

Transforming the Future in All Communities
Remarks for the Women of the Mountains International Conference
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Thank you very much, glad to be here. Happy International Women's Day!

Greetings from Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asia Richard Boucher; from Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Nick Burns; from Director of Foreign Assistance Randall Tobias; from Under Secretary of State for Democracy and Global Affairs Paula Dobriansky; from the Senior Coordinator for International Women's Issues Andrea Bottner; and of course from Secretary of State Rice, who herself studied in the mountains at the University of Denver. She just yesterday announced the first honorees of our International Women of Courage Awards.

I would like to speak today about what the U.S. government is doing in relation to the women of mountainous communities, but I would also like to explain how we think about many of these issues.

To begin, I'd like to tell you about a lunch I had a few months ago with some women of the mountains in the small city of Naryn, Kyrgyzstan, which stands at about 6,600 feet above sea level. Naryn is a true city of the mountains. Driving from Bishkek, we had to cross a 10,000 foot pass to get there. Shepherds still keep their flocks in mountain pastures many months of the year, only coming in to the outlying towns when winter forces them, as Kyrgyz nomads have done for centuries.

These women represented local NGOs and had agreed to tell me what was on their minds. We had not sought to invite only women to this meeting; it just so happened that many of the key activists in Naryn are women. They were smart, articulate, and strong – these were empowered women. They had many concerns. Foremost was the lack of economic opportunity and joblessness. They also complained about corruption, especially in elections. They saw alcoholism in their communities, as well as juvenile delinquency. They noted that bridal kidnapping unfortunately can still happen.

But, in addition to concerns, they also had hopes and plans. They did not ask me for help – they were explaining how they pressed local leaders and the local community to address these problems. They do not expect an easy

road – but they also do not expect others to travel it for them. They have organized to do it themselves.

I tell this story because I think it exemplifies the spirit that predominates here in Utah – the spirit of empowerment, the spirit of taking control of your own future. On a practical level, coming together like this to discuss issues facing women of the mountains gives us new information and ideas and helps us develop contacts around the world. On a more fundamental level, it provides confidence in our ability to transform our own future.

I am going to talk today about some of the ways the U.S. government seeks to empower local communities to transform their own futures. Others of course play important roles as well; we work closely with individuals, communities, and governments themselves, with other bilateral missions, international organizations such as the UN, and with policy experts. This conference is an opportunity to work on that coordination. Ultimately, though, our work as donors should be focused on providing communities the tools they need to formulate their own solutions and achieve their own vision for the future.

Getting back to Naryn, the U.S. government has been active there for many years. One of my colleagues served as a Peace Corps volunteer there in the mid-90s, and I met with the latest crop of volunteers; they are teaching English and consulting with small businesses. The U.S. government helped establish an NGO support center in Naryn, and the women I met with had used the office space, internet connections, and more importantly, the training to learn how to work effectively to improve community policies.

We are working with health care providers to teach doctors and clinics how to be more responsive to community needs, with a particular focus on maternal and pediatric care. We are working in local schools to move from a rote-learning system to one that encourages the development of intellectual skills that will empower the next generation. We have sent many local professors from the university in Naryn on exchanges to the U.S. (and sent many U.S. scholars there) to broaden connections and expand horizons.

The U.S. government will continue these programs. But these women were not asking for more help. They were explaining the next steps *they* were planning to take. The problems they raised they recognized as their own problems that required their own solutions. They recognize that government

has a role to play in those solutions – but they are looking more and more to their *own* government to play that role. They have real expectations for action, their voices are respected in the community. This democratic pressure has already compelled local officials to engage with these women.

The U.S. government’s involvement in Naryn is an example of what Secretary Rice calls “transformational diplomacy,” which she has defined as follows:

To work with our many partners around the world to build and sustain democratic, well-governed states that will respond to the needs of their people -- and conduct themselves responsibly in the international system...Transformational diplomacy is rooted in partnership, not paternalism -- in doing things with other people, not for them. We seek to use America’s diplomatic power to help foreign citizens to better their own lives, and to build their own nations, and to transform their own futures...

There is still a role for donors, such as the U.S. government, to play in helping Kyrgyzstan and other mountainous countries to move farther along the path of development. Outside actors can supply some of the tools, and some of the training, and some of the resources. But, real change will happen only when the people in the communities themselves feel empowered and enabled.

Our challenge is to determine what they need to be enabled. The women in Naryn seem to have reached that point. Naryn still needs help, particularly in the form of economic investment, but their active civil society will help ensure that such investment, when it comes, will go where the community needs it most.

So how do we as donors make that judgment? How do we identify the core assets and skills that a community cannot do without, and that it cannot provide for itself? How do we know when a community has those resources and is ready to become more independent? How do offer help without getting in the way?

Every case is different, of course, and the movement toward full independence is a gradual one. Nevertheless, the U.S. government believes that every country must successfully develop in three broad areas in order to create and sustain open, prosperous, and stable societies. The first is citizen participation in a democratic system of government; the second is a functioning market economy; and the third is a stable, secure environment. You cannot really achieve true individual empowerment – people cannot

transform their own lives – without all three: democracy, market system, and security.

These are complex goals, of course. To take the first broad area, for example, many elements make up a democratic system: a free and open media, an active civil society, an electoral system up to international standards, rule of law that protects the human rights of the people, and universally available education, to name just a few key items. And that's just the first area of democracy. We cannot expect a country to achieve everything at once. Nevertheless, we try to help it address at least part of all three as soon as possible.

Let us consider again the women of Naryn. Upon the fall of the Soviet Union, Kyrgyzstan was quick to embrace the ideas of freedom and the market system. Kyrgyzstan undertook serious economic reform measures, becoming the first former Soviet country to join the World Trade Organization. Kyrgyzstan became known for the most open media in Central Asia, with lively and vigorous debate about the future of the country.

Nevertheless, it is one thing to be able to express your opinion in a newspaper, or even to vote for your local member of parliament, but what if the government still does not respond to – or even notice – a major problem in your community? What do you do then? Democracy is far more than voting and speaking – it is organizing, and lobbying, and being persistent, and seeing beyond your own interests to a vision of a better community for all – and, most importantly, knowing that your involvement can make a difference. We encouraged local groups to recognize that role and provided some information and training on how to do it. We then stood back, and the women of Naryn made that role their own. They approach the serious challenges facing them with new confidence in their ability to improve the lives of their fellow citizens, both women and men.

Let me read you the testimony of a teacher in the mountainous Rasht Valley in Tajikistan, who participated in USAID’s Improvement of Basic Education project. A primary teacher for 20 years, she participated in this program and saw improvements in attendance and student participation, and a reduction in dropout rates. She says,

It’s not a secret that prior to IBET training I was very shy and hesitant about voicing my opinion. I was not confident in sharing my skills and knowledge with other teachers in my school, even with substantial teaching experience. After attendance in a series of

trainings, I feel that my capacity is strengthened and I could confidently share the enriched knowledge with my colleagues from the neighboring schools. I was selected to be a Key Teacher at Core School #1 to conduct trainings for teachers at satellite schools on methodological training days.

Not only has she been able to make a difference with her own students, but she is empowered to go out and spread the wealth.

I would like to mention two U.S. government programs that exemplify this approach to working as a partner with countries around the world. The first is our Trafficking in Persons report, and the second is the Millennium Challenge Account.

The State Department's sixth annual TIP report, which ranks the efforts of 149 countries in combating trafficking, was released last June. The goal of the report is not to punish, but to stimulate government action to end modern-day slavery by prosecuting perpetrators, protecting their victims, and working to prevent future trafficking crimes.

At the top of the report's tier rankings are those governments who meet minimum standards for prosecution, protection and prevention. Languishing at the other end of the report are "Tier 3" countries, whose governments face

possible loss of certain types of U.S. assistance for failing to comply with even the minimum standards.

One of the reasons the TIP report is such an effective tool is the possibility of consequences. Comparing this year's report with last year's, we have hard evidence that low rankings are effective designations. Thanks to intensified engagement by the State Department and increased political commitment from the governments themselves, anti-slavery efforts improved in many countries.

Even beyond the possibility of sanctions, countries do not want the stigma of a low ranking. Many are motivated to implement reforms just to raise their standing in the world – and, of course, to improve the lives of their citizens. I was serving in Armenia – another mountainous country -- when the TIP office was first able to collect sufficient information to demonstrate that trafficking was a problem there. Some government officials at the time did not even know what trafficking was, never mind that women in their own country were victims. Once they realized the problem, the government quickly responded.

Neither the U.S. government, nor any other outside actor, can solve the problem of trafficking for any other country. We can cooperate to an extent on law enforcement, diplomatic, and other levels, but ultimately a country must enact tough legislation, crack down on perpetrators, protect victims, and educate its populace itself. Our TIP report enables us to be partners, however – both by encouraging governments to do the right thing, and by providing a basis for technical assistance and cooperation.

The second example is the Millennium Challenge Account (MCA), which is run by the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC). This is a relatively new way the U.S. government helps fight poverty through economic growth. President George W. Bush proposed the MCA as a new model for providing foreign aid to developing nations. In this new model, which President Bush called a "new compact for global development," aid is provided to those countries that do three things:

- Rule justly;
- Invest in their people; and
- Encourage economic freedom.

The idea is to provide resources, but also incentives, to improve the lives of the people. A country must earn assistance through the MCA by scoring above a majority of its peers in 16 different indicators in those three categories. These indicators come not from the U.S. government, but from independent organizations that rate countries on such factors as corruption levels, percentage of GDP spent on primary education, and the cost of starting a business. If a country makes the grade, it can receive large grants to promote further development.

For instance, Georgia is benefiting from a \$295 million program over five years. Countries are encouraged to take their own initial steps, and then they can receive additional resources to continue their progress.

Some governments are already looking at these indicators independent of the MCC process itself, simply as way to judge their own performance – much as the TIP report’s rankings themselves motivate some officials. This has been called the “MCC effect.” It has helped raise international expectations for governments to provide for their own people and their own communities.

The U.S. government is doing its best to enable people in communities like Naryn to take charge of their own futures – and I see this conference as a showcase of that empowerment. I see here people from those communities

meeting to share ideas, to work together, to chart their own course. At this point the proper role for government is to listen as you share experiences.

We welcome your thoughts on ways we can be helpful, but what I am really here to do is to applaud your efforts at self-transformation. So with that, I will step back and let you get on with it. Thank you, and good luck.