

**Remarks by Dr. Lindsay Kaplan
American Center
March 8, 2011, 10:00 a.m.**

Vážená paní velvyslankyně Macleod; vážení hosté, dámy a pánové!

I am delighted to be with you for the 100th Anniversary of International Women's Day, a global celebration of the economic, political, and social achievements of women past, present, and future. I would like to thank the organizers, and in particular Jitka Vildova, for making this event possible.

Twenty two years after the Velvet Revolution, the Czech Republic has matured into a democracy which promotes and protects the rights of the voiceless, including women and children, in places such as Burma, Cuba, Belarus and Afghanistan. Today Czechs play an integral part in rebuilding the fabric of trust and community that totalitarian regimes destroy. But there is much work to be done here at home, especially in regard to gender equality.

In 1995 Secretary Hillary Clinton said in Beijing that “[i]t is no longer acceptable to discuss women's rights as separate from human rights.” In other words, human rights are women's rights, and women's rights are human rights. This quote, along with the two studies commissioned for this conference, serve as excellent starting points for our discussion on the issues that face women today. There are certainly differences between the situation in the United States and the Czech Republic. International Women's Day is not widely celebrated in the U.S., while it certainly has a negative connotation here from its promotion during the Communist era. Furthermore, as the feminist movement was taking off in the U.S. in the 1960s and 1970s, a very different process was occurring in Czechoslovakia. Accordingly, this disproportionately affected the level of discourse on women's rights, as well as its perception amongst the general population.

Thankfully, and due in large part to the efforts of many of you in this room, there have been significant accomplishments in the Czech Republic over the past twenty years. Much work is left to be done, and I believe the American and Czech women are facing the same core problems of wage disparities, opportunities for career advancement, political representation, and domestic violence.

For example, despite the Equal Pay Act of 1963, wage disparities still exist in the US. As Lisa Fiala points out in her study, women have lower median weekly earnings than men at all levels of education. The earnings gap is largest for workers with a bachelor's or advanced degree.

There is also a woeful imbalance in many career fields, with women being overrepresented in education and nursing and underrepresented in the sciences and the upper echelon of businesses. In the U.S., women constitute 45 percent of the workforce, but hold just 12 percent of science and engineering jobs. In addition, there are very few female CEOs – in 2009, only 15 Fortune 500 companies had women CEOs. As for politics, women hold less than 17% of U.S. congressional seats, and 22% of seats in the Czech Chamber of Deputies.

Furthermore, being a mother should not end a career. While maternity policies in the Czech Republic are far more generous than in the U.S., it often is a double-edged sword. Czech businesses and government have not created daycare facilities or flexible work plans to meet the needs of mothers who want to continue their careers without a major interruption.

On the other hand, in the US it is nearly an imperative for American women to return to work soon after giving birth, or become stay at home mothers. US law only requires that firms with 50 or more employees provide 12 weeks of unpaid maternity leave. Today, there are five million American stay-at-home mothers, compared to 154,000 stay at home fathers. The U.S. government allows its employees to use pre-tax dollars for daycare services, and often contracts for daycare services near the

employee's work. But this can be prohibitively expensive; sometimes the mother's salary barely covers the cost of child care. Also, flexible work schedules often turn out not to be very flexible.

Reaching a reasonable balance between work and family life is a significant problem that we face today and in the coming years. For example, a few weeks ago, I visited Tabor. Ambassador Eisen, my husband, talked with the teachers and students at the local Gymnazium. It was hard not to notice that the entire English-language faculty was comprised of women. When asked about the disparity, they pointed not only to an education system that gendered teaching careers as female, but also to the low salaries that made it near impossible for married, male teachers to afford both a family and a teaching career.

Finally, and most appallingly, violence against wives, girlfriends, and daughters continues to grow. Gender-based violence not only destroys the lives of individual girls and women, families, and communities, but also robs the world of the talent it urgently needs. In the United States, one in four women experiences domestic violence in her lifetime. In the Czech Republic, every fifth family has a history of domestic violence. Encouragingly, in 2007 the Czech Parliament passed a law in which the perpetrators of domestic violence can be temporarily expelled from their homes. Laws are only good when they are implemented, and last year, this law was used over one thousand times to protect victims of domestic violence -- the most to date.

So today, it is fitting that we not only reflect on the extraordinary accomplishments of women, but also recommit to erasing the remaining inequities. As President Barack Obama proclaimed last week, "We must carry forward the work of the women who came before us and ensure our daughters have no limits on their dreams, no obstacles to their achievements, and no remaining ceilings to shatter." Thank you, and I look forward to your discussion.