



The United States Mission to the United Nations

As prepared for delivery

Statement by The Honorable Meryl Frank, U.S. Representative to the Commission on the Status of Women, on the priority theme: the equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men, including caregiving in the context of HIV/AIDS, at the Commission of the Status of Women, Wednesday, March 4, 2009.

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson,

I am honored to be with you today, and to serve as the U.S. Representative to the Commission on the Status of Women.

Let there be no doubt: The United States is firmly committed to promoting women's empowerment and well-being, both at home and around the world. We see this gathering as an important forum for renewing our efforts. This group represents women and men worldwide who are striving for women's equality and empowerment. These are global aims, and your creativity, energy, and intellect are huge assets to our common efforts. The entire U.S. delegation looks forward to working closely with our fellow delegates and with the hundreds of representatives from women's organizations and other civil society groups.

The United States is determined to help ensure that women and girls have not just full civil rights, but also the education, the nutrition, the medical care, and the economic opportunities that they need and deserve. President Obama has already shown that he is a strong advocate for women's issues. As one of his first acts, President Obama repealed the so-called Mexico City Policy, which prohibited NGOs working abroad from using U.S. funding to provide—or even offer counseling about—the full range of family planning options. By moving swiftly, President Obama has empowered women to gain access to the health information and services they need to maintain their own well-being and the health of their families. To further improve women's health, global development, and family planning, the Administration looks forward to working with Congress to restore U.S. financial support for the U.N. Population Fund.

In addition, President Obama has signed legislation that finally protects women in the United States from salary discrimination.

The President has appointed other strong leaders on these issues. As you well know, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton led the U.S. delegation to the historic Beijing Women's Conference in 1995. As Secretary of State, she will, of course, be an eloquent advocate for women's rights worldwide.

We are fortunate to have another strong leader on women's issues in Susan Rice, the U.S. ambassador to the UN. In her confirmation hearings, Ambassador Rice spoke in favor of ratifying the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. She strongly said that it is "past time" to get this done, and doing so "will be an important priority for this Administration."

As the United States continues to bring new energy to these issues, it will review the binding global pacts that help empower women. That includes the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. We will remain committed to working with the international community to promote many of the principles embodied in these conventions.

But as you know, signing treaties or announcing a clear international standard is not enough to improve the lives of millions of women. As Secretary Clinton said during her recent trip to Asia, "It is important to raise the role of women on an ongoing basis. All women should exercise their rights to be fully functioning, productive citizens." In order to do so, governments, NGOs, the private sector, and international organizations such as the United Nations must work as partners to transform the role of women in their societies. The United States urges member states to fully implement Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace, and security, and Security Council Resolution 1820 on sexual violence against women in conflict situations. We need urgent action in the fight to end violence against women, honor crimes, commercial sexual exploitation, and trafficking in persons.

We must also work to support women's and men's efforts to balance work and family. In our own country, we can do better at providing quality child-care, elder care, and flexible work hours, and we can do more to address the concerns of the many American women who work full-time but feel as if they are not meeting either their responsibilities at home or their responsibilities in the workplace. We can also do more to encourage men's participation in family care.

Let me offer a personal aside here. While working at the World Health Organization (WHO) in Copenhagen, Denmark on the International Code of the Marketing of Breast Milk Substitutes, I first recognized that working women should be able to take a period of leave following the birth of a child without losing their jobs or benefits. However, the United States at that time was one of the few nations that offered no maternal or parental leave policy at the national level. I was proud to be an author of the national Family and Medical Leave Act that provides eligible employees with a leave from work to recover from a serious illness or to care for a newborn, newly adopted or seriously ill child, parent, or spouse. Care-giving is something that I know about and care about, and I can assure you that the Administration cares about it too.

The title of this session points out that men and women share important duties when it comes to care-giving, and this is especially true with HIV/AIDS. HIV/AIDS poses a unique challenge to the health and development of women and girls worldwide. The U.S. is responding through the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, or PEPFAR, as well as by supporting the Global Fund to Fight HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria. Gender issues are incorporated into all aspects of PEPFAR's prevention, care, and treatment programs, with a commitment to five strategies:

- Increasing gender equity in HIV/AIDS-related activities and services.
- Addressing male norms and behaviors that may worsen the epidemic.
- Reducing violence and coercion against women.
- Increasing women's access to income and productive resources.
- And deepening women's legal rights and protection.

PEPFAR has been a remarkable success story in its first five years. A key reason has been our commitment to incorporating gender awareness into its programs, including acknowledging the pivotal role of men. Thus far, the United States has:

- Helped provide treatment for 2.1 million people;
- Helped care for more than 10 million people living with HIV/AIDS, of which more than 40% are orphans and vulnerable children; and
- PEPFAR has helped prevent mother-to-child transmission of HIV during nearly 16 million pregnancies, thereby leading to nearly 240,000 children to be born HIV-free, who would otherwise be born HIV-positive.

To share some of the lessons we have learned, the U.S. is pleased to be hosting a side event next Thursday, March 12 entitled “Integrating Gender into a Locally Owned HIV/AIDS Response.” Assistant U.S. Global AIDS Coordinator Michele Moloney-Kitts will speak, and we hope to see many of you there.

We have taken important steps, but there is much more to be done. The United States is fully dedicated to advancing the rights of women. Equality for women across all levels of society is vital to global progress, and today it is vital to rebuilding our global economy.

On behalf of the United States, I assure you that the U.S. delegation is eager to meet with you, to work with you, to exchange ideas with you, and to strive with you, so that together we can craft a world in which women and men can achieve their potential and enjoy full and complete lives. Thank you.

