

Women of the Mountains Conference
Utah Valley University, Orem, Utah
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As prepared

Thank you to Utah Valley University, the Utah International Mountain Forum, and to the team that worked endlessly and behind the scenes and came together to put on this fascinating, inspiring, and important conference. I echo the thanks and praise the other speakers have shared to all of you involved. I first learned about the plans for this convening almost two years ago when Dr. Baktybek Abdrisaev, former Kyrgyz Ambassador to the U.S., came to the State Department, and I was lucky enough to have been invited to the meeting.

So a special thanks Ambassador Abdrisaev for the invitation to participate.

It's a privilege to be in the midst of so many people who've traveled from different parts of the globe who share the commitment to the important role of women in sustainable development and recognize the particular contributions and capabilities as well as the challenges, of women and girls in Mountain Communities.

While I grew up on the East Coast in New England and have a special place in my heart for the ocean, I also love the mountains. I went to college at a women's college in the Berkshire Mountains in Western Massachusetts, and one of our traditions was Mountain Day. We looked forward to it with much anticipation because we never quite knew exactly when it was going to happen but when it did, it was a gift. When the bells rang before class, usually on a Wednesday, classes were canceled, we were forced to close our books, and they even closed the library forcing the most studious of students to get outside. Some of us really did head for the hills to enjoy the day of freedom. Others found other ways to enjoy a beautiful autumn day and appreciate the outdoors. In any event, all these years later, I am thrilled to now be in a different mountain community in the majestic state of Utah. This time I am not escaping the daily grind of classes, but rather the daily grind of Washington, DC!

And this morning, just by coincidence while I was checking my email on the way her, I just got the email from my alma mater, announcing that today is indeed Mountain Day. So maybe that is a sign of something good!

It is quite propitious to be here at this time, just a week after world leaders gathered in New York for the UN General Assembly to reaffirm an ambitious agenda for the Sustainable Development Goals. Given such a set of goals and targets, it will take the talent, curiosity, and dedication of students like those involved this conference and in this college community, to achieve them by 2030.

As a representative of the Secretary's Office of Global Women's Issues at the Department of State, it is especially meaningful to be part of this gathering.

The advancement of the rights and status of women and girls and promotion of gender equality are integral to U.S. foreign policy. Numerous studies show evidence of a direct link between progress in women's employment, health, and education and greater economic growth and stronger societies. And when women's voices are fully-integrated into peace negotiations and security efforts, conflicts can be more often avoided and peace is longer-lasting. Women offer unique contributions to making and keeping peace – and these contributions lead to better outcomes not just for women, but for societies as a whole.

While women's issues have too often in the past been treated as “soft” issues or pushed off to the sidelines, the work of my office has been to change the mindset to more fully integrate women into all areas of diplomacy and development, and coordinate efforts across bureaus, agencies, and embassies to advance gender equality. This collaboration was critical, for example, to the development of the U.S. National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security and in guiding our implementation of UNSCR 1325 and related resolutions.

No country can succeed or prosper when half of its people are on the sidelines or marginalized. Certainly achieving progress on the Sustainable Development Goals will not be possible without the full participation and contributions of women and girls. As President Obama has often said, “one of the best indicators of whether a country will succeed is how it treats its women.”

The State Department has made women's issues a core element of U.S. Foreign Policy since the seminal 1995 UN Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, with some version of an Office or Representative charged with this mandate. But in 2009, the Office was elevated and expanded, with the establishment of an Ambassador-at-Large for Global Women's Issues who reports directly to the Secretary of State. This sends a signal that women are a cornerstone of our diplomatic engagement and key to meeting our development goals. We use a combination of policy formulation, programming of foreign assistance, and public affairs and public diplomacy to carry out this work throughout the State Department. Our Ambassadors are charged with raising these issues with their host governments to help change laws or get more women into leadership positions. Our diplomats receive training on gender integration as part of their Foreign Service career development. Our programs include grants and special funding mechanisms that enable the Department to test innovative ways to tackle entrenched gender inequality, unlocking the potential of women and girls to lead healthy, safe and productive lives and contribute to greater economic growth and stronger societies. Our social media platforms amplify the importance of why we promote gender equality and help to amplify the stories and voices of women and girls around the globe. We aim not to make women's issues just about women, we have also made engaging with men and boys a priority of our endeavor.

The agenda is daunting, our resources and staff are limited, so we must be strategic. Currently, we have a policy framework based around 4 key pillars. They are all interconnected, reinforce each other, and feed into the broader U.S. foreign policy goals and objectives of building a peaceful, safer, more prosperous world.

First, since we know countries that are more peaceful tend to treat women more fairly and equally, we put a focus on women's political participation and leadership to encourage more women to be in positions of decisionmaking that will affect all levels of society. A little over 22 percent of women parliamentarians globally are women, but we need to do better. So in terms of foreign policy, our efforts include support for democracy programs that include training for women, working with our embassies to help identify emerging women leaders who will then participate in International Visitor Leadership programs or apply for Fulbright scholarships. This also includes laying the ground work for such programs as the Women in Public Service Project—which links international

women with U.S. colleges to build interest and support for undergraduate interested in careers in public service, and in implementing UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security.

Although the U.S. was not the first country to develop a National Action Plan on WPS, we launched the first U.S. NAP in 2011, and an implementation plan in 2012. It has been a key tool for galvanizing further support for policies and programs that support women and girls. With the NAP implementation, we are working toward a future where women will have greater representation at the peace table and be present in the reconciliation and rebuilding processes after conflict subsides. We must also continue to integrate women as equal partners in international efforts to counter violent extremism, prevent conflict, and build peace

We have a special fund that supports Embassies and Missions overseas promote gender integration into their activities and operations. In Sri Lanka and Zambia, for example, where female political participation is among the lowest in world, the Department is helping women leaders speak out, vote and stand for election.

Second, since we know countries will likely be more prosperous, experience economic growth, and compete in the global market with the participation of all members of society, we put a focus on women's economic inclusion and opportunity. In too many places, women's economic potential remains untapped. Globally, women are less likely to have a job than men and are more likely to live in poverty. Yet, we know that women reinvest the money they earn into their families, raise healthier children, and send their young ones to school. Ninety percent of women's incomes go back into their families. So we work with private sector and other governments, talk to ministers of trade and labor, to discuss how more effective policies can be made to encourage women to join the work force, study the STEM fields, and remove access to things like finance and credit, markets, and training.

Some examples include leveraging our public diplomacy programming by working with embassies and posts to convene women entrepreneurship training and programs, incorporating women's economic components into major regional economic fora, such as the Women's Entrepreneurship in the Americas Initiative (WEAmericas)—a network linking women business owners and entrepreneurs

throughout the Western Hemisphere; the African Women's Entrepreneurship Program (AWEP), and the Alliance for Artisan Enterprise in partnership with the Aspen Institute. The artisan industry generates \$32 billion a year and employs hundreds of thousands of women in the developing world. I am looking forward to meeting some of the women entrepreneurs who are here, particularly those from Central Asia, since that is a region I am supposed to cover and I hope you can give me some advice!

The women's office, in conjunction with other State Department Offices and Bureaus, have also established women's entrepreneurship centers in a few countries. The centers have the goal of providing provide women with a safe, central location where they can get what they need to overcome the challenges faced by local women entrepreneurs, and help women learn how to run small and medium businesses.

Third, we want societies to be secure, stable and at peace, this means protecting human security and building a culture of human rights. So we put a focus on marshalling forces to tackle gender-based violence in all its forms. Intimate partner violence, domestic violence, trafficking in persons, sexual violence in conflict, early and forced marriage, HIV/AIDS, honor killings, acid attacks, harmful traditional practices like female genital mutilation or cutting FGM/C, sexual harassment, the list goes on--GBV comes in many forms and has no international boundaries, and happens even here in the USA despite the laws on the books.

Since WWII, nearly every global conflict has been about some form of ethnic cleansing, in other words, one group trying to wipe out another group of people. In this type of conflict, sexual violence is perhaps one of the most effective tactics to destroy the fabric of society, and is used in many of today's conflicts. Last summer Secretary Kerry joined forces with the UK Foreign Secretary in London for the Global Conference to End Sexual Violence in Conflict, pledging to step up efforts to hold perpetrators accountable. Leadership at the highest levels of government is taking a stance against this scourge.

In 2011, the State Department in collaboration with a cross-section of U.S. agencies, and in consultation with civil society, launched its Strategy to Prevent

and Respond to Gender-Based Violence Globally, and encompasses ways how diplomacy can address GBV from all sides—prevention, protection, and prosecution of perpetrators.

Various offices in the State Department, primarily the Bureau that works most closely on international law enforcement, recently rolled out a “Guide to Gender in the Criminal Justice System” for practitioners in the field; to train staff responsible for monitor gender-based violence programs in humanitarian crisis situations to be better sensitized and prepared to identify and prevent sexual gender-based violence.

Under one of our grants mechanisms, the Office of Global Women’s Issues worked with Embassy Conakry in Guinea where 97 percent of women and girls are exposed to FGM/C. Although illegal in Guinea, the practice is prevalent and persists across ethnic and religious lines. It is often performed in poor sanitary conditions with crude and dirty instruments and often without anesthesia. Through partnerships with the host government, UNICEF, Guinea’s first lady and 26 local civic and human rights organizations, our Embassy launched nationwide educational and media campaigns urging policymakers, health professionals, religious leaders, the public and those performing FGM/C to abandon the practice. Since the start of 2015, 265 of Guinea’s villages and townships have voluntarily and publicly denounced FGM/C as part of the national campaign. There are many more examples of how we are working overseas on GBV issues.

Fourth, in order to sustain the progress that has been made, continue to advance our common humanity, and attain the SDGs, we need to focus on empowering adolescent girls. Investing in girls is an investment in our future. Girls’ education has been a key tenet of our overall approach to supporting women and promoting gender equality. Educating girls can be the best antidote to breaking the cycle of poverty, preventing 14 year old girls—or even younger—from early and forced marriages, and stopping harmful traditional practices like female genital mutilation or cutting. Adolescent girls who stay in secondary school one year longer than they might have can increase their future earnings by 10 to 20 percent.

Early and forced marriage increases early pregnancy, and young mothers’ children have higher rates of infant mortality and malnutrition than children born to mothers older than 18. Girls account for more than 80 percent of new HIV infections among adolescents in countries hardest hit by HIV/AIDS. And

more than 62 million girls around the world aren't in school, which means they face diminished economic opportunities and increased risk of discrimination and violence

We are looking at innovative ways to leverage existing resources and programs to advance girls education globally under the Let Girls Learn initiative. This initiative leverages other parts of the U.S. government and includes working with local leaders to develop community-based solutions, such as creating technology camps for girls or working with at-risk girls. We've started a challenge fund that brings together different partners to work with us and to partner with communities to find the right solutions. Our aim is to empower a generation of girls to stay in school until they graduate, and to contribute to their economies and societies.

One example of how we are marshalling our forces to empower girls is in Rwanda, where, the Department launched the Women in Science (WiSci) camp this summer to give adolescent girls skills in science, technology, engineering, art and design, and mathematics—(STEAM). The 3-week long camp also included leadership building, skills-based workshops, and opportunities for cross-cultural exchange and included 120 girls from 9 countries.

October 11 is the International Day of the Girl, and this year's theme is "The Power of the Adolescent Girl: Vision for 2030." We're working with our embassies and posts globally to encourage them to take action and carry out programs on behalf of girls in the countries where there is a U.S. presence which will help to further elevate the importance of and value of girls to every society.

A mantra that is often used when talking about women's issues, is that investing in women and girls isn't just the right or moral thing to do, rather it is one of the smartest and strategic ways of building a safer, peaceful and prosperous world. In far too many places girls are undervalued and robbed of their childhood, women are sexually exploited, and suffer physically and psychological abuse. Yet, women are not victims—those who have endured these horrors are survivors; their identity must not be defined by those damaging experiences. When allowed enjoy their full rights and gain access to opportunities, women can be positive agents for change.

Around the world, U.S. posts are using creative diplomacy, public affairs tools, and a little innovation, to craft resource-neutral and low-cost solutions. Sometimes this

can mean convening women in countries affected by conflict, providing a safe space for women to come together and speak across ethnic, racial, or political lines. This has led to increased trust and solidarity and have helped advance women's role in peace negotiations.

As President Obama said during UNGA last week, reducing inequality and creating opportunity at home and around the world “is not just the job of politicians, this is work for all of us.” So those of you gathered here today are already on board, we need to get more people around the world to join this collective endeavor. Governments, businesses, faith communities, NGOs, students, and citizens all have a stake in supporting the rights and empowerment of women and girls, if we hope to see progress on the next phase of the SDGs by 2030.

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