

Statement by Ambassador Swanee Hunt
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US House Committee on Foreign Affairs
Subcommittee on International Organizations, Human Rights, and Oversight
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Distinguished Members of Congress,

I would like to thank Chairman Russell Carnahan and Ranking Member Dana Rohrabacher for inviting me to testify about advancing women's leadership in politics and civil society. I thank all the members of the Foreign Affairs Committee as well as representatives from other committees here today. By emphasizing women's agency rather than their victimhood, this subcommittee is highlighting an essential, yet often overlooked, partner in consolidating democracies and building peace.

I began promoting a more inclusive concept of security, one that acknowledges women's contributions to peace and stability, as US Ambassador to Austria. While helping resolve the conflict in the Balkans from 1993 to 1997, I became keenly aware of the unwillingness of the international community to use the enormous pool of talented, well-educated women peace builders to help resolve the conflict. Yugoslavia, the country torn apart by a bloody war that lasted a decade and killed close to 200,000 people, had the highest percentage of women PhDs per capita; yet when we convened the parties in Vienna and later at Dayton to negotiate, no women were on any formal delegations.

The marginalization of these experts in the Balkans was simply part of a broader problem of exclusion. To address it, in the fall of 1999 I founded a program called The Institute for Inclusive Security. Its cornerstone has been the global network of women peace builders, which has since grown to include over 1,000 women from 50 conflicts. My primary goal was to connect its members to policymakers around the world. Network members, all demonstrated leaders, are elected and appointed government officials, directors of NGOs and movements in civil society, scholars and educators, businesspeople, representatives of multilateral organizations, and journalists. With such varied backgrounds, perspectives, and skills, they bring a vast array of expertise to the peacemaking process. Over the past decade, these leaders have led major efforts to create stability in the most volatile places in the world, ranging from Afghanistan to Sri Lanka, Colombia to Liberia, the Middle East to Cambodia.

Women and Government

To build inclusive political institutions, cultivate economic development, and sustain peace, governments must reflect the needs and priorities of the whole population. Yet today, women are severely underrepresented in governments across the globe. Women currently fill only 17 percent of parliamentary seats worldwide and only 14 percent of ministerial-level positions. They continue to be marginalized and underrepresented in everything from district councils to constitution-drafting committees to legislatures.

This is true despite a growing body of research showing the distinct roles women play in society. Strengthening women's leadership results in significant rewards for governance.

The Benefits of Women's Leadership

1. Women advance critical developmental priorities post-conflict.

Worldwide, women legislators often champion issues that directly impact communities, such as education, health care, and the environment. In many settings, women have crossed ethnic, religious, and

party lines to shape peace agreements, sponsor legislation, and influence the drafting of constitutions in ways that ensured greater attention to long-term social well-being. Women also are more likely to adopt a comprehensive definition of security, one that highlights key social and economic issues critical to solving intractable conflicts.

2. Women help rehabilitate the image of government in the eyes of the people.

In post-apartheid South Africa, women leaders successfully involved the general population in re-envisioning the role of the military so it could be viewed as a service provider rather than as an arm of a tyrannical regime. In Rwanda, the rise of women improved public perception of government; women there — and elsewhere around the world — are perceived to be less corrupt. In fact, research by the World Bank and others indicates a direct correlation between women and decreased bribery and corruption in the public sector.

3. A critical mass of women in governing institutions promotes collaboration across ideological lines and sectors.

Nothing illustrates this point better than the work of Senator Aloisea Inyumba of Rwanda. At the age of 26, Ms. Inyumba became Rwanda's minister of gender and social affairs after the genocide. She designed programs to bury 800,000 corpses and crafted a national adoption campaign to find homes for 500,000 orphans. As head of the Commission for Unity and Reconciliation, she went village to village helping victims dramatize their tragedies, preparing them for the reintegration of perpetrators. She created women's councils that fed into the parliament, resulting in the highest percentage of women legislators in the world.

In Rwanda's Parliament, Senator Inyumba and her female colleagues have secured what many have only dreamt possible: a female majority legislature. With 56 percent representation in the lower house, Rwanda is at the top of the world's ranking of women's political representation. Though Rwanda's legislative branch is relatively weak, women parliamentarians have been at the forefront of efforts to improve it. They developed and introduced the first substantive legislation to originate in Rwanda's parliament—a bill on gender-based violence. The Forum of Rwandan Women Parliamentarians (FFRP), a cross-party caucus to which all female members belong, led the bill's drafting and introduction. Throughout the process, the FFRP used an inclusive approach: extensive consultations and outreach to men and women in communities nationwide influenced the bill's provisions. Moreover, women legislators included male colleagues in the consultations and recruited them as co-sponsors. The significance of this legislation can not be overstated; Rwanda's executive branch has put forward every other substantive law since the 2003 election of Rwanda's first post-genocide, permanent government.

4. Women increase cooperation between government and civil society.

In Kosovo, Vjosa Dobruna led the interim government Department for Democratic Governance and Civil Society. She viewed as a priority the need to organize consultations on human rights and other issues with civil society. Dobruna notes these processes sparked a cooperative relationship between government and grassroots organizations: "For the first time, a ministry included marginalized minorities. We asked them what they wanted, and we listened to their responses."

In Afghanistan, women have been active participants in their country's reconstruction, striving to promote gender equity, religious and political moderation, and human rights education and reforms.

No one can tell the story of Afghan women better than the Honorable Shukria Barakzai. Despite the crushing oppression of Taliban rule, Ms. Barakzai founded and directed the Asia Women's Organization,

which provided underground education for women and girls. Ms. Barakzai was not alone; countless Afghan women continued to provide health, education, and social services under the Taliban, providing the foundation for Afghanistan's civil society networks today.

In 2005, Ms. Barakzai and more than 600 other women ran in Afghanistan's first parliamentary elections in over 30 years. The road to victory was not an easy one; she and many other candidates faced verbal harassment and even physical violence during the campaign. The results of the 2005 elections exceeded expectations, with women capturing 17 seats beyond the 68 allocated by quota.

While increasingly marginalized, women parliamentarians represent the only counterbalance to the religious leaders and warlords that dominate the National Assembly. While fighting immense challenges, they have bridged ethnic and political divides through a nonpartisan women's network, which includes women from the Assembly, various institutions of the executive branch, and representatives of civil society. When the Shiite Personal Status Law passed, women not only came together to demonstrate on Kabul's streets, but they also drafted and passed Afghanistan's first ever legislation outlawing violence against women. The legislation was recently signed into law by President Karzai. Through these multi-sectoral initiatives, women are broadening participation, helping to democratize Afghanistan's fledgling government.

More work still needs to be done. This fall, women will once again run for seats in the National Assembly. While the constitutional quota has opened the door for women, the international community must do more to ensure women can meaningfully participate in the legislative process. Like Rwanda, Afghanistan's women parliamentarians need a cross-party women's caucus in the National Assembly to provide the support and resources necessary to become effective leaders. As Afghanistan stands at a critical crossroads, these women are key allies we simply cannot afford to lose.

5. Women in government serve as a democratizing force.

In 1993, Cambodia held democratic elections, bringing peace to a country besieged by more than 40 years of civil war and despotic rule by the Khmer Rouge. Although the country's political environment is marked with party isolation and mistrust, the growing number of women in local government has strengthened democratic values.

Like many, the Honorable Mu Sochua was forced to flee her homeland to escape the Khmer Rouge. After nearly 18 years in exile, she returned to Cambodia and to an environment *Time* magazine called "a pervert's paradise." Women and girls were routinely being trafficked as sex workers. As Cambodia's first minister of women's affairs, Sochua negotiated an agreement with Thailand allowing trafficked Cambodian women to return to their country instead of being jailed. She authored and defended the Domestic Violence Law in Parliament. Sochua continues to call for greater national and international attention to government corruption and human rights abuses. She is the first woman to become secretary-general of a political party, and as a top opposition leader, she constantly faces threat and intimidation. Sochua's refusal to stand down has come at great personal sacrifice; she was recently stripped of her parliamentary immunity and found guilty of defamation against Cambodia's prime minister. Today, she is faced with imprisonment because she is refusing efforts by the government to silence her opposition. She continues to push for increased transparency and oversight, challenging local norms and systems that breed corruption and stymie genuine democratic development.

A Critical Window of Opportunity

These women are not exceptions to the rule; they are but a few examples of the valuable contributions millions of women make every day to building peace, providing stability, and consolidating democracies.

In the past decade, the rhetorical commitment to women's leadership has increased. The UN has passed Resolution 1325, 1888, and 1889, each emphasizing women's participation as a key prerequisite in establishing durable peace and security.

The 10th anniversary of UNSCR 1325 on Women, Peace and Security takes place in October 2010. Despite some important progress in achieving the goals of women's empowerment and protection in the context of armed conflict, the promise of Resolution 1325 is largely a dream deferred. Women face continued exclusion from peace processes and post-conflict governments. Reconstruction efforts are usually not gender-sensitive. There is rampant sexual violence against women in conflict, and rape is often used as a weapon of war.

Former Irish President Mary Robinson and I worked closely with UN Deputy Secretary General Asha-Rose Migiro to spur the creation of a high-level steering committee on 1325 that includes the heads of all relevant UN agencies. That committee is meant to ensure a coherent and coordinated approach by the UN system to implementing the resolution. A civil society advisory group is helping shape the committee's focus and generating support and specific commitments from UN member states; I, along with Mary Robinson, Executive Director of Femmes Africa Solidarité Bineta Diop, former UN Special Representative of the Secretary General Lakhdar Brahimi, Ambassador Don Steinberg, and several Advisory Group members are seeking to make sure the tenth anniversary is a call to action.

US action and support in the lead up to this anniversary is critical. It would focus attention and catalyze support for women's leadership. It would strengthen the effort to end conflict and build peaceful, democratic societies around the world. And it could meaningfully help the women leading efforts to end conflict and strengthen communities globally.

What Can Congress Do?

The US Congress must play an important role in advancing women's global leadership. In particular:

- 1) Congress should use its oversight role to request from the administration much more significant political and financial attention to programs that promote women's political leadership. Specific focus should be placed on:**
 - a) Cultivating nonpartisan women's legislative caucuses and supporting them technically and financially;
 - b) Supporting training for women parliamentarians on coalition building, advocacy, and public speaking as well as training that involves men to strengthen support for women's participation;
 - c) Providing financial and technical backing for civil society consultations on legislative initiatives in post-conflict countries;
 - d) Underwriting practical support to female candidates and government officials, such as transportation, child-care, extra security when appropriate, and access to mass media for campaigns; and
 - e) Funding urban and rural campaigns that publicize women's contributions and ability to lead.
- 2) Congress should assist the United States in demonstrating leadership in implementing UN Security Council Resolution 1325 by:**
 - a) Authorizing and appropriating funds to enable the direct participation of women in peace negotiations as well as post-conflict needs assessment and donor conferences;
 - b) Encouraging US support for a minister-level conference of UN member states proposed by the UN Civil Society Advisory Group on Women, Peace, and Security as well as substantial US

commitments at the ministerial conference. This conference would take place in October 2010 and provide a forum for member states and the UN itself to make commitments to specific actions they will take on this agenda over the next 3–5 years;

- c) Allocating increased funding and resources to combat sexual violence against women refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs); and
- d) Passing the International Violence Against Women Act.

3) Congressional members should regularly meet with women political and civil society leaders during CODELS. You would be surprised at the difference in substance and in tone. As ambassador, I worked closely with President Clinton, Secretary Albright, and Ambassador Holbrooke on Bosnian peace. We all had many frustrating encounters with stubborn local politicians who refused to support the possibility of coexistence. I always countered that resistance by meeting with hundreds of local women who had their fingers on the pulse of their communities. Each time I left inspired by their energy and motivation to rebuild their country.

4) Congress needs to regularly recognize and call on women leaders from government and civil society around the world to testify. Aloisea Inyumba, Shukria Barakzai, and Vjosa Dobruna are among the foremost leaders in their countries, yet it is rare to see a woman from a conflict zone called to testify and lend her expertise to your deliberations. Leaders like Mishkat Al Moumin should regularly be among those whose insight you seek. It will elevate their prominence and amplify their voices. Most importantly, it will enhance US efforts to consolidate democracies and sustain peace.

Thank you.