



World Summit for Social Development  
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**United States Delegation**

REMARKS OF FIRST LADY HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON  
AT A SPECIAL EVENT AT THE UN SOCIAL SUMMIT  
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[Text as delivered]

Good morning. Thank you to Ambassador Teymour, Mr. Desai, and Mr. Nielson.

I am honored to participate in this historic gathering, where civic, religious, and social organizations as well as government leaders from around the world are uniting in the fight to eradicate absolute poverty, create jobs, and empower women and men to become full participants in their societies.

It is a special pleasure to be able to speak to a gathering that includes so many non-governmental organizations. Whether they operate in great cities or in remote villages, NGOs have always played a vital role in strengthening our global community. But particularly today, as all nations face new challenges and choices, the experience and wisdom of the NGOs will be critical in guiding us toward a safer, more just, and unified world.

The end of the Cold War created extraordinary new opportunities for growth and progress. But at the same time, ethnic strife and civil conflict have erupted across our planet, depleting our resources, draining our energies, promoting hatred and intolerance, and imperiling the idea of a free and open global society.

Today, too many nations waste precious resources on building and acquiring weapons of mass destruction, staging wars, and doing violence to basic human rights, instead of investing those resources in people. Too often, natural resources are destroyed and human ones exploited through socially irresponsible behavior. Today, too much time is spent in naked pursuit of power, instead of working for peace and prosperity.

It has become fashionable in recent years to assign blame for the world's problems to one group of nations or another. I hope this Summit does not succumb to that temptation. In fact, every nation needs to rethink its approach to social development and most nations need to do more for their own people and for humanity.

To meet the goals of this Summit, governments will have to go about their business in new ways. They will have to rethink how to protect their most vulnerable populations in a time of shrinking resources and accelerated global competition. They



will have to respect basic human rights, and that includes the rights of women and workers to be protected from exploitation and abuse. And they will have to create conditions that encourage individual initiative and a vibrant civic life.

Finally, as my husband said in a speech last week, governments will have to choose engagement over isolationism. With our economies and our societies becoming increasingly interdependent, we must work to create a global community in which economic growth and social progress result in shared prosperity and opportunity.

On a large scale, there is no better place to start than with an indefinite and unconditional extension of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

The threat posed by these devastating weapons endangers all the work we do to end poverty, create jobs, and empower people. Moreover, in balancing priorities and resources, all nations will have to realize that investing in people, not the acquisition of nuclear arms, is the way to make their societies stronger. Clean water, safe sanitation, basic education, health care, and human rights are better investments to strengthen societies in both the short and long term than the acquisition of or increase in nuclear arms.

Two days ago marked the 25th anniversary of the Non-Proliferation Treaty, now joined by 172 nations that realize that opposing the spread of nuclear weapons is in their self interest. And to further the goals of the Treaty, the United States and Russia have agreed -- through START I and START II -- to reduce their own nuclear arsenals. We must all continue the effort to deal responsibly with this critical issue.

In addressing the world's social problems, however, we cannot expect governments to act alone, particularly in an era of scattered and, some believe, scarce resources. Governments need NGOs to monitor their actions and mobilize them to find innovative solutions to problems. NGOs can also inspire us to work more effectively with each other -- within the NGO community and within the community of nations. That is why the participation of NGOs at this and other UN conferences is so invaluable.

The great social movements of my own country during the 19th and 20th centuries -- the abolition of slavery, the right of women to vote, as well as the civil rights movement would not have been achieved without the leadership of civic, religious, and social organizations.

And the same is true elsewhere. As Ambassador Somavia knows so well, civic organizations committed to human rights and the rule of the law were instrumental in assuring Chile's transition to democracy.

Through the work of nuns and lay people in the Philippines, civic groups in Bulgaria, grassroots organizations working across Africa and South America, and many others, NGOs have helped to improve the lives of tens of millions of men, women, children and families struggling to escape tyranny, poverty, and social dislocation.

Ultimately, this forum and the Social Summit is about supporting and building on that work, not for the sake of governments or ideologies, but for people. It is about putting people first. And putting people first requires realistic, workable solutions to complex problems.

Too often, the assumption is that any solution will inevitably be costly and complicated. In fact, we have proof to the contrary. We see grassroots efforts around the world that are reducing poverty, improving health and education, and promoting individual freedom.

UNICEF, to take one shining example, has had a decade-long focus on child survival and has pioneered many strategies that are low cost, including breastfeeding and oral rehydration therapy and immunizations.

Last year, polio was eradicated in the Western Hemisphere by a multinational effort and the U.S. was the lead donor for that. Around the world, the percentage of children immunized has been increasing in a rather remarkable way from 20 percent to 80 percent between 1980 and 1990.

In the United States, I am frank to admit, we have had to follow the lead of other countries so that finally we are attempting to increase the immunization rates of our own children. And our rates have increased, but are not yet where they need to be.

In South America, the involvement of NGOs teaching pregnant women self-diagnosis of maternal health problems has resulted in a dramatic reduction of the infant mortality in rural areas.

I saw myself at the Fabella Hospital in Manila, new mothers staying in the hospital long enough to learn to nurse their babies, which promoted a stronger bond between the mother and child and increased the chances of family stability.

And in countries where governments and NGOs have made voluntary, safe and effective family planning available and have provided related health services, we have seen an improvement not only in the lives of individuals but in the economic well-being of their countries.

Now, no one person, as we know so well, can be freed from the bondage of poverty or fully integrated into society without the means to earn a living, and the task of nations and NGOs is to promote policies that lift up the poorest in society, and to insist on core labor standards that help stop the exploitation of workers, many of whom are children.

Governments must be responsible for promoting disciplined economic policies. And, in the United States, the President is working hard to renew the American economy through fiscal policies that do assist those who are poor in such ways as providing tax credits and attempting to raise the minimum wage.

Investing in education goes hand in hand with providing economic opportunity.

As capital and technology become more mobile, differences in the quality of labor forces will become that much more apparent. And again, we can learn from each other as to how we can reduce illiteracy and increase prospects for employment and economic security.

Opportunity should be the reward for taking responsibility in life. That philosophy is a good guide when we consider strategies -- governmental and non-governmental -- to promote greater self-reliance and economic independence among all our citizens, including especially the poor and disenfranchised.

We have an example of that which will be discussed at this Summit when we look at the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh. Dr. Mohammed Yunus, who many of you in this room know, as I do believes that if you give people access to credit -- and ask them to take responsibility in return -- they will achieve greater economic and social independence.

Through its small loans to the poorest women in rural areas of Bangladesh, the Grameen Bank not only has improved the immediate circumstances of thousands of families, it has also fostered a greater sense of purpose and spirit of community among the people.

I only wish every nation shared Dr. Yunus's and the Grameen Bank's appreciation of the vital role that girls and women play in the economic, social, and political life of our societies.

Although women comprise 52 percent of the world population, although they are the primary caretakers for children and the aged, and are a significant presence in the workforce, they continue to be marginalized in many countries.

Worldwide, more than two-thirds of the children who never attended school or have dropped out are girls. Of the one billion people who remain illiterate, two-thirds are women. And a disproportionate number of those we call living in absolute poverty, are women.

Investing in the health and education of women and girls is essential to improving global prosperity, and I am glad that this Summit has endorsed the principle of equal rights and opportunities for women. In parts of Asia and South America we have seen education of girls help lift whole populations out of poverty. We have seen the education of women enhance their roles as mothers and increase their participation in civic life. So we must do more to ensure equal rights for women, along with equal pay and equal access to health care and education.

Tomorrow, as part of International Women's Day, it will be my honor to announce a major new United States commitment to expand educational opportunities for poor girls on three continents.

I'd like to end by saying that we must all take responsibility and do our part. Too often we engage in a false debate that says on the one hand only governments or on the other only individuals, are responsible for solving their own problems and those of the world. In fact, we all know that we need a partnership that is going to bring us all together. Governments can either support or undermine people as they face the moral, social, and economic challenges of our time. Individuals can either take initiative and responsibility or fall into hopelessness and despair. Simply put, no government, no NGO, no person can remain idle given the magnitude of the challenges we face and the uncertainties of the world in which we live.

For those who are skeptical about our progress, I suggest that we all reflect on the life of one extraordinary man, James Grant, who recently passed away. Jim may have been more responsible for saving more lives over the past 15 years than any other person in the world. Millions of children are alive today because Jim Grant challenged us, set goals for us, and devised simple, efficient, and affordable methods of intervening on behalf of children and their families. UNICEF will be issuing this book, *PROFILES IN SUCCESS, PEOPLES' PROGRESS IN AFRICA, ASIA, AND LATIN AMERICA*, which outlines some of the techniques and strategies that UNICEF has employed in order to create successful outcomes for people.

His legacy is not only found in the wonderful work that goes on every day at UNICEF, or in the success of his infant formula campaign, or in the packages of "Oral Rehydration Therapy" that he would carry around in his pocket and pull out on any occasion.

His legacy is in the jobs that each of us in this room, each of the people around the world in private, voluntary organizations and other NGOs and government

organizations do day in and day out, throughout the world. It is our duty to continue to live up to Jim Grant's challenge and to do our part to fulfill the goals of this Summit. In closing, I would ask that as we go about our business in the months and years ahead, whether we are in government or in the private sector or just acting on our own, that we draw strength and courage from Jim Grant's example and do justice to his memory. If we do that, then this Summit and all that follows will be a success.

Thank you very much.

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