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**Clinton Global Initiative University 2008 Meeting
Working Session: Human Rights & Peace
Protecting and Promoting the Rights of Women through
Empowerment
Clinton Global Initiative University
March 15, 2008**

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[Applause]

MICKEY BERGMAN: Thank you and good afternoon, and welcome back to those of you who are coming back for a second session here, and welcome to those who are visiting us in this room for the first time today. My name is Mickey Bergman, I'm the program manager for Peace and Human Rights, and I want to welcome you to this very exciting panel. I hope you enjoyed the special session plenary that we just had.

And before introducing this exciting panel, I want to say— just to remind you of two things. First, in the first half of the— or the first portion of this panel while there's a moderated discussion on stage, if you have any questions please write them. You have cards on the table, and pass them to your table facilitator, which is that very kind person with a laptop in each of the tables. We will get those questions to be fed back and we'll be able to share those questions with the panelists for the second portion.

Protecting and promoting the rights of women through empowerment. This very, very interesting session is going to discuss an issue that is constantly overlooked, and that is the role of women in post-conflict reconciliation, in promoting or escaping from poverty and a lot of other roles. And we're going to try and take an angle on this one of what is it that

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students and campuses can do about those in a very tangible way, and we're going to throw it back to you in the second portion of this session in order to discuss it on the tables and then bring it back.

At this point I want you to please welcome your panelists Zainab Salbi, Ndidi Nwuneli, David Leebron, and our moderator James Carville.

[Applause]

JAMES CARVILLE: You all ready to have a little fun here? Absolutely. Before we get started I can see the time tyrants over there looking at me. But there are three special women that I want to introduce. First, it's Sister Lynn Leer [misspelled?] who's from the great town of New Roads, Louisiana, who is the principal of Sacred Heart Academy here in New Orleans, and in the best traditions of the Clinton Global Initiatives requires public service as part of the graduation requirement. And so we're delighted to have her here. She's an old family friend.

Second, is my cousin Anne Milling who is from Monroe, Louisiana, who she and some other women in New Orleans became so disgusted at the lack of inaction after Katrina that they started one of the most effective advocacy groups here in New Orleans. They've probably done as much good as anybody, and

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again in the best traditions of the CGI, took action when other people weren't.

And third, is my wife Mary Matalin, who has been involved in government and other enterprises through our life, actually doing most of the raising of my two lovely daughters over there, Mattie [misspelled?] and Emma [misspelled?]. And Mary is intimately involved in matters concerning women's rights around the world and cares very passionately about that. And I'm delighted that these three women along with my two daughters are here to see and hear the good work that all of you out here in the audience are doing, and to see the kind of commitment that you're making. These are all- [Applause]

I want to say the panel we have here is just- I think you're going to find it just unbelievable. These are all very, very charming, interesting and needless to say accomplished people. Nnidi, you were introduced earlier. Just so you know a little bit about her, she's educated at the Wharton School, Harvard Business School, spent years of management with McKinsey & Company. She returned to Nigeria to promote entrepreneurship and leadership. She served as a pioneer director of the FAT Foundation in LEAP Africa. She's been involved in any number of things, numerous honors, awards, boards, et cetera, et cetera. I have met this woman and talked to her. This is one firecracker here. This is one lady that

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is somebody that we can learn a lot from and who has given a lot to her country.

Zainab, am I pronouncing it right? If I didn't we're not going to worry about it. This is one of these people that you meet for five minutes and you've known them all her life. She's written a book about her escape from Saddam Hussein's Iraq called *Between Two Worlds: Escape from Tyranny: Growing up in the Shadow of Saddam*, the other side of women's stories of survival and hope, and she chronicles stories of women of this nature. She's interviewed regularly on U.S. TV networks. She's received ultimate accolade that one can receive in the United States and that is she appeared on the *Oprah Winfrey Show*. [Laughter]

She's done any number of things. She was elected global leader the World Economic Forum, she's a graduate of George Mason University in Sociology and women's studies. She earned a Master's degree in developmental study from the London School of Economics. And when I tell you this is another woman that it's not going to take her very long to tell you what she thinks and how she thinks it can get done. Welcome, and it's a distinct honor to have you on the panel.

And then I don't know what we're doing with this other guy up here, but David Leebron is the president of Rice University, as obviously everybody knows one of our premier

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institutions in the United States. He studied at Harvard with History and Science with emphasis on German history. He's a lawyer, but we won't hold that against him. He's become president of Rice University in 2004. He is very involved in building international relationships in programs. He's particularly emphasized increasing the number of foreign students enrolled in undergraduate university. He served on the Carter-Baker Commission for federal election reform, and is serving ex-officio on the Baker-Christopher Commission on War Powers.

To have this kind of group that the CGI people put together I think is really remarkable. And I just want to go ahead and start taking advantage of this. The first thing is I want to throw the first question out to the two women on the panel. It's not the first question, but I really don't want a moderated discussion. Just jump right in. But what strikes me is Nigeria and Iraq are two countries that, to put it mildly, have not really valued the input of women in their history as much as we would like, yet you two women have jumped out in front and become real leaders. Tell us a little bit about your story, what motivates you, and how these young people can relate to that.

ZAINAB SALBI: Well, I grew up in Iraq, as you mentioned earlier. And yes, you may think that this society

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does not encourage women, but I grew up with a very strong mother who told me I should not learn how to cook or clean, because no man should expect me to do that just because I was a woman. [Applause] I ended up learning how to cook because I love cooking. [Laughter] But the point is, it wasn't my family per se, it was growing up in a dictatorship, and it was growing up in a totalitarian country led by Saddam Hussein and anybody who expressed any views, men or women, were vulnerable to torture and executions.

Now what changed for me is I always knew about issues of injustice. I grew up in a school where a lot of people were executed, at least my classmates' parents were executed, and they talk about how they got executed in public. And I could not do anything or say about it, because to say something would action to get your own family killed, my own family killed.

When I came to America in 1990, I was twenty at the time, and I knew I needed to do something. And I knew that in this country I have no excuse not to do something. This is for me the land of opportunities. So my journey started personally as an Iraqi woman, as an Arab woman, as a Muslim woman I would say, and I would not say it's different than other women, that I just had the opportunity to express my outrage at injustice. And it was the raid camps in Bosnia, and the concentration camps in Bosnia, and the rapes of hundreds of thousands of

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women in war zones from Bosnia, to Rwanda, to Congo— to Rwanda, to Congo, to Iraq, and Afghanistan and different countries. And that's how I started Women for Women International. I was twenty-three years old. I had nothing— nishta nada vian wella ishi [misspelled?]. I had nothing. I was a new immigrant to the United States. I had only been here for three years and I was able to start an organization, and in acting on my passion and believing that I can make a difference, even if that difference is only a drop.

Fifteen years later Women for Women International has helped directly 150,000 around the world, and distributed directly \$42 million to 150,000 women, and impacted 850,000 people. So if I could do something, if I grew up in a different country in a dictatorship in a totalitarian country, came here as an immigrant who had nothing whatsoever when I came here and was able to enact on my beliefs and my values and do something about it, I believe each one of you can do it. I really believe in the possibility of making a change and making a difference in this world.

[Applause]

JAMES CARVILLE: Thank you. And, sister, you didn't just talk the talk, you walked the walk. Ndidi, I want to hear your story because I know a little bit about Nigeria, and I know what it is, and I know your story and I know that these

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young people would be delighted to hear from you. Please tell us.

NDIDI OKONKWO NWUNELI: Okay. I grew up in a small town in Nigeria called Enagu, and I was fortunate to be born into a home with a very strong mother as well, and a father who believed in education. And I'm from a family of five, four women and one man. And we grew up believing that we could achieve our highest potential.

I had to go abroad for my university education because in the early '90's we had serious dictatorship in Nigeria under the Babangida and Abacha regimes. And when I got to the states, like many of you I was in college and trying to figure out what to do. And if you had asked me as a young person then where I'd be fifteen years, twenty years from now, I always imagined that I'd be running a multinational. I used to tell people, well, I'll be on my private jet with my nanny on one side and my children on the other. But as an African, very quickly, especially 1994 I was a junior in college. What was going on in '94? The elections in South Africa, the first free elections in South Africa.

And then of course soon after the Rwanda genocide someone who was educated in Africa was already someone who was privileged. And I felt that it did not make sense to utilize the skills that I had just for my own personal enrichment.

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Through college people tell you well, you learn, then you earn, and then you serve. I don't know how many of you have heard that. But I decided very early on after I graduated from college I worked for McKinsey. And when I was at McKinsey I got to some very exciting pro bono projects. And they gave me the highest satisfaction and a lot of fulfillment.

And so I went to business school, and after business school I got a call from an entrepreneur in Nigeria. And he said I hear you want to move back and I want to offer you some jobs. And the last job he mentioned was an organization that he wanted to start for young people. And I said, well, I want to start an organization for women. And I had redone my business plan. Very quickly we agreed that I would come back and start the organization. And I had \$40 in loans, like many of you will, and it piles up after some time. And you say well, should I take a job with an investment bank or go on and work for a non-profit? But I can tell you that doing what I've done, seven years later I've started four non-profit organizations, and they have made a tremendous difference in the lives of people.

And I would say that what has amazed me about a country like Nigeria is that even though I'm a young woman I have been mentored by so many amazing men and women, and as a young person I still face challenges. But I believe there are always

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people who support a vision. If you have a vision and you're passionate about it and you're willing to demonstrate that you're ethical and you're committed to change, people will support you regardless of how young you are. And you have to surround yourself with people who believe in you and are going to encourage you to do the best that you can do.

And I've challenged people, I've spoken out when I shouldn't have spoken out. I've been branded a lot of things, but at the end of the day when a young person calls you up one day and says Ndididi, happy anniversary. And I said happy anniversary? And he said, exactly four years ago I met you, and you've transformed my life. And that is the type of message that keeps you going when you want to give up. Thank you.

[Applause]

JAMES CARVILLE: I just want to say this modest guy sitting right to my left is— this guy is a really big deal. He was the editor of the Harvard Law Review— President of the Harvard Law Review. There's one current United States Senator I think held the same position. He also was the dean of the Columbia Law School, and is now the president of Rice. This is, as we'd say, a real stout guy in the world of higher education.

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But to reduce it a little bit, David, you could talk to some people about things that you know. How is it that some young person is going to go out in the world and really make a difference?

DAVID LEEBRON, J.D.: My first advice would be spend more time listening to people like this than to people like me. [Laughter] I was listening this morning to President Skorton of Cornell talk about student power. And the amazing thing to me is that students often underestimate their power rather than overestimate their power. And that's because you're surrounded by people in your institutions who actually are there because they not only care about you, but they're inspired by you. And if you come to them with your ideas and relate to them, they really do for the most part want to help you. And it's amazing what you can do.

We, for example, have group at Rice and maybe on some of your campuses you have a similar group, Engineers without Borders. And at Rice this was a completely student-founded, student organized group. And they took as one of their projects, they went down to Central America, I think it was Guatemala. And what did they go to do? They went to build a near sort of town, a place where the people in the town could get water, where they could wash their clothes, they could get water for cooking, they could get showers.

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And this you really you might say what does this have to do with empowering women? And the answer is, it has everything to do with empowering women. Because it's really women who are for better or worse spending their time in these communities going far away to get water and preventing them from doing everything else they might do to help their children, to help the people in the village, and to develop, perhaps, their own businesses. You can have micro loans, for example, but unless you begin to change the infrastructure within which people operate, those micro loans aren't really going to make any difference.

And so the students at Rice who took their time over spring break— but this isn't a lot of time— they went down, these are engineering students, and they went down and designed and built this facility. And of course in that process they learned an incredible amount about engineering. They came back better engineers.

So I guess we heard earlier today, you have to start with something manageable and small. And it may seem small to you, but it will make an incredible difference in people's lives. And just briefly how do you go about that? I think you go about it, you start by learning about something, really sort of immersing yourself. That's what you're all amazing good at is learning about things.

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And then I think the next thing you do is you communicate about it. You find people interested on your campus, not only your fellow students with faculty, you talk about it, talk about the problems, talk about your ideas, and then you make a decision about what you want to do and then you act on that decision. And I think you'll find, as these women so well illustrate, if you think about something and you say by the time I end this I'm going to have a project that I'm going to do that's going to make a difference, you won't have any trouble actually getting them.

ZAINAB SALBI: James, can I add, actually I really do want to acknowledge how important it is to have both David and you on the panel talking about women's rights. I know Ndidi and I have been often in panels talking about women's rights, and in conferences talking about women's rights, and it's usually only women, and attended only by women mostly. And to have a panel having half men and half women talking about the important of women I think is an important shift to be acknowledged and to simmer on it, because it's for me a symbol of how we're shifting women's issues from marginal issues to central issues, that we're saying that we cannot talk about nations building, or the ending of poverty, or the ending of HIV, or the ending of all the crisis in the world where women are disproportionately impacted by it. The majority of victims of

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all the crisis in the world are women. From refugees in the world 80 percent of the refugees in the world are women and children. 90 percent of the modern wars casualties are civilians, 75 percent of them are women and children. Two-third of the 2.5 billion people who are poor in the world are women, actually. So to get this panel and to have two great men talking about it is really an important shift of saying we cannot talk about the ending of these crises, or building strong nations, strong democracies, strong economies without having strong women in it, and I do want to acknowledge that.

JAMES CARVILLE: Thank you. [Applause] I think the truth is more basic. I think my wife and two daughters would kill me if I didn't have a real commitment. One of the things that we want to talk about is instances where people really make a difference. There's a saying that I always like, "In a ham and egg breakfast, the chicken participates but the hog is really committed." [Laughter] Maybe we could— if you have somebody from Louisiana you're just going to get these kind of sayings. We just accumulate them over life. [Laughter]

But each person on this panel has really gone out to the world and done things in their own way, as educators, or activists, anything. What would you say to these young people, anybody on the panel, to move from the sense of that you're participating in something to this is something that you're

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really going to be committed to, not just for the set amount of time in your life but to your whole life will be part of this. If you could just speak to that question a little bit, please.

NDIDI OKONKWO NWUNELI: Well, I think that as a young person, one of the things that I do with two of the organizations that I've started, NIA, which works with women in four universities to achieve the highest potential, and LEAP Africa which does leadership training and helps young people start change projects, similar to some of the projects you have come up with, is that there's a ladder of involvement, and you have to determine where you're going to stand on that ladder.

At the lowest level of that ladder of involvement is just being a volunteer, or helping out maybe once in a while, getting excited about an issue and sending an email to somebody. That's at the lowest level of that ladder. And there are many ways— many steps up the ladder. You could become an intern, you could give your money, you could give your time, you could decide to work as full-time employee, or you could do what Zainab and I have done, which is basically devote 100 percent of your time to that. And you have to determine what is feasible in your life, given what other competing interests you have. But to really make a difference in our world we need people who are going to be willing to do the 100 percent. But it's not for everybody.

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Now what does it take? I think at the end of the day what I tell young people is that you have to think about what makes you angry about your environment. And I have to say that because both of us are from the developing world, or the South, doesn't mean that there are not things that make me angry about women's issues in the North. And there are enough things to make you angry. Because I come from a business background, whenever I open annual reports I'm angry at the few number of women who are on the boards of directors of leading companies. That make me angry.

I'm angry about the fact that women are still violated on a regular basis by their spouses. I'm angry about the fact that we still have quotas in many parts of the world because we don't have enough women who can fund election campaigns or whatever. So there are so many examples of things that can make you angry. Then you have to figure out how can you channel that anger?

Now if nothing makes you angry, then what makes you cry? What gives you energy? What keeps you awake at night? What would you love to do for free? And if you can figure that out then you can start narrowing down your options, and then find a few people who you can share that idea with. Articulate it, and then you might be surprised. Funding will start coming.

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So every initiative I've started, one, I went to a conference similar to this and I stayed up all night after watching a movie called *Wishing for Seven Sons and One Daughter*. And that day I wrote the plan for NIA, and NIA was born. And you'd be amazed at how many people are excited if you can articulate that idea and convince other people to join you. But I would repeat that there is a ladder, and my hope is that everybody here will figure out by the end of the day where they want to be on that ladder and choose to do something about it. Thank you.

JAMES CARVILLE: Well, all I would say is in *Wishing for Seven Sons and One Daughter*, if you were the daughter it'd be better than any seven sons he could have anyway. Thank you so much. Go ahead, please.

ZAINAB SALBI: I want to add really quickly, because I agree with you completely. I wake up every day, and I say it's a good day to die, and it's a good day to fly. And life is beautiful, so it's all about learning and doing things that you love. But if you die that day, if I die today, I want to die on a good page with myself, with my values. And if I die today, actually I was recently in Iraq and I was really scared of dying. I really thought that I would die. And I said it's worth it because I lived my truth and I lived my values. And each one of us have different dreams and different values.

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It's just not worth living life without living it fully, and that means do what you really and passionate about. And if there's one simple advice it's that just live it fully and live your passion. And the changes are different.

At Women for Women International, for example, we ask for every woman around the world to do one simple thing, which is just sponsor a woman survivor of war by sending her \$27 a month along with a letter to start communication link between the two women. \$27 a month changes a woman's life there. She can actually buy a land and start a business. Countries like Rwanda, Congo, Iraq, Afghanistan, Sudan, Bosnia, Kosovo. She can actually stand on her feet after war destroyed her life. And for you it could be giving up your latte, as Oprah said, or it could be giving up whatever it is, and it could be a sacrifice for you also. So the difference, it doesn't mean that you should drop all your life to make a difference in the world. Each one of us are making a drop of a difference. You could sponsor a woman, you could volunteer your time, you could help you community. Whatever it is, just live it fully so that every day is a good day to fly and is a good day to die.

JAMES CARVILLE: David, you spent your life educating young people. Just briefly, these young people have gone out, and empowering women and doing good things in the world.

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What's an observation, a piece of advice that you would give them going forward from here?

DAVID LEEBRON, J.D.: This perhaps takes a little bit different perspective from what you just heard. I think it's great if all of you, or as many as possible, go out and commit all of your time and your professional lives to doing good, whether it's empowering women or other things. But the truth is, most of you aren't going to do that. But all of you have the ability to commit yourselves to be at least if not the whole ham, a piece of the ham. I didn't get that either, just for reference. [Laughter] He explained it to me. That all of you will have the capacity in your lives to make some kind of commitment and make some kind of difference. And that's something that you're going to have to decide relatively early in your lives because it's going to be very easy to be distracted from that commitment.

I come from the law school world, and so of course what I saw most of my students do is go off and work for very large law firms, corporate law firms helping really in corporate transactions, big litigation. But if I could add up the difference those people make in the lives of people who need help and empowerment, people who have been deprived of their rights, it would just be enormous. And then you can add to

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that of course the people like people up here who have committed themselves overwhelming to that.

But I think my advice and encouragement would be decide now that part of your lives will be dedicated to making a difference, no matter where your personal choices and professional choices will lead you. And they're going to lead you to some pretty unexpected places. But in none of the places, in my view, that you end up will you not have the opportunity to make a difference.

JAMES CARVILLE: Wow. Please.

NDIDI OKONKWO NWUNELI: I actually agree with that comment. I agree with it a lot. And I want start even on a smaller scale which is, from working in the environments that I've worked in, I've realized that everybody has to start with themselves, which is first of all what is your belief system? You know, I go around talking to young people, and I ask many of them, and especially guys— I'm sorry to pick on the guys in this room— I say do you believe in equity of women? And all of them say yes, of course I do. And then I say to the guys and the women, so I start with the guys, how many of you believe that your wives should work? They say oh, we all believe their wives should work. Okay, how many of you believe your wives should work really long hours? They say well, she can work but her hours have to be a little less than mine, because somebody

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has to be home to take care of the kids. And that is a challenge, right, for all of us. Because then you see that you have biases about whose career should be second.

Same with women. I have a daughter now, and I'm trying to raise her. And I have to remind myself all the time that I shouldn't tell my son oh, that's what girls do and that's what boys do. And it's tough, because you socialize all the time to have these stereotypes and gender rules, when at the end of the day I have a role to play making sure that my daughter feels she can be the best she can be, and that my son feels that he can be a support of women, and he can wash the dishes and he can cook.

So it's a constant balancing act, and we all have to start with our belief systems. Beyond our belief systems I think we all have to decide where we're going to put our stake in the ground. And I just want to mention another organization I'm involved in. I'm on the board of an organization called Women Thrive, and I recently joined this board. And it's an organization that is involved in shaping U.S. policy on funding for women initiatives. And so it's a lobbying organization, and it's working on some phenomenal policy changes across the U.S., and one is called the growth act. And this growth act is focused on the issue of micro-finance and insuring that the U.S. Government, which only channels right now 1 percent of its

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funding to international development issues, and shows that that 1 percent is utilized to insure that women's needs are met. Because unfortunately when you look at development and you fund development in our society, if you give a woman a dollar she'll spend it on education and her children's health. If you give a man a dollar he will most likely spend a little on education and health, but he'll most likely spend some it on alcohol, sorry, and maybe having a good time. Am I right? Yes. I'm sorry. [Laughter]

JAMES CARVILLE: You can appreciate this. The time tyrant has just—

NDIDI OKONKWO NWUNELI: Oh, I'm sorry.

JAMES CARVILLE: I'm always remind of, there's a guy in Louisiana that won \$10 million in the lottery and they asked him what he was going to do with it. And he said well, its going to take \$9 million to spend on gambling, booze and woman, and the other million he was just going to waste. [Laughter] I think that's a very profound statement about how the fact that what we're here is a real effect that women do.

I'm going to close and am going to come back. We have another return here. But I would remind you that I think one of the smartest things ever said in human history is, "It is better to light one candle than curse the darkness." And each one of you, while the rest of the world is cursing the

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darkness, each one of you are lighting a candle. And for that I think everybody up here and everybody associated with the CGI, this is really about you and your commitment, and your candle and your light, and we thank you for that. I appreciate it. [Applause]

FEMALE SPEAKER: Thank you very much to the panel. That was truly an inspiring set of ideas that you shared with us. And what we heard very strongly was that each one of us has a role that we can play. And at this time in your lives being a part of a community on a university or a college campus, you have an extraordinary network that you can leverage and connect into.

So we're about to turn it over to you at the tables for you to generate new ideas and to share your visions. And we're wondering what you think about to protect women's rights and promote their role internationally. What actions can campus communities take? So think students, administration, faculty, the community in which you're embedded.

And then also consider, because many of us are based in the United States, are there unique actions for the domestic context? So you have about twenty-seven minutes at your table. You'll have a chance to type in your ideas. And after the session we'll hear answers to the questions and hear back your themes. Enjoy the conversation.

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25

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