

**Ambassador Melanne Verveer**  
**U.S. National Voluntary Presentation**  
**June 30, 2010**

Mister President, Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you for providing me with this opportunity to present, along with my colleague Alonzo Fulgham, the U.S. National Voluntary Presentation.

The United States fully embraces the Millennium Development Goals. As President Obama has said, the MDGs are America's Goals. We are committed to working with others towards meeting the Goals by 2015 and to helping ensure that development gains are sustainable.

Millennium Development Goal 3, on gender equality, is the linchpin—the means to the achievement of all other MDGs. No country can get ahead if half of its citizens are left behind. And the United States recognizes that we cannot achieve any of the MDGs unless we invest in women and girls.

As our Secretary of State has noted, women and girls are one of the world's greatest untapped resources, and investment in women and girls is one of the most powerful forces for international development around the world. As such, promoting gender equality is not just the right thing to do—it's the smart thing to do.

Women are still vastly underrepresented globally. Women are half the population yet they hold less than one-fifth of positions in national governments. They are still significantly outnumbered in the chambers of parliaments, in provincial councils, and they are often missing from negotiating tables where conflicts are to be resolved. Yet we know that when women take their rightful place and bring their talents and experiences to bear in the political arena, they invest in their families and communities. At the country level, higher rates of female participation in government are associated with lower levels of corruption.

Research demonstrates that investments in women also positively correlate with the general prosperity of nations. Women-run small and medium enterprises are proven drivers of GDP, and when they are able to access the tools that they need, from skills training to education to market access, property rights, technology and credit, they can make an enormous difference. Women are a safe and reliable investment, because the money that they borrow is not only likely to be repaid—it is also used for the benefit of their families.

Studies also show that investing in the health and education of women improves the lives of families and communities. Investing in women's health acts as a positive multiplier, benefitting social and economic development through the health of future generations. And when a woman receives just one year of schooling, her children more likely to survive, to avoid illness, and to attend school themselves.

In most of the world, women are responsible for the health and care of their families, for managing natural resources, for farming, for controlling household goods. And when one considers the development challenges that we face—poverty, hunger, lack of education, poor health, climate change—it is clear that women and girls are fundamental to making progress in these areas. The question, then, is not whether we can afford to invest in women and girls—it is whether we can afford not to.

For this reason, the United States has put women and girls at the core of its development strategy and foreign policy. The creation of the position I hold—U.S. Ambassador-at-Large for Global Women's Issues—is unprecedented for my country and recognizes that we can't begin to address the security, environmental, governance, economic, or development challenges of our time without the participation of women at every level. This strategic commitment to women's issues is also reflected in the Obama Administration's creation of a White House Council on Women and Girls and the appointment of a White House Advisor on Violence Against Women. The centrality of women and girls is also evident in and integrated throughout US foreign assistance programs—in our budgets, our policies, and our programs. Today I'll focus on three major development initiatives that illustrate our commitment to achieving the MDGs through advancing women's equality.

The first is President Obama's **Global Health Initiative**, a \$63 billion program to improve health and strengthen health systems worldwide. Improving global health is an enormous undertaking, so we are employing a strategic focus on those people



whose health has the biggest impact on families and communities—women and girls.

Our women- and girl-centered approach to global health will improve health outcomes for women and girls, both for their own sake and because of the centrality of women to the health of their families and communities.

To that end, we are amplifying programs that serve women and girls, including maternal and child health, family planning, and nutrition programs. We are focusing on strengthening health systems in order to provide women with access to an integrated package of essential health services. And importantly, we are linking our health programs to efforts to remove the economic, cultural, social, and legal barriers that create obstacles to obtaining care for women and girls, including gender-based violence, harmful traditional practices such as early and forced marriage, lack of education, lack of economic opportunity, and unequal access to adequate health services and facilities.

The GHI also reinforces the U.S. commitment to addressing the global pandemic of HIV/AIDS. In many parts of the world, the face of HIV/AIDS is a woman's. Through the GHI and our continued work through PEPFAR, we hope to provide women and girls—and, in particular, adolescent girls—with the tools and knowledge they need to protect themselves. To that end, we are redoubling our efforts to integrate our HIV/AIDS treatment with programs that address gender-based violence, a scourge that contributes spread of HIV. And we are scaling up our treatment of HIV-positive mothers so they are less likely to pass on the virus to their children.

Investment in women and girls is also a key pillar of the President's **Feed the Future Initiative**, which Secretary Clinton has been leading. The program is a \$3.5 billion commitment to strengthen the world's food supply, so farmers can earn enough to support their families and food can be available more broadly. It focuses on addressing hunger through greater agricultural productivity, and recognizes that most of the world's food is grown, harvested, stored and prepared by women. This initiative recognizes that women's contributions to agricultural production and their specific needs for training, access to financial services, markets, and decision-making must be met in order to enhance agriculture productivity and end hunger. Although women represent the majority of farmers in some areas, they seldom own the land they work. The reform of land tenure rights and property and inheritance laws can help women succeed in farming and help secure the world's food supply.



Women and girls are also instrumental to the U.S. response to the challenge of **climate change**.

In Copenhagen, last December, Secretary Clinton announced that the United States would work with other countries to mobilize \$100 billion a year by 2020 to address the climate needs of developing countries, and women and girls must be a key part of this work. Women are well-positioned to be active participants in the fight against climate change. They are 70 percent of rural and small scale farmers. In many areas, they have primary responsibility within families for securing water, food, and energy sources, and therefore can play a key role in safeguarding their families and communities from environmental hazards. Women are already assuming leadership in advancing climate change solutions around the world, and we need to increase their access to adaptation and mitigation technology so that they can promote and employ new green technologies in their families and communities.

Not only can development not thrive without the full participation of women, but neither can peace be achieved unless women have an equal role in shaping it.

President Obama's recently-released National Security Strategy recognizes that "countries are more peaceful and prosperous when women are accorded full and equal rights and opportunity."

Around the world, the places that are the most dangerous for women also pose the greatest threats to international peace and security. Where women are oppressed, governance is weak and extremism is more likely to take hold. Women must be active participants during the peace process and its aftermath. Not only do women have the right to participate in decisions that affect their lives, but, for a sustainable peace to take hold and for all of our lives to improve, women must take an equal role in shaping these decisions. The United States remains committed to working both bilaterally and multilaterally to accelerate implementation of the Security Council resolutions on Women, Peace and Security.

These initiatives reflect more than examples of programs designed with the needs of women and girls in mind. They demonstrate that investing in women and girls is a fundamental part of our development strategy and foreign policy. This investment in women must be at the core of any strategy to grow economies, attack disease, strengthen democracy, and achieve peace and security. As we head toward the MDG Summit this fall, we look forward to joining hands with our partners and allies around the world to make progress towards meeting the MDGs through the empowerment of women and girls—the surest way to succeed.