

Citizenship through Community of Enquiry

The following is an abridged version of part of a speech delivered by Hillary Clinton to the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women, in Beijing, China, September 1995.

This conference is truly a celebration – a celebration of the contributions women make in every aspect of life: in the home, on the job, in their communities, as mothers, wives, sisters, daughters, learners, workers, citizens and leaders.

It is also a coming together, much the way women come together every day in every country. We come together in fields and in factories, in village markets and supermarkets, in living rooms and boardrooms. Whether it is while playing with our children in the park, or washing clothes in a river, or taking a break at the office water cooler, we come together and talk about our aspirations and concerns. And time and time again, our talk turns to our children and our families. However different we may be, there is far more that unites us than divides us. We share a common future. And we are here to find common ground so that we may help bring new dignity and respect to women and girls all over the world – and in so doing, bring new strength and stability to families as well.

What we are learning is that if women are healthy and educated, their families will flourish. If women are free from violence, their families will flourish. If women have a chance to work and earn as full and equal partners in society, their families will flourish. And when families flourish, communities and nations will flourish. That is why every woman, every man, every child, every family and every nation on our planet has a stake in the discussion that takes place here. At this very moment, as we sit here, women around world are giving birth, raising children, cooking meals, washing clothes, cleaning houses, planting crops, working on assembly lines, running companies and running countries.

Women also are dying from diseases that should have been prevented or treated; they are watching their children succumb to malnutrition caused by poverty and economic deprivation; they are being denied the right to go to school by their own fathers and brothers; they are being forced into prostitution, and they are being barred from the bank lending office and banned from the ballot box. Those of us who have the opportunity to be here have the responsibility to speak for those who could not.

If there is one message that echoes forth from this conference, it is that human rights are women's rights – and women's rights are human rights. Let us not forget that among those rights are the right to speak freely – and the right to be heard.

Families rely on mothers and wives for emotional support and care; families rely on women for labour in the home; and increasingly, families rely on women for income needed to raise healthy children and care for other relatives. As long as discrimination and inequities remain so commonplace around the world – as long as girls and women are valued less, fed less, fed last, overworked, underpaid, not schooled and subjected to violence in and out of their homes – the potential of the human family to create a peaceful, prosperous world will not be realised.