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**Clinton Global Initiative University 2008 Meeting
Protecting and promoting the Rights of Women through
Empowerment: Discussions and Commitments
March 15, 2008**

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JAMES CARVILLE: I'm just reminded, how many university presidents did we have here today, thirty? I was an incredible college student. I went to LSU up the road. Have any of you had a 4.0 on graduation day? See, I did. I did. I had a 4.0 on graduation day. That was my blood alcohol level.

[Laughter] There you go. There's a little joint up there called the French Quarter. You don't want to go there, you don't want to have anything to do with that place. Stay away.

I want to start. We had a lot questions here, and from left to right just ask our panelists as opposed to me picking them out, or somebody else. What are a couple of things that were brought up that you would like to respond to? And we've got eight minutes left, so let's be mindful of the clock time.

ZAINAB SALBI: Absolutely. Hello. I don't know if this is working. One of the things that came in the questions is the involvement of men in the discussions of women's issues. And it came in different questions, so we thought of lumping them into independent answers. And my way of answering it is, two things that Women for Women International does is sharing the two things.

One is when we work with men in the communities that we work, and we only work in war zones. That's our specialties at Women for Women. And the most common question I get asked is do men resist your work with women. And the most common answer

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is no. The reason we do that is that we actually developed a leadership training for men, those who are leaders in the communities that we work in. So it means that the mayor, the chief, the pastor, the military commander. And we develop a leadership training that is addressing their leadership training. And the logic for that is if you want to be good leaders you really need to understand what 55-percent or 60-percent of your population is demanding and is saying.

And the changes we've been actually able to see are absolutely amazing. Just to give you an example, one of the men who were in the training program was a military commander. And I was interviewing him, and he said, "Whenever I entered a man's house and the other man did not have a gun and I had a gun, I never questioned whether I had the right to rape his wife or not, I always raped his wife." And the change that happened with this particular commander was he never associated the issues of HIV and the spread of HIV with rape, that he actually could kill himself, could kill his family, and he could lose half of his soldiers if he encourages them to rape.

And so we were able to actually manage to have this commander abolish rape from any soldier in his command, and punishes any soldier who rape. And that's an accomplishment. But the way we approached it was not to come and talk about women's rights, was actually to talk about what's in his interest as a good leader.

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The other thing that we do is we started surveying women in the countries that we are working in. Because many politicians learn to talk the talk about women's rights, but we really have not yet to see the walking of the walk in terms of women's rights. So we sometimes need to change the themes of how do we address these issues. And the way we address them is by asking women, what do they think about the national issues in their own countries. Often when women get asked anything, it's only asking them about women's rights. Well, let's deal with them as a constituency and let's ask them about what do they think about it.

In Iraq we just finished a study, for example about the security situation in Iraq, or the economy, or the government, or the military, or the question of U.S. presence over there, all of these questions. And their answers become answers of constituencies that are important for politicians and not simply women. And the findings are absolutely amazing. And that's when we're able to get men to pay attention to women's rights. So sometimes it's changing the methodologies of how one approaches this subject. So this is one of the issues that came out as the theme, and I wanted to share with that.

NDIDI OKONKWO NWUNELI: Okay. I'll take on the issue of what women empowerment means, because there were a lot of questions around what is this issue of empowerment. And I look at it a little differently. What I think of is that women

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still face tremendous challenges in trying to achieve economic independence. And those challenges include access to education. In many parts of the world very few women can access education. The issue of having mentors and role models, the issue of societal expectations of women. And in parts of the world there are still issues around widowhood rights and female genital mutilation.

A big issue is access to financing. In a lot of countries, for a woman to get a loan she needs a husband to sign. And what if she's not married? What about property rights? Property rights is a huge issue for a lot of women. Only recently in Lesetho a woman couldn't own property. Not to talk about inheritance laws, which in many countries still favors a male child who gets the property that his parents leave behind.

Equity in the job search process. In a country like mine, unfortunately women are still propositioned. 45-percent off women say they are propositioned during an interview. And unfortunately they ask them--well, for the first two years of getting a job in this bank you can't get pregnant or you can't get married, because that affects my bottom line.

And then the issue of women in the workplace and combining all the roles of motherhood and successful careers. And then I mentioned the issue of boards. What about the issue of women in political life and the fact that in many parts of

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the world 1-percent or 2-percent of the political positions are held by women. So there are a broad range of issues that oftentimes in the development sector are called empowerment. You can call it whatever you like, but just figure out where your own interest lies and what you can do about it.

DAVID LEEBRON, J.D.: Well, mainly I'll address two questions that seem to be specifically addressed to me. One is, how do you empower women at the university level and in the world in general? And I'll have to say in my experience there is really no substitute for putting women in positions of leadership. If you don't send a pretty clear message that women are expected to lead at your organization and at your university, it's very hard to accomplish that goal simply by talking to people, basically. You really, I think, have to set that message pretty clearly, and so people see the examples to follow. And I think what happens with that is, generally speaking, not surprisingly the organizations tend to function much better.

The other question I think addressed specifically to me is, how can we get the attention of our universities to support us with our goals? Now I had the advantage of coming from a fairly small university, so it's not actually that hard to get my attention. You send me an email and you get an answer, an appointment or something like that. But some of you are probably from universities with 30,000 students, 40,000

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students, 50,000 students. And the only advice I can give you about that is, it's much better to deposit a solution on a busy person's desk than to deposit a problem on a busy person's desk. And it's much better to go with optimism about what you can achieve than pessimism about what you're unhappy with. And I think when you do that, what you will find is you can easily get to the position not merely persuading somebody to help you, but really them wanting to help you because they see a way to accomplish something.

And our lives are filled with, if you'll pardon me, trivial tasks, things that may sometimes be not that satisfying. If you present an opportunity at little or no cost where somebody can say, I can make a contribution and people are going to be happy about it, and they're going to be supportive, going into your president or administrators with a smile rather a frown is much more likely to get you what you want than going and putting a problem on his or her desk and saying, stop this because I'm unhappy about it.

So translating things from the problem in to the solution, and going with the solutions saying boy, here's an opportunity for you rather than a problem for you, I think will make all the world of difference.

ZAINAB SALBI: James, can I add something? I see that we have 15 seconds, so I want to share a story, because someone

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said that we need to share our stories, and I want to capture on the issues of empowerment.

I was in Afghanistan a couple of years ago, and a woman lifted her burkha, and her face was full of tattoos. In Afghanistan tattoos is called the makeup of the poor. And she said, "I have been married for twenty years, and the first twenty years of my life, of my marriage life my husband beat me every single day. And I never questioned whether he had the right to beat me up or not, I just took it as part of his right." Then she went through Women for Women International's training program which includes women's rights among other things, and she learned it's not in his rights. So one day he came home and wanted to slap her, and she held his hand and she literally acted and said, "Stop it. Don't beat me. Talk to me in a different way." I was shocked. I was like, he's probably going to kill her. I can't believe that she's still alive in front of me.

But the point is, she said, "In the last year of my marriage life I actually have a good marriage with him because I was able to talk with him and change the way he communicates with me." You call this empowerment, you call this anything. It's about awareness, it's about knowing your access to information, whether this is information or education, or resources, or money, or networks or whatever it is. Let's not get stuck on disciplines, and vocabulary and issues. I'm very

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practical in my solutions. And don't get stuck in the empowerment issues as much as what are we ultimately trying to do, and ultimately we're trying to give her her voice, share with her the knowledge we have to tell her that she can tell him to stop, and that's change.

JAMES CARVILLE: I just want to say, on this panel I think that everybody brought so much. You brought wisdom, passion and optimism. And I think those are the three things that I particularly got out of this. And I can't tell you, it's a huge honor to be part of a stage like this, but that pales compared to the honor of being in this room with you guys who are making this commitment. That's the real honor here. And to have my own young children see that there are young people committed like you are and doing the things that you're doing, it gives me great cause for hope and optimism. And thank each of you in the room and thank each of you up on the stage here. We appreciate it.

[Applause]

MICKEY BERGMAN: Thank you so much. And I want to say something about the table discussion that happened just now in the last twenty-five, thirty minutes were incredible. I don't know if you were too engaged talking at your own table. Sorry about that. What you probably didn't hear because you were completely engaged in your own table discussions is the overall buzz in the room, and it's a wonderful sound. And as a result

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the think team in the back got a lot of input. And I want to just quickly go over. You will see it on the monitors next to you some of the themes and some of the gems that came up from your discussions, and then we'll probably have the panel--we'd like to have the panel reflect on those.

Some of the themes which are thoughts that came from several tables start locally with women's rights and welfare on campus, then build the movement outwards. It suggests to me, in my mind talking about chapters in university campuses, what exists, what doesn't exist and how to expand that. And I would be happy to hear from the panel if they have some experience on that one, how to do it, and you can read them most on the monitors.

We have advocate moving women into leadership roles, CEOs, et cetera, and lobby big companies to have better practices towards women. I'm now targeting this at university presidents. Are there any types of programs that we can have where universities and corporations build up structures of stipends in order to allow women to actually get internships in very good permanent positions in the business community as they go through their schools? Identify instance of sexual assault and discrimination on our own campuses. Use these stories and statistics to raise awareness and promote prevention. Again, it's something that exists. You know if you raised it. It

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exists in our campus. It's not only elsewhere. And this is a very important thing that came out.

Direct efforts to empower women within their culture, not imposing preconceived Western notions of empowerment. And that I would really want the panel to react, to reflect on how they're doing it and how it should be done in their mind. Include everyone in the conversation about women's issues--men, women, in the U.S. and international.

Have students go to women's shelters to experience the problems faced by women firsthand. And women need to respect their own bodies. It's not just men who disrespect women's bodies. [Applause]

Moving a little bit to a few of the gems, honor and recognizing the inspiring work of women to promote, empower and motivate other women. To some extents we have on this panel some great examples of that, and they exist everywhere, and they exist locally on your campus. And some of them are actually you, and sitting here, and we need to make sure that these are recognized by the university campuses and communities.

Use gender-mutual language. This is an interesting one. Create scholarship or fellowship programs to send students to study women's rights abroad, to make sure that we don't just concentrate about it here, but actually send people to the locations of what we're studying about. And I would

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like to also hear, not that I know, whether programs like that exist already. And if they do, maybe we can learn about them a little bit and see how we can actually join from their experience.

And I want to finish with a last gem, which I think reflects on something that Zainab said here on the panel earlier, and that is make tee shirts for men and women that say "This is what feminists look like." Sell it to men, make men start wearing them. [Laughter] I want to thank you for this great session, and I want to bring you back to the panel and to have them reflect on this. Thank you.

JAMES CARVILLE: Thank you very much. [Applause]
Alright. Does anybody—

NDIDI OKONKWO NWUNELI: I think these are all great suggestions, and I just want to comment on a few of them. One of them is the concept of recognizing the inspiring work of women. I think this is really, really critical. And with both LEAP and NIA, the two organizations that I've started that work with young people, I think that we've used the importance of role models and getting women to actually go out and interview other women about their lives, women in your communities who might seem very simple to you but are everyday heroes. And I think this really serves as a great mentoring relationship that is created. Every woman and every man needs a mentor, a role model and a critic, and I think that's a very important tool.

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The second one is the whole concept of starting from your school environment and the context in which you are. I'm just going to make a little plug for this organization I mentioned, Woman Thrive, and I think I put pamphlets on little tables. I think that, everybody, if you have the chance go to womanthrive.org, and this is their website. Recently the executive director and founder of Woman Thrive went to live on Honduras to see what it means like to live on less than a dollar a day. And it was a profound learning experience for her, because a large majority of the world's population lives on less than a dollar a day. And going through that experience and see what women especially go through was so profound. But they have tangible steps to say now that I've had that experience and you can learn from my experience, of course go out and have that experience, you can do something about it. You can influence policy at the local government level. You can write to your senators, you can get involved in your school campus, you can get online and do something about helping other women. So I would encourage all of you to visit that website.

And finally, I would say that in terms of scholarships or fellowship programs, there are a growing number of programs. I know that Goldman Sachs just launched this initiative. I think it's \$100 million--you know more about it--to train women in business schools around the world so that more women can be educated and can go back and transform the economies. And I'm

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sure you can find out more information about that. But organizations like NIA, and LEAP and so many others in Africa are always excited about people who want to come and study. So if you're interested you can send me an email, and I hope you find an internship this summer, if you don't already have one. Thank you.

ZAINAB SALBI: My comment, it goes back to one thing. It's actually about including women in decision making. That's as simple as that. One of my most embarrassing moments was when I was in Sudan a year ago sitting next to--talking to the Sudanese government about women's rights. And a man stopped me and he said, "I am sick and tired of people coming from the Western world, lecturing us about women's rights when all the U.N. delegations are men, and all the U.S. delegations are men, and all the European delegations are men. So unless you actually make sure that you include women in your own delegations, stop talking to us." And he's right, and I actually was silent in the moment.

I find it amazing that the only groups of people who do not burn, who do not pillage, who do not create wars, who do not rape, who do not create rebellious groups and who are the only ones worrying about getting food, getting their children to school, getting health systems are not included at the negotiating tables. All of these are commendations, whether it is about your own college campuses or whether about it's

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getting more women in leadership positions in companies in America, or other parts of the world, or women in politics. What women or men do around the world is about inclusion of women in decision making. It's about inclusion of women in the negotiating table. And when we do not do that, and when we are not doing that, women's rights are getting negotiated away by many of us around the world. It's not only a developing world issue. I really do agree that I think it's a universal issue. And when women's rights get negotiated away, we create a vacuum, a vacuum that the very enemy in some of the countries that we are fighting is taking on, and that is religious extremism.

As in Afghanistan, as in Iraq, as in so many countries, we need to put women's issues at the center of the discussion and not on marginal discussions. And we need to make sure that we include women in the discussions not in symbolic way. Not have one woman invited to a panel and check, or to a discussion. But really in a fully inclusive way, because we are missing out on ideas on how to solve some of the issues that you are raising in here when we're not including women.

So the fight for me is as simple as include more women at the decision-making issues. And that's women's issues, and men's issues, it's a human's issue. We can't talk about the building of a prosperous future without the full inclusion of strong women in it.

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JAMES CARVILLE: Well, David, the women got five minutes and you get five seconds, and that seems about the right allocation and time for you. No, give us an observation or two if you will, please.

DAVID LEEBRON, J.D.: I'm going to try to be very quickly. What I want to talk a little bit about, this question of direct efforts to empower women within their culture, not imposing pre-conceived Western notions of empowerment. This is a very complicated question. If you look at the convention on the elimination of discrimination against women, there are more fundamental reservations to that convention allegedly based on culture. And so we really have to start struggling with this issue, how do we on the one hand respect differences in culture, on the other hand not concede so much to differences in culture that we prevent the empowerment and protection of women.

I'll give you one brief example from my teaching experience. I was teaching class, I think it was on human rights, and we started talking about female circumcision. After the class I think a man from Africa wrote to me telling me how upset he was with this discussion, and it was kind of insensitive for me to raise the topic, and wasn't live difficult enough for him. And so I sent a note feeling well, maybe all of the students from Africa had been upset by that. And afterwards one of the women I wrote to wrote back and said

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no, I am so glad that you raised that issue and opened it up for class discussion. So I think we ought not be simplistic about this question of culture. We do have to respect differences, we have to not treat these kind of colonialists or imperialists about it, but at the same time I think we have to have a fundamental commitment to rights that says those rights don't have cultural boundaries.

And the last thing I want to say, just a word about the thing that said about honor and recognize the inspiring work of women to promote, and empower and motivate other women. So I want to add to that two things. One of the most successful university presidents in the United States got up in a very public panel and told this story sort of in answer to a question like this about how the key person in her life was in terms of inspiring her and giving her confidence was not a woman. It was a man who very early in her career said to her, "You one day are going to be a university president." Right? So it didn't matter to her what the gender was of the person who gave her that confidence and inspiration. This is not a responsibility limited to women, it extends to all of us.

And it works the other way around. I think we also honor and recognize the inspiring work of women who promote, empower and motivate men. And in my own career I started off working for women. Early in my career I worked for multiple women, ended up going to a law school to teach where the dean

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was a woman. And so I think we ought to recognize that all of us have a responsibility to motivate and empower people, and the potential to do that across gender lines.

JAMES CARVILLE: Thank you. [Applause] Which table came up with the idea of make tee shirts, this is what a feminist looks like? Right there. Okay. Now I'm going to have my wife and children verify this. I have and wear frequently a shirt that says, "This is what a feminist looks like." Right, girls? That's right. [Laughter] [Applause] And I want someone to send me a tee shirt that says, "Real men are feminists, [laughter] because you can't be a real man unless you're a feminist, and you can't be a real human being and not appreciate the contributions that this panel has made, and of the wisdom and the, like I say, the passion and the optimism that they bring to this. So thank you all so much, and I'm going to wear my shirt proudly. [Applause] Thank you.

So now we come for the commitment part of it, and I want the people to come up who are receiving the certificates, if you will, all the young people that are getting--I think you know who you are.

Frank Fredericks from New York University, come up. Come up, Frank. Come on. [Applause] Come up here. Tell us a little bit about what you're doing on your commitment. I want to hear from you.

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FRANK FREDERICKS: Alright. So in New York about a year-and-a-half ago we started an interfaith organization, Interfaith Action Network. And this specific project is we're working with a local organization called the New York Disaster Interfaith Service and the City of New York to create a protocol which houses of worship will be trained in so they can mobilize in emergency situations to deal with anything from a heat day, power outage, all the way to terrorist attacks or evacuations. So this basically allows houses of worship to mobilize to assist the public in a non-prophezing way. And then at the end of this year we're actually looking to take this model and export it to other locations, World Faith Works, my organization, and perhaps in India and Lebanon.

[Applause]

JAMES CARVILLE: You're a great man, and thank you so much for being part of this and signing this commitment. You're really a fine young man. There you go. Hey, you want your picture taken with me? Look at this. Alright. Frankie, baby. [Laughter] [Applause]

Alright. Now we have our friends from the Sudan here. Come up, please. Come up. Come on. Oh, my goodness. Alright, let's give it up. Alright. Okay, introduce yourselves and tell us about your commitment and what it makes. Go ahead.

SARAH SOLA: I'm Sarah [misspelled?].

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JIHAD ABONAVISA: This is Sara Sola [misspelled?] from Ahfad University. I'm Jihad Abonavisa [misspelled?] from Ahfad University for women in Sudan. Our commitment to action, basically Ahfad University students are required to participate in rural health projects anyways. And this is our new--what we're adding to it is that as a reaction to the conflict in Sudan, the Ahfad Medical Students Association in cooperation with other students, we will conduct workshops on peace building and health literacy for Sudanese, because the conflict is emerging as a health problem that affects our public health in Sudan, and it allows a lot of diseases to basically migrate from the areas that they were endemic in.

Another thing is that women are disproportionately affected by conflict, and so it's very important for women's reproductive health to teach women about peace building. Basically we will have certified trainers from Ahfad Medical Students Association teach approximately 500 students in health literacy. The peace-building component will require more extensive training, so we will basically do that for about 100 students. The main health issues that we will target will include female genital mutilation, maternal and child health and infectious disease. And we will introduce, like I said, conflict as a public health problem. And upon successful completion of the commitment the group will be dispersed across Sudan, basically, and they will go back to their communities

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including Darfar, Nuba Mountains and Juba, to continue on with the work that we will train them in. [Applause]

JAMES CARVILLE: Thank you so much. You're beautiful young people, and thank you so much for the commitment you make, and here's the commitment that you signed for the CGI. And you're an inspiration to all of us. Thank you so much. [Applause]

Now as an LSU person I cannot say the name of the next institution of higher learning, so will the Tuscaloosa contingent come up here please. I'm not going to say that world. Come up, darling. Come on up here and tell us--come up. Come up here. From Alabama, now, man. Get up here. Alright. Come on. Here we go. Alright. Beautiful. Now who's going to be--you're going to be the spokesperson. I just assigned you the job. I want you to introduce your fellow tiders, or whatever you call yourselves in Alabama--Roll tide.

ERIKA RICE: Roll tide.

JAMES CARVILLE: Go ahead, tell us--and then tell us about your commitment and what you're doing.

ERIKA RICE: Okay. My name is Erika Rice [misspelled?] from the University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa. And this is John Goods [misspelled?], and this is Jerry Bowers [misspelled?], who's a Master's student at the University of Alabama Tuscaloosa. We're all social worker students there. And our commitment to action is to start a program that would allow the

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Tuscaloosa community to work with ex-offenders, non-violent ex-offenders in reintegrating them back into the community by providing them with resources and jobs skills, training, resume building, just things to get them back on their feet and a functional part of society once again.

JAMES CARVILLE: Well, thank you so much. This is your plan to commitment. [Applause] We really, really appreciate it. Come on, let's get in here, John. Let's huddle up here, guys. Alright. [Applause] Thank you so much for your commitment. Thank you very much.

Again, I know that I speak for everybody up here to day that the real honor is for you allowing us to be something part of your doing, and the commitment that you're making. And I just want to stress one thing, is it's going to be a wonderful journey, you're going to do a lot of hard work. But just remember, you can have a lot of fun along the way. And always take my first rule, you don't have to take yourself seriously to take what you do seriously. Thank you all very much. Go ahead. [Applause]

MICKEY BERGMAN: Thank you so, so much. Thank you so much for this really, really great panel. It's a great way for us to end our working session today. And I just want to have one announcement, and this is that you're now asked to proceed immediately from here towards the closing plenary, which is going to be in the Fogleman Arena.

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Please note that you will be seated on the black chairs on the floor of the arena. And please remember that at the end of the session you are to remain seated until President Clinton actually leaves the arena. Thank you so much.

[END RECORDING]