

## "Honoring Women in an Age of Participation"

*by Melanne Verveer*

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Secretary Clinton has noted that "What we are learning around the world is that 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.

Around the world, we are witnessing examples of the Participation Age. Here in the Netherlands, I was inspired to meet Dutch women who care about the plight of other women around the world and are working together to lend their support and their voice. Last September

Foreign Minister Rosenthal and I came together with many others at a conference in The Hague to discuss ways in which to empower Afghan women through rural development. Closer to home; you see women and men who believe that positive change can be achieved at the local level. Dedicated people are working every day to ensure the protection of women in the Netherlands from domestic violence, from human trafficking and abuse in their own communities. As Secretary Clinton said “talent is universal, but opportunity is not.” America and the Netherlands will continue to work together to ensure that women and girls have the opportunity to fulfill their potential, to improve their lives and the lives of their families, and to create a better world for all.

Women are 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 them means investing in global economic progress, political stability, and greater prosperity for everyone-the world over. As we honor them today, let us renew our resolve to work for the cause of equality each and every day of the year.

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