



EMBASSY OF THE
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Vienna, Austria

Office of
The Ambassador

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March 24, 1997

Ms. Melanne Vermeer
Deputy Assistant to the
President and Deputy Chief
of Staff to the First Lady
The White House
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Melanne,

Welcome back to the other side of the world.

You were wonderful to pop out of your office Friday the 14th for a quick catch-up with me. Since then, you've had a whole world of moving experiences, imprinted on your open soul. That's why I'm writing to remind you of our conversation.

We talked about Hillary coming to Vienna from Madrid to address a conference of "Vital Voices: Women in Democracy." The conference, organized by me, will fall under the auspices of the US/EU Transatlantic Agenda, and the NSC is drafting a request for the First Lady's presence. (Mary Ann Peters is our primary contact at the NSC, although others "above her" are enthusiastically supportive.)

At this point, Mary Robinson and Vesna Pesic are confirmed speakers. Three hundred participants will explore ways to strengthen the role of women in developing open, democratic societies. Three tracks of workshops -- Women and The Law, Women and Politics, and Women and Work -- will be action-oriented, developing skills in starting businesses, working with media, using the Internet, running for political office, designing laws, and writing grant proposals. The conference will stimulate

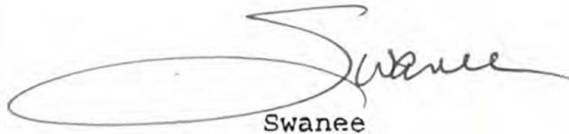
international debate, focused on concrete results for women in the emerging democracies.

You hoped to have an early answer so we could let our invitees know. We have been thinking about how to empower these women back home; a picture of each delegation with the First Lady, broadcast through their home media, would go a long way. We will invite the highest level women as far east as Ukraine, and from the Baltics to Skopje, to meet with women from western Europe and the U.S.

Plans are moving ahead swimmingly. Our fundraising would be very much facilitated by an affirmative answer from your office. That would also smooth my way with other ambassadors as I proceed with this somewhat "out of my box" endeavor. Which is to say, time is of the essence.

Please feel free to check with Theresa Loar, who is intimately involved in the planning. Oh, one other requirement. I don't think we could have this conference without your presence. How's your Ukrainian?

Much love,


Swanee

P.S. - I'm enclosing the earlier letter which you did not recall, giving the date of the conference. Since there is a personal message for her, I hope Hillary can see it.

P.P.S. - I'm in Denver and Dallas for a few days. You can reach me though 303-839-9781, and 214-828-4560.

I'll be back in Vienna Tues., April 1, then back in D.C. April 4-5 to speak at the White House/Center for Policy Alternatives conference. Can I see Hillary then perhaps?

Vital Voices: Women in Democracy

July 9-11, 1997

Vienna, Austria

"I have seen in Central Europe and the New Independent States the birth of movements designed to give women a real voice in the construction of new democracies."

U.S. Secretary of State, Madeleine Albright

A conference, "Vital Voices: Women in Democracy," will convene women from the governmental and private sectors of Central and Eastern Europe, to build networks with women leaders from the United States and European Union. Three hundred participants will explore ways to strengthen the role of women in developing open, democratic societies. Three tracks of workshops -- Women and The Law, Women and Politics, and Women and Work -- will be action-oriented, developing skills such as starting businesses, working with media, using the Internet, running for political office, designing laws, or writing grant proposals. The conference will stimulate international debate, focused on concrete results for women in the emerging democracies. A report will be published following the event, outlining specific actions to be pursued by participants.

Presentations by high level public figures will underscore the priority of empowering women as a foreign policy goal. As U.S. First Lady Hillary Clinton has asserted, "Democracy without the full participation of women is a contradiction in terms. To reach its full potential, it must include all of its citizens." The project will also further the goal of the US/EU "Transatlantic Agenda" to cooperate on more "people-to-people" ventures; and it will continue the work launched at the UN women's conference in Beijing, September 1995.

The "Vital Voices" steering committee, chaired by U.S. Ambassador to Austria Swanee Hunt, includes EU Commissioner for Humanitarian Affairs Emma Bonino; Deputy Chair of the Senate of the Czech Republic and Czech UNESCO representative Dr. Jaroslava Moserová; Serbian opposition leader Vesna Pesic; General Secretary of the Austrian People's Party Maria Rauch-Kallat; Senior Coordinator for International Women's Issues at the U.S. Department of State Theresa Loar. The conference is an outgrowth of Ambassador Hunt's privately-funded Vienna Women's initiative. A major airline is interested in providing over 100 round-trips from Eastern European locations, and other financial co-sponsors are being sought.

President Mary Robinson (Ireland) and Vesna Pesic (Serbia) have agreed to be among the plenary speakers at the conference.

Conference objectives:

- to define the common challenges faced by women in the emerging democracies and explore concrete policy initiatives to meet those challenges;

- to energize and equip women leaders to assert their influence in their home countries;

- to establish a wider East-West network of women leaders in support of democracy-building efforts in Central and Eastern Europe; and

- to increase public understanding about the economic, political and social contributions of women to democratic society.

A 50-minute film documentary, partially funded by a major Austrian bank, will profile women leaders in their homelands, leading up to their meeting at the conference. Produced in multiple languages, the film will carry the voices of extraordinary women in the new democracies, to millions worldwide.

Swanee Hunt
March 21, 1997

For more information on the "Vital Voices: Women in Democracy" conference contact:

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