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Women's Status on the Threshold of the Third Millennium

*Zahra Shojaie**

I am extremely happy to avail myself of this opportunity to participate in this conference as the representative of my country and speak on behalf of the Muslim nation of Iran. I am speaking on behalf of an Iran the fame of whose splendid civilization has reverberated in the ears of history and its freedom-seeking voice has been heard by every righteous person. Putting behind several political, economic and international crises, today Iran is marching ahead towards institutionalizing civil society which is going to add another golden page to its historical dignity. The chronology of history indicates that count down has begun for the end of a century and the beginning of a new century.

Today every free human being must prepare himself for entry into the 21st century with a realistic approach to the past and analysis of the past events in every corner of this globe. He/She must also think of man with all aspects of his being, all his needs and natural wants, his thought and ability and the path that he should proceed to reach the ideal perfection, that is becoming a perfect man.

I am happy to announce that the world is preparing itself to celebrate the year 2001 as designated by the United Nations- on the proposal of the President of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Seyed Mohammed Khatami, and warm welcome of the scholars at International organizations- as the year of Dialogue Among Civilizations. Naturally our civilizations, that is Iran, Greece and Italy should play a key role in this regard.

Today's world cries for a new development in the domain of thought. One of the basic issues in our contemporary world is the necessity of holding dialogue among the scholars to revive the proximity among great civilizations which have been shedding light on the generations over the centuries. Today this chandelier of civilizations needs a new polishing.

The world of 21st century needs the revival of man's dignity. Today man is fed up with the genocide, aggression and contempt of man in all corners of the world and seeks peace, security, stability and freedom.

Since I am representing the women society in Iran, I would like to touch upon the issues of family and women on the threshold of the 21st century. One of the anxieties of man today is the destruction of the foundation of family which has its roots in the lack of a proper approach to its members, specially woman - as the main foundation of family, as a spouse, as a mother, and as a guardian. Another anxiety is the lack of a proper approach to child as the result and fruit of family life who guarantees its sustenance and continuation.

* Her Excellency Zahra Shojaie is Iran's Presidential Advisor in Charge of Women Affairs. The address was delivered on 3rd March 1999 at the Hellenic Foundation for European and Foreign Policy (ELIAMEP), Athens.

One of the indices of human resources development is proper approach to the real place of woman. Today woman, whether Iranian or non-Iranian, in any part of the world has inevitably a dual role. On the one hand shoulder-to-shoulder with men, she is participating in the process of production and development of her country in the political, social, cultural and economic fields, and on the other, she is responsible for bringing up the new generations and training human force. As a competent manager, she is the pivot of the family and the family is run with her emotional management. Family is an institution which is considered sacred in all divine religions, because it is a center for the development of individual and society. Today attention to family is necessary more than any other time. Family and the health of its members must be respected.

Woman is the pivot of the family and child is its subject in the fast-moving society. The strength of the family can be maintained only if serious thought is given to its foundation which is the health of the mother and the children.

Attention to the young girls and their basic roles in creating political, social and cultural developments is a serious matter. Spiritual-mental peace in the educational and social institutes is among the important factors for maintaining the health of the society. The spread of poverty, economic dependence among the women and the violence they endure, negative attitudes towards the women and girls, racism and sexual discriminations are common problems of all women across the world.

As a woman I would like to announce today that the time has come to put an end to slogans, speeches, resolutions and sessions that are held in the name of supporting the women. We must respect the women in practice. All scholars and politicians should join efforts to find proper strategies to improve the conditions of the women and restore her real dignity.

Still women are suffering in many countries because they are women despite the humanitarian resolutions and protective human rights. Still women are caught in the clutches of carnal power of their men in many countries and their humanitarian rights, stipulated in the divine religions, being neglected like the stone age. Still in many countries women are the instruments for the enjoyment of men.

In order to restore the woman's rights we must prepare the grounds for her to utilize her rights without any anxiety and fear to remove the restrictions which have been imposed on her soul and body over the centuries.

Let us open a new horizon for half of the body of the societies, that is, the women with creating new opportunities for them.

In order to materialize these goals, the following proposals are suggested:

1. Answer should be found to this great international paradox about the women: how can the women play their two roles (in family and society) so that one does not disturb the other?
2. Revision of the development plans at macro level, specially in the Third World countries, with special attention to women. (I am happy to inform you that this has materialized in the Third Development Plan of the Islamic Republic of Iran).
3. Allowing the women to develop their personality within the religious, cultural and national frameworks of each country, refraining from issuing a uniform formula for all women through the world.

4. Utilizing the year of Dialogue Among Civilizations to materialize the role of the women in this dialogue. Bring women of various nations close to each other for better mutual understanding of each other's belief and strengthening of mutual respect to their religious, cultural and national beliefs.

At the end I want to mention a number of achievements of Iranian women in different areas including political, cultural, educational and in economic fields. Parts of these achievements are as follow:

Political Field

- The upgrade of the office for women affairs. It has become the Center for Women Participation with its head attending the cabinet sessions.
- The upgrade of the judiciary's office in charge of women affairs to a general directorate and establishment of its branches in seven provinces.
- Setting up of a commission of women, family and youth in the Iranian Parliament.
- Establishing especial departments in charge of women affairs in the ministries and the governmental organizations.
- Establishing provincial commissions on women affairs which are now spread in 243 cities and towns.
- Promotion of private women agencies and nongovernmental organizations. At present there are 90 women NGOs active in Iran.
- The number of women candidates in the city councils elections (held on February 26th) has increased by 40 percent as compared to the fifth Parliament elections.

Cultural Field

- Establishment of more than 1312 rural libraries for rural women and girls.
- Inauguration of the first specialized women library and several cultural houses for women.
- Designing women's data bank and information sites.
- Establishment of the Association of Women Journalists last October. At present some 67 publications are being run by women working either as the editor-in-chief, license holder or the managing director.

Educational Field

- To reduce educational inequalities some 486 guidance schools have been established in deprived regions of the country. Some 350 of them are allocated to boys and 136 others to girls.
- Some 45.48 percent of the total educational establishments in rural areas are allocated to girls.
- Girls constitute 47.78 percent of country's high school students and boys 52.22 percent.
- In the current academic year girls constitute 52.1 percent of the total students who admitted to the universities through the nation wide entrance exam.

Economic Field

- More than 21 billion rials have been allocated for women's sports.

-There are 282 carpet weaving cooperatives and unions 70 percent of whose members are women.
-More than two millions women and girls received vocational training in more than 2,000 rural welfare centers last year.
-At present there are 46 women productive units which are active in producing livestock products and clothing. Some 663 training clubs have been established for girls in rural areas.
-Agricultural Bank of Iran has initiated a plan under the name of "Hazrat-e Zeinab (SA)" with an aim to support for those women who head the household.
By the end of 1997, the bank had offered 37,000 credit facilities for these women. More than 45 billion rials have been allocated for this purpose.

In the end, I hope all women of the world get united, gather under one umbrella and rise to solve their common problems.

Thank You