Unfortunately, violence against women is no stranger to America but a dangerous intruder we must work together to drive from our homes."

I can't remember a central campaign manifesto in which "a woman's right to choose", teen pregnancy, child support, investment in women's business and community policing were purposefully made major electoral issues. But the 1996 Democratic Party National Manifesto did all these things.

On top of this, every Clinton speech, from foreign policy to economic policy, was vetted for its women's dimension, for its delivery style and for its substance to women.

None of the issues is very novel. But Hillary Clinton has brought forward many women's issues to the point where the mainstream political culture must either consciously or unconsciously deal with them. They cannot be ignored.

As if reflecting on her own treatment and the political thuggery she has had to endure, she concludes her book: "In times of profound and overwhelming social change like the present ... extreme views hold out the appeal of simplicity. By ignoring the complexity of the forces that shape our personal and collective circumstances, they offer us scapegoats. Yet they fail to provide a viable pathway from the Cold War to the global village."

Australian political culture may have something to learn from Hillary Clinton's quiet revolution.

Dr Peter Botsman is executive director of the Evatt Foundation.