

February 27, 2008

*Statement by Ambassador Patricia P. Brister, United States Representative to the Commission on the Status of Women, at the 52<sup>nd</sup> Session of the Commission on the Status of Women, February 27, 2008*

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Thank you, Madam Chair. This is my third year as U.S. Representative to the CSW, and it is always a pleasure to address this body. I would like to speak to some of the main themes of this session: violence against women and in particular human trafficking, women and conflict prevention, and women and HIV/AIDS.

On human trafficking, the U.S. Government has obligated over \$528 million in international anti-TIP funding since fiscal year 2001. In fiscal year 2007, we committed approximately \$79 million to fund 180 anti-trafficking programs in over 90 countries, and spent an additional \$23 million for domestic projects. On domestic efforts, in addition to existing federal law, 27 U.S. states have passed criminal anti-trafficking legislation by the end of 2006. Our Department of Justice continues to increase the number of anti-trafficking task forces. Forty-two task forces now exist in 25 states, which have state, local, and federal law enforcement working together with NGOs to rescue and provide care to victims and prosecute the traffickers. The Department of Health and Human Services also has anti-trafficking coalitions in 21 areas of the U.S., with the goal of increasing the number of victims who are identified; assisting victims in leaving the circumstances of their servitude; and connecting them with qualified service agencies and benefits.

Trafficking for sexual exploitation makes up an estimated two-thirds of transnational trafficking. But trafficking for labor exploitation also takes place, and many foreign governments do not have the means to address this problem. The U.S. hopes to devise and implement strategies concerning the trade of products made through exploiting trafficking victims. By denying access to markets for products made through forced labor, we hope to discourage employers seeking to profit through exploitation. As required by the 2005 reauthorization of the Trafficking Victims Protection Act, the Department of Labor will develop and make available to the public a list of goods that it has reason to believe were produced by forced labor and child labor in violation of international standards. The Department of Labor is gathering information worldwide and aims to publish an initial list by 2009.

In the past, UN peacekeeping forces have aggravated the trafficking problem by creating a demand for victims whom they exploit sexually. The U.S. will continue to encourage the UN, NATO, and OSCE to ensure that their peacekeepers and contractors not engage in TIP or the exploitation of TIP victims. Beginning with the 2008 Trafficking in Persons Report, we will be assessing the efforts of national governments to prevent their nationals, deployed abroad as part of a peacekeeping or similar mission, from engaging in or facilitating human trafficking. We will also work with NGOs and government

representatives, especially those from troop contributing countries, in order to identify ways to address the problem.

The Secretary of State has been personally involved – diplomatically and programmatically – in women and conflict prevention. In June 2007, Secretary Rice and the Austrian Foreign Minister, on behalf of a network of women leaders called the Women Leaders’ Working Group, wrote to the UN Secretary-General and Deputy Secretary-General. They urged the UN leaders to establish a mechanism to increase the number of women considered for UN special representative and special envoy positions, including as heads of peace operations. They pointed out that at that time there were no women among the 54 Special Representatives of the Secretary-General assigned to conflict and post-conflict regions. The Deputy Secretary-General suggested that the U.S. submit a list of suitable women candidates for senior positions. The list that we submitted consisted of women from both developed and developing countries, including some U.S. candidates.

War and conflict often cause populations to move on a large scale. Most refugee and internally displaced persons settings are in need of effective, standardized means to address rape, domestic violence, exploitation, and abuse. In response to these challenges, the Department of State is funding an initiative focusing on Prevention and Response to Gender-based Violence for refugee populations. Since the program began in 2000, the Department has through this program provided over \$27.8 million for gender-based violence prevention and response projects through international organizations and NGOs. Although programs largely target women and children, many of these programs include the active participation of men, who are a key part of building peace and security within conflict-affected communities. In addition, the U.S. Agency for International Development funds initiatives related to rape crisis counseling overseas. Currently there are initiatives in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Haiti, Jordan, Liberia, South Africa, Sudan, and projects related to the Africa region in general.

The U.S. Government has designated “Increasing Gender Equity” and “Reducing Gender-Based Violence and Coercion” as cross-cutting issues within the Foreign Assistance Framework. These issues have been factored into our development portfolios across various sectors, including health, education, democracy and governance, and economic growth. The U.S. Government has been a leader in addressing access to quality health care, and has worked to empower women to make healthy decisions, as well as to engage men as supportive partners in their wives’ health.

Additionally, the U.S. Agency for International Development supports maternal health interventions to reduce suffering and deaths related to pregnancy and childbirth. These include programs on enhancing nutrition for mothers and children; increasing access to postpartum and newborn care; and improving the management of pregnancy complications. The U.S. Government is the world’s largest family planning bilateral donor. Last year USAID delivered over \$436 million in voluntary family planning assistance to over 60 countries to help families plan the timing and spacing of their children.

USAID has just announced a new \$70 million, five-year program – “Fistula Care” – to prevent and treat obstetric fistula in developing countries. The program will increase access to emergency obstetrical care; help hospitals strengthen their capacity to provide surgical fistula repair; and work with community groups and individuals to increase understanding about obstetric fistula and its prevention. “Fistula Care” will also conduct research to strengthen the quality of fistula services, and will work toward institutionalizing fistula prevention, repair, and reintegration programs in developing countries. The U.S. Government has addressed another serious threat to women’s health, female genital cutting or mutilation, since the mid-1990s. Over the years, we have funded research and supported programs that help communities abandon this harmful traditional practice.

The HIV/AIDS epidemic poses exceptional health and humanitarian challenges and threatens prosperity, stability, and development. The President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, or PEPFAR, supports a variety of bilateral, regional, and multilateral initiatives. In May 2007, President Bush announced that he would work with the U.S. Congress to reauthorize PEPFAR. The President’s five-year, \$30 billion dollar proposal would double the U.S. initial 2003 commitment of \$15 billion. Assuming the Congress meets the President’s fiscal year 2008 request, and with the new \$30 billion proposal, the U.S. will have committed \$48.3 billion over 10 years to fight HIV/AIDS.

PEPFAR promotes strategies to address gender issues in programs in five key areas: 1) making sure women and men have equal access to HIV programs, 2) addressing male norms and behavior, 3) reducing violence and coercion, 4) increasing women’s and girls’ access to income and productive resources, and 5) increasing women’s legal rights.

Madam Chair, I’d like to mention two panel discussions that the U.S. will be holding. The first one on “Child Marriage: Promising Approaches for Prevention” will take place this Friday, February 29. The second event on “The U.S. Family Justice Centers: An International Model for Coordinated Community Support to Combat Domestic Violence” is scheduled for Monday, March 3. We hope to see many of you there.

Thank you.

