

## **Women in Government: A dialogue with Secretary of State Clinton**

March 12, 2009- Secretary of State Hillary Clinton addressed US government workers to discuss the role of women in our government. Government workers asked questions- leading to a very interesting conversation about women in government and foreign service.

Official Transcript from the US State Department:

SECRETARY CLINTON: Well, good morning. And it's wonderful to be here today for this special occasion. I want to thank our musicians and singer, as you can see from the program, the Lavenia Nesmith Quartet. And I'm delighted – John Robinson told me that he was determined to have an all women's musical performance. So I thanked John for that. (Applause.) I want to thank Julie Connor for those warm words, for her leadership in this event, and to thank the Office of Civil Rights, as well as the women of the Senior Executive Service for organizing today.

In addition to recognizing the women of the Senior Executive Service, I want to acknowledge all the women of the State Department – Foreign Service, Civil Service, contractors, spouses, partners who accompany Department employees on assignments overseas. I thank you for every time you have spoken out on behalf of those who don't have a voice at the table, for every day that you have served our country after being up all night with a sick child, for every girl you have inspired to believe she really can change the world. You have my gratitude and the thanks of a grateful nation.

I was thinking as I was listening to Julie speak that I remember well the first time I was here at the State Department for an event concerning women. It was shortly after Madeleine Albright had been confirmed as the first woman Secretary of State. This is becoming a trend with Secretary Rice and now myself. (Applause.) And I had been working with Madeleine in her prior role at the UN. And following our presence at United Nations Conference on Women in Beijing, we had come back with a commitment both to improve our own government's contributions to advancing women's progress, but also to work in concert with the UN and with governments around the world to do the same.

And I came here with Secretary Albright to talk about the importance that we placed on the role of women and the empowerment of women in the foreign policy of the United States of America. But it was not a marginal issue, it was not a luxury to be gotten to after all of the other problems were solved, but that it was a critical component of our strategic objectives. And at the time, that seemed like a radical idea. But as Julie has said, we now know beyond any doubt, that the advancement of women is not only an important humanitarian and moral objective that furthers the cause of justice, it is a contributing factor in how well

we will do to advance America's national security interests. And it is a pleasure to be here with all of you in recognition of International Women's History Month to discuss an issue that is critical to our foreign policy and incredibly important to me personally.

I don't need to tell any of you that we face daunting challenges from a global financial crisis to the continuing threat of changes wrought by climate change to chronic disease, hunger, poverty that sap the energies, the dreams, and the talents of hundreds of millions of people worldwide. Solving these problems, even managing them, takes all of our efforts. But I am convinced that we cannot succeed if humanity is working at half its strength.

We need women in the State Department, women throughout our United States Government, women everywhere, to step up and take the lead in addressing the crises that confront us. We need the benefit of women's life experiences and expertise. And women here in the United States, as well as women around the world, need a State Department that is committed to the advancement of women and to the furthering of women's rights. And that will be – (applause) – that will be a building block of our foreign policy in the Obama Administration and certainly during my tenure.

I recognize that there is a long way to go for our country and our Department in ensuring full and equal representation for women. But we have a lot to be proud of today. It is no longer at all unusual to have women serving as Foreign Service officers, as very high-ranking Civil Service officers, ambassadors, or certainly Secretary of State.

Now, as Julie alluded to the fact, this was not always the case. I don't think that will surprise you. When some of his cabinet suggested the idea of women diplomats to Thomas Jefferson, he said, and I quote, "The appointment of a woman to office is an innovation for which the public is not prepared, nor am I." (Laughter.) So instead of serving as diplomats, the few women who were employed – the first, as Julie said, in 1800, I think – were relegated to part-time positions, copying correspondence and scrubbing floors.

Now there was a long period where not much changed until 1874, when the Department hired the first women to work as full-time employees. The group consisted of five clerks, several of whom had been personally recommended by President Ulysses S. Grant. Now Mary Markoe, one of the clerks, served the Department faithfully for more than 30 years. When she retired, she was receiving the same salary she had earned in 1877.

Now, one of my heroines, Eleanor Roosevelt, provided an example of American diplomacy at its best. After her husband's death, she was asked to work for this newly created entity known as the United Nations, and she headed the drafting committee responsible for the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Her

appetite for hard work was such that a fellow participant once had to remind her that the committee members also had human rights, including the right to sleep and some time off. (Laughter.) You know, there's that old saying: If you want something done, ask a busy woman to do it. And there seems to be some truth to that.

So we can pay tribute to the pioneers who began charting the path that we ourselves walk today. We are heirs to their tradition of courage and excellence. But this is not just about looking backwards. I know neither you nor the women I have just mentioned would be satisfied if that's all we did today. Around the world, women are taking the lead to help save and change their families, their villages and neighborhoods, their communities and countries, and indeed the planet.

I am continually inspired, as I have been for 35 years, by the women I meet who are risking their lives, their reputations, their standing in their families and communities, facing difficult and dangerous circumstances to advance the cause of human rights. As Julie said, we have had the great privilege in the Department to recognize some of those women, and I would like to ask the women who received our awards yesterday to please stand so that we can once again show our appreciation. (Applause.)

You know, from Iraq and Afghanistan, from Russia and Guatemala, from Uzbekistan and Niger, they come here after surviving slavery, torture, prison, and abuse. When First Lady Michelle Obama and I presented the Department's Courage Awards to them, I confess that I was, you know, so emotionally moved by not only their stories, but their dignity. These are women who have seen the worst that their fellow men and women can possibly do to another person, but they persevere and they never quit believing in the importance and the righteousness of their cause. As they fight for equal treatment and broader political rights, they represent not only the women of their own countries, but all of us.

Now, these women are not isolated phenomena. I think many of you, like I, have met with similar women across the world. When I was First Lady, I never went to a country without meeting with women. And one of the objectives I had was to bring together women who might not otherwise know one another, who were on the front lines of advancing the cause of women's progress. And as a senator in my travels, I did the same. Because so many of these women look to us, not only American women but others, to provide support and encouragement, resources, protection that they need to continue the difficult work they do.

I think of Mukhtar Mai of Pakistan, who survived a horrific assault in that oxymoronic practice known as an honor crime, and then used the money she received in a court settlement to help educate the rural poor in Pakistan.

Or Aung San Suu Kyi, whom I mentioned yesterday and I mention as often as I can, because having been in prison now for most of the past two decades, she still remains a beacon of hope, strength, and liberty for people around the world.

Now, these women are not just improving the world for other women. Their courage and actions are helping to create societies where every boy and girl, every man and woman, has the opportunity to live up to his or her God-given potential.

These women understand that the struggle for women's rights in the 21st century is no longer limited to fighting for the ballot, or equal pay for equal work, or the end of the cancer known as domestic violence, or the right to speak out, or the right to worship or associate. All of these items are critical and necessary, but they are no longer sufficient. In order to secure the full spectrum of women's rights, we have to create economic opportunity and economic security. It is essential that we improve access to healthcare and that we protect Mother Earth from our assaults, so that we can guarantee a better future, and that we do all that we can to help improve education so that we will have more allies and partners and fewer adversaries.

We will need all of our intelligence and our courage, our grit, and our grace to address these challenges. But I have not only optimism, but confidence. Wherever there is oppression, we as women need to stand against it. Wherever there is violence, we as women must work to end it. Wherever there is poverty or sickness, we as women must work to cure it. And wherever our planet is in danger, we as women must work to protect it.

Now, there are different ways that we will fulfill these responsibilities. But we need as a nation to reaffirm a strategic commitment to doing this, because it is not only behalf of someone else, it is on behalf of ourselves, our children, our children's children, and so many yet to come.

I don't know each of you individually here in the Department, but I do know more and more about the work you perform. I have seen it in refugee camps and in the corridors of power. I have seen it at the front desk of this building and at the Security Council of the United Nations.

As we celebrate the achievements of women at this gathering and throughout the month, we should remember the individual stories we've heard. But we should also work to create not only more stories of struggle, but more stories of success. A struggle for human rights and human liberty springs from the founding of our nation. It is a struggle predicated on the simple but profound belief that all men and all women are created equal, that they are endowed by our Creator with rights that transcend any government, any family structure, any social system. The United States is grounded in these ideals, and so should our foreign policy be. So therefore, we have a lot of work to do.

I want us to think both broadly and in a more creative way about how we advance this. I don't think talking about human rights for the sake of talking about human rights is necessarily the most effective strategy. I'm interested in outcomes and results, changed lives, increased opportunities, helping those who are on the frontlines changing their own societies in ways we never could, no matter how eloquent the speech or powerful the speaker.

So I invite you to join with us in proposing ideas and approaches that you have seen work, that you would like to see taken to scale, that you understand will truly make a difference. Because at the end of the day, that is how we should be judged. History will hold us to the same standard of courage and excellence that our awardees from yesterday represent. And I am confident that with your help and your leadership, our country will continue to make clear to all who aspire for the rights they were endowed with at birth, that they, too, can look to a better future.

Thank you all very much. (Applause.)

MR. ROBINSON: Now, when it comes to questions and answers, Secretary Clinton needs little help from me. However, it's my responsibility to explain to you that this program is a celebration of Women's History Month. We need to respect the occasion and do two things. First, no speeches or soliloquies. The speech has already been given. (Laughter.) So now we need your questions – I repeat, we need your questions. We have two mikes available and the Secretary will alternate from right to left.

Secondly, the question should be devoted to the occasion as opposed to general policy questions or your, or my, special agenda, unless they're related to the occasion.

SECRETARY CLINTON: Thank you, John. Well, I'm always up for a good speech. But you know, I can understand John's instructions. So let's start right there.

QUESTION: Okay. Thank you so much for addressing us this morning. My name is Elise Carlson-Rainer, and as you can tell, this might be a personal question, but I am about nine months pregnant and I was wondering if you plan to engage at all on maternity leave for the State Department. You know, we're one of four countries in the world without a national maternity leave plan, so I'm just wondering if you have any thoughts on that. (Applause.)

SECRETARY CLINTON: Is this your first, second?

QUESTION: First.

SECRETARY CLINTON: This – what?

QUESTION: First.

SECRETARY CLINTON: Your first baby?

QUESTION: Yes.

SECRETARY CLINTON: Oh, congratulations, and — (Applause.)

QUESTION: Thank you.

SECRETARY CLINTON: You know, when I was pregnant back a hundred years ago – (laughter) – this was a debate then, and it still is a debate, isn't it? And I personally find it inexplicable that a country like ours doesn't recognize the importance of supporting parents in the critical work they do in raising the next generation.

When I was pregnant, I was working as a lawyer in a law firm. They – you know, I was the first woman partner. They had never had a pregnant lawyer before – (laughter) – and nobody knew what to say. So I just kept getting more and more pregnant and – (laughter) – you know, the men in the firm would just look at – everywhere except – (laughter) – and nobody ever said a word to me about what was going to happen after I had this baby. (Laughter.)

And I was – you know, I was so uncertain about what I would do, and I remember, you know, after Chelsea was born, I was in the hospital and one of my partners called, and I think he was trying to be funny. He said, "Well, when are you coming back to work?" He said – first, he said congratulations and then he said, "When are you coming back to work?" (Laughter.) And I said, "Oh, I don't know, maybe four months." Silence. (Laughter.) So I set a maternity policy for us at that point. But that's not recommended as the way to set policy. (Laughter.)

You know, this is an issue that I have worked on unsuccessfully along with many allies over the years. I will look into what the State Department and the government policy is. I honestly don't know right now what it is. I have always tried to have a very family-friendly workplace wherever I am. And, you know, when I was First Lady, we kind of, ad hoc, created family arrangements so that people could take time off after they had a baby. The Family Medical Leave Act, of course, helped, but it is unpaid, which makes it difficult for some people to participate.

So we should look at that, and I will find out what it is. The real answer is we need a national policy that recognizes it and supports it. You know, I always was grateful for the fact that I had rather unusual circumstances; not only was I a

lawyer, but at the time, my husband was the governor, and so we had a certain level of support that most people don't have. Although it's a little – you know, it's a little hard to, you know, think back and imagine, you know, how all of that unfolded because it seems so long ago, but I'm struck by how little has changed in all of those years.

So I would like to do more if I can. And I think that the objections to maternity leave – and, you know, I'm very non-gender specific. Parental leave is the term of art, but it's 90 percent maternity leave, and for obvious reasons. But when you look at the consequences of it, it has such a positive effect. It has not only a positive effect on the parent-child relationship and the bonding experience and the getting started – I don't know about any of you, but I – you know, I was way overeducated to be a first-time mother. (Laughter.) And I read everything there was to read and I was still totally overwhelmed by the experience.

And I had a friend who, at that time, was living in England in part of the National Health Service, and she told me a story about how, you know, the first time the National Health Service nurse came by, which was, I think, her first trimester, my friend said, "Oh, I don't need any help, thank you very much." And the second time, which was, you know, beginning of the third trimester, "Oh, I don't need any help." But her mother, who she had expected to come over and help her, got sick and couldn't come. And this friend of mine told me about how the National Health Service nurse knocked on the door after the baby was born and my friend goes, "Please come in, I don't know what I'm doing." (Laughter.)

And I think there's some truth in that experience for a lot of us. So as you can tell, you have hit a button with me. (Laughter.) And I wish you well with your new baby. Good luck. (Applause.)

QUESTION: In many states around the world –

SECRETARY CLINTON: Could you identify yourself, just so –

QUESTION: Oh, I'm so sorry, Rachel Sosin, I'm an intern in ISN. In many states around the world, women still hold a peripheral role at best within the government. When placing Foreign Service workers there, how much weight do you think we should give to the preferences of those governments? And do you think in giving weight to their preference, we're in some way betraying something intrinsic to the American character?

SECRETARY CLINTON: Great question. I think we are at the stage now where we give very little or no weight. I'm not saying we never give weight, because obviously, that may not be the case in every instance where we have to look at all the factors. But I can tell you that from my perspective, we have women ambassadors serving in some of the most difficult assignments anywhere in the world. I personally have considered in the last six or seven weeks, however long

– how long have we been here? I can't remember. (Laughter.) It seems like – I mean, you know, I feel like Eleanor Roosevelt. I mean, we've just been working around the clock and lost track of time.

In, certainly, the assignments that I have been recommending and reviewing, that has not entered into it. Sometimes we'll have questions like, you know, how will this work, how will this be received, but those are not determinative in any way. And we've got some extraordinary women ambassadors and chargés and counselors in places that are very difficult – unaccompanied posts, I mean, all kinds of challenging circumstances. I really think we've got to look for the best people – you know, what's the prior experience, what are the language skills required, what special experiences are suited to the problems we have. I mean, I don't think it's a surprise to any of you that, you know, Pakistan is one of our most consuming countries right now and we have an excellent ambassador, Anne Patterson, who is there working, you know, 24/7.

So I just think that we're beyond that, but we also – you know, we have to be smart. We don't want to be provocative or, you know, send someone who – just to make a statement. We want to send someone who can do the job. And thankfully, there are lots and lots of women who meet that criterion. (Applause.)

Yes.

QUESTION: Yes, good morning, Madame Secretary. My name is Stephanie Ortoleva and I work in the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor.

Earlier this week, I had the privilege of speaking at a panel at the World Bank on women with disabilities and development and how we can advance the rights of women in that arena. And one of the issues that I raised was how we increase the involvement of women with disabilities in conflict resolution and conflict management and peacekeeping around the world. And there was recently a report by the United States Institute for Peace on the very issue of women and peacekeeping, and like under so many other similar circumstances, that role of women with disabilities in that context wasn't addressed.

So I'd like to hear your thoughts, and of course, I'd welcome the opportunity to be of any assistance that I can in your efforts on that.

SECRETARY CLINTON: Thank you very much, and thanks for your work and attention to this issue. You know, I think that people with disabilities face particular challenges in many settings around the world, particularly in regions of conflict. And I would just reiterate that people with disabilities who have the necessary experiences and expertise to play a role in helping to resolve such conflicts should be very determinedly recruited and involved. I think that there are lots of lessons that can be learned, and I know that from the aftermath of the horrors of the Rwanda genocide, there were many people, as you know, who had

been brutally attacked, losing limbs and eyes and ears and other terrible injuries who played an instrumental role in the resolution of many of the immediate crises arising out of an effort to reconcile the country so it could begin working again.

And I believe that people with disabilities, whether they are from a horrific experience like that or in some other – from some other source, you know, carry a reminder of the full range of human potential. So I would hope that we would find ways to involve people who can make a contribution, and I would look forward to your suggestions. (Applause.)

Yes.

QUESTION: Greeting, Madame Secretary. My name is Shirley Miles and I work at the overseas building operation. My question is what would be your plans for addressing workplace bullying of women, an issue that I know you would have zero tolerance for?

SECRETARY CLINTON: I do have zero tolerance for it. (Applause.) You know, I have zero tolerance for any kind of bullying. I find it intolerable. I hate people who use a position of either superior rank or physical dominance or any other aspect to lord it over or mistreat other people, especially those in the workplace. I mean, we have policies, we have all kinds of grievance procedures. You know, obviously, I expect those to be adhered to and followed.

And also I think, too, that, you know, I've – I have experienced a lot of strange behavior in my life. (Laughter.) And I think that, you know, part of it is trying to make it clear that what might have been acceptable 10, 20, 30 years ago in the workplace no longer is. That comes as a revelation still today. (Laughter.) And really, people could pass a lie detector test who engage in this behavior, that they are not because the previous work environments were either more permissive or traditional in a conventional sense of, you know, pre-1964, 1973, and 19 everything else. (Laughter.)

So I think that there still needs to be some outreach and some efforts to try to modify and change behavior. I don't think everybody who engages in behavior that I would consider beyond the bounds is a bad person. I think some people are just stuck in bad habits. And so I would hope you would, you know, use the kind of processes we have here at the Department, including, if there needs to be, you know, intervention, sensitization, explanation as to how certain words or actions are perceived. And we would welcome that. (Applause.)