

Opening Remarks
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Global Forum—Win With Women
National Democratic Institute
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Welcome to the Women's Global Forum luncheon. On behalf of NDI's Board of Directors and staff, I want to thank you for being with us today.

This is the closing event of a groundbreaking two-day forum—a gathering of a group of remarkable individuals from 28 countries in every region of the world. The participants have two important traits in common—they are women and they are politicians—two classes of citizens who have long suffered discrimination. They were born into womanhood. However, they also chose to subject themselves to the slings and arrows of political life.

They are members of parliament, political party leaders, cabinet ministers and heads of government. The group includes older women who were trailblazers and younger women who followed their path. Many persevered against daunting odds. By their very presence they represent the potential of women in power. Politicians—whether male or female—are happier when they can point to something they share. This is the quest for affinity. It is the very heart of politics, when mutual concern culminates in action.

They have assembled here to recognize the great strides women have made in the political arena over the past decade. That is the celebratory side of our gathering. But there is a different side as well: the hard reality that the struggle for broader involvement of women in politics—at all levels, and everywhere—goes on against tremendous odds. We are assembled here because we desire change: a sea change. An attitudinal change. A generational change.

We hope and expect that the Women's Global Forum will not just be another conference. The global action plan developed and adopted by the participants at the forum can be a global call to action, a living document that, with political will, can be a practical blueprint and a tool to promote women's political leadership roles.

I want to thank our chairman Madeleine Albright and Board Member Geraldine Ferraro for their leadership at this forum as well as their leadership at NDI.

I want to recognize NDI's vice president, Jean Dunn, who, in addition to her day job of running the day-to-day operations of NDI, conceived, designed and managed this forum. This event is a testament to her vision and perseverance. Jean was ably assisted by Kristin Haffert, who coordinates our women's programs, and many other NDI staff members.

I would like to recognize the supporters of the Global Forum who are listed in your program. Without their generous support, this forum would simply not be possible.

And finally, I want to acknowledge with great appreciation those who have supported NDI's women's political leadership programs worldwide—The National Endowment for Democracy and the US Agency for International Development. We are proud to be a member of the Endowment family and, on our 20th anniversary, we are deeply grateful for the support we have received from four administrations, Republican and Democratic alike, and from the U.S. Congress.

In conclusion, let me share with you a fundamental but often overlooked fact. That at the heart of all democracies is the politician, and his or her political party. Therefore, it should come as no surprise that when political parties fail to fulfill their special roles, the entire democratic system is jeopardized. And we have seen growing evidence of this in far too many places. The fate of parties should concern every practitioner of democracy—whether of the left, center or right on the ideological spectrum. It is what we share in common. It affects every society—whether a traditional, emerging or new democracy. It impacts on developed and developing countries alike. And parties must reform, renew and modernize themselves if they hope gain, and in some places regain, the trust of the citizens.

That reform process must begin with outreach efforts to women, to youth and to previously disenfranchised communities. And women's participation does not mean token representation on the lower end of party lists or the creation of toothless "women's wings." It means real leadership roles. Parties are the surest path to women's political leadership and that leadership is an essential ingredient to the vitality of political parties and to the democratic system itself.

I would like to close by quoting from a retired Lt Colonel in the U.S. Army, Ralph Peters, a military historian. "The transition from women as property to women as full participants in society," he said, "has been the greatest revolution in human history, and its reverberations will be felt for centuries. Repressive cultures are horrified by it because it calls into question their most fundamental biological, sociological and religious ideas. However, the oppression of women anywhere is not only a human rights violation. It's a suicide pact with the future".

Thank you