

Remarks at Seminar on Domestic Violence – Women in Crisis

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Bon dia. Bon bini.

Thank you. Thank you all for coming to hear about, to discuss, and work together to build solutions to this important problem.

First of all, I want to thank Willem Remie, Public Diplomacy Specialist at our Consulate for working together with the University of the Netherlands Antilles and many other local partners to organize this conference. Our partners include Miloushka Racamy, Daira Leer, Jeanette Juliet-Pablo, Cassandra Martha, Jeanne de Bruijn, Chris Palm, Niki Van Wijk, Sharine Eisdien, Corah Perret Gentil, the Curacao Department of Labor, and the Rector of UNA Miguel Goede. Most of all, I want to thank our expert speakers, Marisa Rivera-Albert and Dr. Elaine Alpert, for coming all the way from the United States to address this important topic.

I am new to Curacao, having arrived only seven weeks ago to begin my assignment as U.S. Consul General to the six islands of the Dutch Antilles. In that short time, I have already seen what a beautiful island Curacao is and how wonderful and full of potential the people of Curacao are. But the cycle of violence sadly limits the potential of too many people – most often woman – in Curacao.

As a career diplomat, Hillary Clinton is an inspiration to me on the topic of women's issues.

She was instrumental in bringing international attention to horrible atrocities being committed against women in the DRC, even – at great personal risk – visiting that war-torn area herself.

She also was instrumental in pushing for the establishment of UNIFEM the first UN organization dedicated to women, much in the same way that UNICEF has been advocating on behalf of children since 1953. 57 years Later, It's about time that the UN paid more attention to women.

Just last year, Secretary Clinton also established the first Ambassador-at-Large for Global Women's Issues to promote the political, economic, and social empowerment of women.

Together, Secretary Clinton and Dutch Princess Maxima recently co-hosted a UN event on micro-financing which helps women start small businesses and become financially independent.

Studies have shown that if you give a micro loan to a woman to open a small business, she is more likely to pay it back on time. If you give a small grant to a poor woman she is much more likely to spend it on

books or school uniforms for her children, than if you give a small grant to a man, he is more likely to spend it on cigarettes, alcohol or lottery tickets. Sound familiar?

What impresses me most about Secretary Clinton is that she gets it. Women's issues are important, not just because she is a woman, not just because I am a woman, but because women play a key role in economic development, equally important, women often take the lead role in raising children, who are our future.

I am also inspired by our First Lady, Michele Obama, because she is doing so much for women and girls not only in our own country, but around the world. She inspires them, particularly women of color. She challenges them. She exemplifies for them the kind of strength, warmth, and grace that so many of us see in her and aspire to for our own daughters. She has made the health and empowerment of young people - particularly young women - a centerpiece of her leadership.

As women, we must support each other as mentors and cheerleaders as Hillary Clinton and Michele Obama are doing.

Let me share with you a little bit about my background. I am from a very small town, even smaller than Willemstad. Fairbanks, Alaska – in the middle of nowhere – has only 50,000 people. My father was the first of his family to go to college, but even on limited income as a college professor, he and my mother very carefully and selflessly saved as much as they could so that I too could go to college.

I give credit today to many people for where I am today. First of all, to my mother and father for having faith in me and encouraging me. To my teachers in elementary and high school for convincing me that I could be or do anything I set my mind to as long as I studied hard. To women of the 1970s who broke the barriers that kept women from being able to study at Princeton, as Michelle Obama and I did only ten years later.

To anyone here who feels as blessed and as fortunate as I do, to anyone who was helped by a mentor or inspired by your parents, by a teacher, or by a successful woman. It is now our turn to give back, to mentor, to inspire and to empower others. We must give them the encouragement, the education, and the opportunity they need to succeed.

It is my sincere hope that together we can lead Curacao from being a place of women in crisis to being a place where women are empowered. Too often women endure isolation and intimidation and, sadly, even violence rather than being appreciated for the great untapped resource they are for the betterment of our families, our communities and our societies. It is up to us, working together, to change this. Curacao cannot wait for others to come and solve the problems of domestic violence. It is up to you – the men and women of Curacao – to take action to change this cycle of violence and turn it upside-down into a virtuous cycle of empowerment.

Unfortunately, I am not able to stay for today's proceedings, but I will rejoin you tonight. I wish you a very successful and inspiring conference. I have met Ms. Rivera-Albert and Dr. Alpert and I can assure

you that they are very inspiring women. Thank you again for coming. I am confident that at the end of this conference you will feel inspired and empowered to break the cycle of violence.