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Ambassador of the Kyrgyz Republic

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,

First of all, I would like to express my opinion on why it is so important to raise again and again problems of sustainable development of the mountainous regions of the world. Today's planet Earth is experiencing challenges of natural and economic cataclysms, and this reflects first of all on lives of those who live among mountains. It is not coincidental that among the participants of this conference I can see people from many countries that are daughters and sons of mountains.

My homeland, Kyrgyzstan, has been attracting the rest of the world to problems of mountainous regions for many years, and one of the last UN General Assembly Resolution's on sustainable developments in mountainous regions and assistance to developing mountainous countries, was adopted on December 13, 2005 with Kyrgyzstan's active participation and me personally.

I am so glad that today's conference is devoted to women living in mountainous regions. Because life starts from a woman. And because sustainability of any society can be assessed by a status of women and her family.

Since 1991, the Kyrgyzstan has been experiencing massive changes in all spheres of the society, just as other former Soviet sister republics. This transition is still associated with hardships in finding our own place in the world's economic and social order. Poverty is still one of the main factors, which create obstacles on our move to progressive reforms. And it is women and their children who suffer the most. They are primary targets of economic strikes, unemployment, and social insecurity. Lack of sufficient number of pre-school facilities, including kindergartens and nurseries, leave very little chance to Kyrgyz women to be part of income-earning process.

Raising children and own feminine health are two closely interrelated issues of mothers in the mountains. Deficiency in nutrition, lack of many essential minerals and vitamins, including iron, iodine and protein, result in bearing babies who are initially not healthy. This creates a vicious circle of health and upbringing problems. We need a growing and healthy nation, but not for the expense of mother's own wellbeing.

Another thing which can make a real difference in uplifting women's participation in social and political life, would be providing them with knowledge and information about their legitimate rights as humans, citizens and future wives and mothers.

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,

Since the independence of the Kyrgyz Republic in 1991, my country has joined more than thirty international conventions on human rights protection, including all main conventions against women discrimination. I must say that our former regime has done

some useful attempts in order to protect women's rights. For example, a National Council on Women, Family and Gender Development was established several years ago. However, most of the efforts of this organization were pointed towards only one family. Towards the family, where women had been already dominating and leading the whole country.

It was probably injustice and desperate situation in gender issues all around the country, which made women to be in front-lines of the events, which changed Kyrgyzstan in March of 2005. It was our Kyrgyz women who had encouraged the leaders and the whole nation to change the course of Kyrgyzstan's modern history. May be it was another reason why our Revolution was named as a Tulip Revolution.

On November 20th of last year, a National Conference on Gender Equality took place in Kyrgyzstan's capital city of Bishkek. The event was organized by the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic, and the following points were marked as the core directives in achieving gender equality:

1. Changing of women's discrimination in appointing to supervising positions and achieving a balance in human resources policy;
2. Fighting unemployment, especially, in rural areas;
3. Improvement in quality of health services within the framework of "Manas Taalimi" Program.

In addition, it has been emphasized that salaries increase for women's labor, based on the tri-partial agreement of "Government – Employer – Labor Union", would eventually solve many of currently existing problems.

I am frequently being asked why there are no women in Kyrgyz Parliament. I would name a few reasons for that. First, Our patriarchal and religious traditions are still strong in the Kyrgyz society. And secondly, women themselves are not completely ready to real political struggles. As a result, the whole society is not ready to admit and appreciate the image of a woman – leader.

However, I must say, that there are many women who lead and successfully harness a growing number of strong NGOs. This is a very encouraging fact. Those NGOs is a real and significant power, which influences the society through communities.

I want to emphasize and repeat at this point again that it is vital to teach and educate women in mountainous regions how to develop entrepreneurship skills. Successful experience of micro-loans is a very serious proof that trained and responsible borrowers, who are mostly mothers, can make a significant difference in their families' lives. Those women more frequently than men apply for loans towards new businesses in trade and agriculture. The number is especially high among very poor households. Besides that, women must have an opportunity to new trainings, re-trainings, and vocational trainings. Modern changes in the life of the society require changes in women's attitude towards traditional labor and career growth.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As some of you remember, the idea on consolidating the efforts of mountainous countries towards sustainable development was raised during the First Mountains Summit in Bishkek in 2002. I am very grateful to the State of Utah for its hospitality in hosting this year's "Regional Educational and Informational Network for Rocky Mountains". And now, Kyrgyzstan is "full of fire" in its desire to bring people together for its Second Global Mountain Summit.

Thank you very much.