

"Honoring Women in an Age of Participation"  
March 8, 2012

March 8 is an important day of international celebration of women.

U.S. Secretary Clinton has noted that "... around the world... 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."

These words have particular relevance as we celebrate International Women's Day around the world and as we continue to make strides for women's progress.

On December 10th, 2011, the Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to three extraordinary women who have led the fight for human rights and democracy in their home countries - President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf and Leymah Gbowee of Liberia, and Tawakkol Karman of Yemen. Their achievement signifies recognition on the world stage of the essential role that women must play in the hard work of building peace and sustainable communities in the 21st century.

In December, President Obama released the first ever U.S. National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security, charting a roadmap for how the United States will accelerate and institutionalize efforts across the government to advance women's participation in preventing conflict and keeping peace. This initiative represents a fundamental change in how the U.S. will approach its diplomatic, military, and development-based support to women in areas of conflict, by ensuring that their perspectives and considerations of gender are woven into the fabric of how the United States approaches peace processes, conflict prevention, the protection of civilians, and humanitarian assistance.

This International Women's Day, Secretary Clinton and First Lady Michelle Obama will host the 6th Annual International **Women of Courage Awards**, honoring 10 remarkable women from around the world. These women have shown exceptional bravery and leadership in advocating for women's rights and empowerment, often at great personal risk. Their stories represent just a few of the emerging leaders found in every corner of the world.

Yet, as we rightfully honor achievements, we must also be reminded that International Women's Day is an opportunity to renew the call for action, investment, and commitment to women's equality. We are at a moment of historic opportunity. Secretary Clinton has referred to this era as "the Participation Age". This is a time where every individual, regardless of gender or other characteristics, is poised to be a contributing and valued member of their society.

Here in the Marshall Islands, women continue to assume leadership roles to ensure this nation's women are healthy and educated, that they are free from violence, that they have a chance to work and earn as full and equal partners in society, that they are poised to be contributing and valued members of the Marshallese society.

Today is a day to celebrate and join the ongoing efforts of women's organizations here in the Marshall Islands:

- Women United Together, Marshall Islands – WUTMI – whose very name defines the way in which women around the world are making a difference. The women of WUTMI have worked together for many years to ensure women in the Marshall Islands have a voice in their government, as well as access to education and the skills and tools they need to improve their economic condition.

- Juren Ae – for leading young women into the future by training them in both traditional and modern skills that help them improve their economic future and livelihood.
- Kora In Jour Lale Ejmou – KIJLE – for its efforts to improve the health of women in the RMI,
- Kora In Okrane – KIO Club – for its work in mentoring young women and encouraging young girls through school,
- Atar Moman Eo – for building the entrepreneurial capacity of women on Majuro and Arno.
- Women’s Athletic Club – WAC – for encouraging women to participate in sports and for their ongoing support of patients at Majuro’s hospital.
- Pneuma Ministries – for its educational program to help young mothers get the basic skills they need to continue on to college or improve their employment prospects.

Empowerment of women is a cornerstone of America's foreign policy because the simple fact is that no country can hope to move ahead if it is leaving half of its people behind. Women and girls drive our economies. They build peace and prosperity. Investing in women is a means of investing in global economic progress, political stability, and greater prosperity for everyone the world over. As we honor women today, let us renew our resolve to work for the cause of equality each and every day of the year.