

## **"Honoring Women in an Age of Participation"**

Ambassador Beatrice Welters

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"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 from Secretary of State Hilary Rodham Clinton are especially important as we celebrate International Women's Day around the world and continue to make strides for women's progress.

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. Trinidad and Tobago is truly blessed to have a free and democratic society where women can do anything they set their minds to in business, science, the arts and where a woman can even become Prime Minister. Prime Minister Kamla Persad-Bissessar has made a point of recognizing the contributions of women to all aspects of the society and raised the importance of gender issues in the Caribbean Region by

appointing Hazel Brown and Brenda Gopeesingh as special envoys for women's and children's issues. Women leaders are found in every aspect of society, today I and several other women Ambassadors will speak in a panel discussion about the role of women in international diplomacy.

Globally the 2011 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.

And in the United States President Obama recently released the first-ever U.S. National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security. The United States is accelerating and institutionalizing 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. approaches 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.

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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Beatrice Welters is the Ambassador of the United States to Trinidad and Tobago.