



**Celebration of Women Diplomats
May 3, 2012
New York, New York**

Geraldine Kunstadter: Welcome everyone. It's always an enormous pleasure for me to have you all here, and I promise we're not going to keep you standing for a long time because I can't do it very well for a long time. And our speakers tonight will tell you a lot of interesting things, but not for a long time. [*Laughter.*] They'll do it in a short time. But it is always a very special evening to have the Women's Foreign Policy Group here, and our women diplomats in New York, so I thank you. [*Applause.*]

Patricia Ellis: Well, I want to begin by thanking Geri so much for her very warm hospitality, for opening up her beautiful home to us once again, and it's always wonderful. This is the event not to be missed of ours every year, so we're glad that all of you could come. The reason we're here tonight is to celebrate women diplomats, and we have quite a number of them from many different countries. We have consuls general, ambassadors, deputy permanent representatives, other diplomats, and it's always lots of fun. This is a very informal program because, like Geri said, we don't want you all to stand too long, and I know you all want to mingle and get to know each other, and that's an important part of tonight's event. But every year we choose a theme, and tonight's theme is women's economic empowerment. I chose it. Okay, I'm Patricia Ellis, the president of the Women's Foreign Policy Group. [*Laughter.*] We chose this theme because it's been very much a focus of attention at the State Department and around the world and recently we have done a number of programs that relate to this issue—one with Michelle Bachelet, who spoke in New York a year ago, just after she took over UN women. And then we also recently had Dina Powell, who is the head of the Goldman Sachs Foundation and runs something called *10,000 Women*. And so this whole theme of women's economic empowerment was on our minds. Also, there's good news in terms of women's leadership. Little by little, there are more and more women. And in your program book you have statistics, but a few stuck out in my mind, and Michelle Bachelet said them so I know these two are right. There are 17 women heads of state right now, 15 women foreign ministers, 25 women ambassadors to the UN, and not that long ago there were about 10, so I think that's great. In terms of consuls general in New York, there are 20. So, let's applaud all these women. [*Applause.*] So what we're going to do is hear from a few of the diplomats, and then we're going to go around and have all the diplomats introduce themselves. And we have time for brief discussion, which then you can continue informally. Okay so, I'm going to introduce the women, Edita Hrdá is the ambassador of the Czech Republic to the United Nations. You will speak first, and then we will hear from Isabelle Picco, the ambassador of Monaco to the United Nations. Finally we will hear from the consul general of Slovenia, Melita Gabrič. So I'd like to ask the ambassador of the Czech Republic to please step forward and say a few words and thank you so much for joining us.

Ambassador Edita Hrdá: Excuse me for being late, and excuse me for being dressed like this.

Ms. Ellis: No, it's very elegant!

Ambassador Hrdá: I am not usually walking like this at the UN, you know. [*Laughter.*] It's true! Once I arrived exactly like this—it was last year when the fifth committee had some real troubles, and my expert called me. "Ambassador, you have to come because it's crucial." It was like half past seven—no, really—it was half-past seven, and we were going to some of these galas. And I said to him, "Look, I am coming from 83rd street and I am coming straight down to the UN, but I look like this." And he said, "Doesn't matter, you have to be here. Secretary General is calling the ambassadors, it's really crucial you have to come." So I run there and you can imagine all the people in the garrets looking and saying, "Ambassador! What is happening?" I said, "No, no, no, it's fine. Secretary General called me." "Oh! Is

something wrong in your country?" [Laughter.] "It's fine. It will be okay." So then the solution was made in fifteen minutes, and then we could enjoy the last dinner of our critical fast, which was very nice. So, excuse me. But I think that's a very good example that women can do something like—something what you call multi-tasking. One thing here, and another thing here, from one place to the other one and as businesswomen, you know it quite well. Sometimes with the family calling, you have to do and so you're with colleagues, sitting in the Security Council resolving the problems, and you're thinking about if your kid has eaten something. You're the same I think. But I have to speak about our women and how they work and how is the situation in the Czech Republic.

So, I have to say that we are lucky and maybe unlucky in the Czech Republic, maybe in all the post-communist countries. Because during the communist regime, it was very normal—all women were working. It was obligation for everyone, men and women, to go to work, and if not it was a problem. So we had to have the solution of kindergartens and pre-school education and whatever, you had women in high schools and universities. It was the positive part. Afterwards, after the changes, many young women decided to stay back home with the kids, and the situation was very new. And at that moment, others from the western countries came and were saying, "You have to have now women's rights, it's important." But looking to them we say, "Come on, we had this in the past, we don't want work now! We would like really to enjoy being housewife, and so—of course, in the meantime, the situation changed again. I have some numbers, if I may. I have to read it because I don't remember it all. What I haven't said, which is important, we have on the level of the government improvement of the National Action plan for promotion of gender equality, which is very important, and they are the main numbers and topics and targets and tools that we can do. We have a few priorities. One of them is training, qualification, and retraining for the women. And I have a number—we have now at universities almost 55% of all students are women, which is a very good and nice number, and it has increasing trend. And we have relatively high rate of employment of women, around 60-65% in the Czech Republic. Of course we have the same problem as in other countries. You have salaries of women that are not normal. So salaries are so high for men. When I arrived at the post of chief of staff to the minister of foreign affairs, my minister asked me to review how are the salaries of the vice ministers. I realized that my colleagues—in more or less the same position, ten years younger than me—had higher salaries than me. And then I said, "Well it's fine, I have a husband who works, but come on. I am doing the same work as they do." But I have to say that my minister at the time was very nice to us women. We were two at the leadership of the ministry. He saw this, and he said, "It's impossible," and he changed salaries of all women. He didn't put the men lower—that was positive. That way they were not angry at us! But I have to say the situation—in our case, where we have problems of course is unemployment, as in all around in Europe. But things are good. The government tries to help the women with small kindergartens, looking for the training. And so, here we are, and I only hope that in other countries it will be the same—women ambassadors and ministers and prime ministers and even presidents maybe? [Laughter.] Thank you very much.

Ms. Ellis: Thank you very much. [Applause.] Okay, Isabelle.

Ambassador Isabelle Picco: Monaco—Monaco is blessed, that's for sure. Many women—most of the women even with children or families—are working, so the social protection is quite high, and it has been even expanded in the coming years. You know, since 2005 when we acceded to the SETO convention, legislation has also been improved in terms of self-transmission of nationality. For the economic empowerment of women, you know, women entrepreneurs are very active and they are very active also in the Chamber of Commerce. Many of them work in the services and also in the public service. And what is done is that they constituted an association of women entrepreneurs, and they launched a program where they would help entrepreneurs in Africa. It started in Senegal to establish businesses. We also follow the leads of princesses who are very active. You know, Princess Caroline, having raised four children, has always been very active, not only in the arts but for microcredit also to try to have women have access to businesses and not depend on their husbands for their livelihood. And women's empowerment is also about health—what Princess Stephanie does with UNAIDS. And I think that from what we see as UN—you know, the secretary general has been very proactive in

balancing women and men in the highest posts. I suppose that's why we have a high number of women now, and especially, as you mentioned, Madame Bachelet. She is a great leader. The deputy secretary general also from Tanzania, she was a foreign leader. No, it's coming, but as Edita said, we still have to face—yesterday I went to a farewell party for a colleague. And I always complained that the windows of the official car were so dark, and yesterday I told the driver, "You know what, thank god tonight the windows are so dark because if they saw I stopped before coming here to get dry cleaning, that then I went to get the espresso capsule, and then because I was too early to go to the reception, I stopped because I saw something in the window and bought it. [Laughter.] So I managed to do three different things before going to the reception. Oh, and before that, I stopped home and fixed some pasta for my 15-year-old, who was dying of hunger. [Laughter.] But you know, I think what is very important that we develop—because we always think that it's so obvious that we are protected by laws and rules—and what is very important is that we have these countries develop a set of rules to make sure that women have rights, that they can implement those rights. And I remember years back attending a meeting when the peace-building fund was first created and the development agency had issues of allowing grants because, you know, in some countries women couldn't own property. So how can you develop or give some grant when you don't have right to access land? And a lot of work has been done in Rwanda. They've done an amazing job. And in Senegal, women have always been very, very entrepreneur-minded. I think this is about us reaching out for those because we are lucky and we should lead by example.

Ms. Ellis: Thank you so much. [Applause.] Yes, the consul general of Slovenia and then the deputy permanent representative of Kenya who will join us quickly.

Dr. Melita Gabrič: So, thank you very much to Geraldine, and to Patricia, for the invite and for bringing together this wonderful group of people, and for the opportunity to say a few things about the situation of women in Slovenia. Well actually, I started my professional life in the office of women's policy. And ever since then—that was about two decades ago—whenever I am put into a public forum, council, whatever, I always look for gender balance. The gender balance I see here is great, and men are also very welcome, of course. But I think that it is especially great to have so many accomplished women, most of them with careers in traditionally male domains, like diplomacy, finance. I mean I don't know where exactly everyone is coming from, but as a larger point I think that holds true. I would say, as the Monacan ambassador mentioned, in Slovenia, we are quite lucky to have the disparity between men—well, salaries of men and women—is 4.4%. Still in favor of men, I have to add, but the average in Europe, I think, is around 15%. The US, I'm not so sure. I don't have reliable data for the US, but I think it's a little bit north of 15% also.

Guest: It's about 24-26%.

Dr. Gabrič: Oh, wow. So we're quite lucky but, you know, these things have to be sustained, and they must never be taken for granted. And let me point out one outstanding data that I came across as I was preparing for tonight. I have to refresh my memory about these issues. In Slovenia, women who have children, when they have children, do not leave the workforce. On the contrary, the percentage of women with children who are employed goes up by 2%, from 83% in the active period to 85%. And of course the question is why—why is that so? And the answer is quite simple. It is, first of all, we have one year of maternity leave, fully paid, full salary. And we have, additionally, three months of father's leave, which cannot be taken by the mother. It has to be father, but it does not need to be biological father. So that's one thing. The other thing is that our kindergartens accept infants starting at age 12 months. And the third thing is aftercare programs—after-school programs—and meals are provided in kindergartens and in schools. So this is where we stand now, when it comes to women's employment. I would point out another fortunate development, which is that traditionally women in politics in Slovenia were very few. Nine years ago we introduced quotas. So, in the first elections, the results did not change very much. We still only had, like, 3-5% women parliamentarians. Then in this last parliamentary election in December, the quotas were raised, so the political parties were obliged to put 30% of the candidates on their list—30% of the candidates on their list must be women. So today, we have 32% women in the

Slovenian parliament. And they say—research has shown—that once you surpass the threshold of 30% of women representation in politics, the agenda changes. There is more focus on social issues. And also, they say that discourse itself—the political discourse—becomes more emphatic and, you will not believe it, even civilized. [*Laughter.*] So in Slovenia, we're still waiting for that to develop, to take place in practice, but we now have good grounds for hope. So, well, but not everything is so rosy in Slovenia. So the economic crisis, I have to say, hit us hard. And it obviously has many negative consequences, and one of them is—I just learned this today—that the office of equal opportunities, government office, ceased to exist last week. So this is the office that actually generated the public awareness, the legislation, the promoted legislation for the empowerment of women, but let's hope we have enough accumulated inertia to get us through the hard times, to allow us to hold onto the accomplishments that we have achieved so far. So that's basically what I wanted to share.

Ms. Ellis: Thank you. [*Applause.*] So now we'd like to hear from the ambassador and deputy permanent representative of Kenya, Josephine Ojiambo. So we'll hear from a different part of the world, so thank you for joining us. We'll hear your brief comments now.

Ambassador Josephine Ojiambo: Thank you very much. I want to first appreciate Geraldine, whose home we are in. And of course, the Women's Foreign Policy Group and its presidents, and excellencies, and ladies here and good friends—I see one tucked behind me. My name is Josephine Ojiambo. I am an ambassador and deputy permanent representative to the United Nations, and I will be bringing perspectives to our discussion from Africa. And as I do so, I have my two colleagues at the back who I'm sure could raise their hands.

Ms. Ellis: Yes, we're going to introduce them afterwards but Zimbabwe—the deputy permanent representative of Zimbabwe—and Zambia.

Ambassador Ojiambo: So suffice to say, I—maybe in a note of introduction—I am by training a physician, a public health specialist, and now a diplomat. And I spent many of my years as a younger professional working for my government at the largest tertiary hospital in Nairobi, and, later, worked for UNICEF, and then later for a number of international NGOs. Then I did some advocacy work in civil society for what we call the Kenyan Medical Women's Association, a very opinionated group of medical doctors and dentists, which took me to the level of working with legislators. And I came into diplomacy through the initiative because I did a lot of work with the presidency as I ran my private sector consultancy. Having said that, a little bit about Kenya. Kenya, like many African countries, is patrimonial. And what that means for us is that, over time, there continues to be disparity in terms of social and economic services and rights for women. Our demography—we have a very young population, 50% of which is female, and 20% of our population is young girls under the age of 24. This is a country with a very high dependency ratio, which translates into a lot more work at the family level for women, a lot more social and economic responsibility. Poverty, if defined by earnings of less than one dollar a day, would indeed, in our setting, be reflective of a majority—well above, I'd say, 50%. Over the last ten years though, we have had that number fall from about 56% in 2000 to 48% recently. But if you look at the figures, the disparities show that women are indeed more when it comes to the issue of poverty both at general population level, and also that more poor single-headed houses are headed by females. This means that poverty is perpetuated among females at household level. But having said that, and that being the challenge, we have done a lot as a government, and suffice it to say that we do have an employment law as of 2007 that outlaws discrimination at the web-base based on gender and prohibits harassment of the same. We have a recently promulgated constitution of 2010, which affirms women and has a very strong bit of rights providing social services for women and accountability to government for the same rights. The same constitution provides in its chapter on political participation for the affirmation of women in politics. So we are looking at a new way forward for women, and also their equal—or should I say—some representation, in terms of 30% in the public sector. Our government has provided free, universal primary education, secondary education, and is now looking at university education. And what that means for women is, in a home where there is poverty, that the choices made about who to educate will definitely include the woman. Because hitherto, if there was no money at

household level, in a patrimonial society it's the man who goes to school. Beyond that, the government has some initiatives. We have a woman's enterprise development fund that provides loans for small- and micro-enterprise for women through the banking system through the district level. Beneath the district level—for the poorest of the poor—we have the Women of Kenya Initiative, which reaches out in informal settings to the poorest of poor. I think, having said that, it's important that we see that those women who can access finance end up improving the education of their homes and their children, have access to healthcare, have capital for further business, and are able to step out of the cycle of poverty. Thank you.

Ms. Ellis: Thank you. *[Applause.]* Okay, I just want to thank our speakers and I would like just the consuls general and DPRs to stand up, and please introduce yourselves. Yes, okay, we'll start right there. Yes, yes please.

Angella Comfort: I am Angella Comfort, the DPR for Jamaica, and of course I also have my stories to tell, but it would take me the entire evening to tell them. *[Laughter.]*

Ms. Ellis: Next time! We'll have more programs.

Ms. Comfort: But I will say one thing, and it is this. We have a very vibrant, a very vivacious prime minister who is female—the first female prime minister. *[Applause.]* Portia Simpson Miller. She was here recently, and I'm hoping and I'm keeping my fingers crossed that if I'm here in September—because I've been here quite a while, a little over four years, so you know terms tend to end very soon—but I'm hoping that I could be here if she comes in September because you're all going to be very happy and warm when she comes here and takes over the United Nations. *[Laughter.]* We actually don't have problem with gender issues in our foreign service because if you came to the Jamaican foreign service, you would ask, "Where are the men?" *[Laughter.]*

Ms. Ellis: Okay, thank you. Let's move to The Bahamas.

Rhonda Chipman-Johnson: Hello, I am Rhonda Chipman-Johnson, consul general for the The Bahamas. I am happy to have been invited here and to hear your stories. I would just like to share with you that this year is the 50th anniversary of the women's suffrage movement in The Bahamas, and they got the vote in 1962 for the first time. So we are very, very happy about that. I would also like to say to you that all of our consuls general are female from The Bahamas. *[Applause.]* And our ambassador here is a woman to the Permanent Mission of the United Nations. The ambassador to the US is male, but we have our fair share of women. And like in Jamaica, we don't have as great a disparity as some of you seem to have, but I would like to see more women in politics in The Bahamas. We really dominate the civil service, and we are dominating tertiary education, but we are very few in the House of Assembly. We'd like to change that. But we are holding our own in The Bahamas. *[Laughter and applause.]*

Ms. Ellis: Thank you. Sanja Zografaska-Krsteska from Macedonia.

Sanja Zografaska-Krsteska: I am Sanja Zografaska-Krsteska from Macedonia. I am the diplomatic representative of Macedonia to the UN, and I am very thankful to be invited to this event and also to hear the statements of other ambassadors to the UN and the consul general. Our situation is very similar to the one in Slovenia, although all our indicators are not as shiny as Slovenia's. But it's due to similar background in terms of institutional and legislative sense. Also, it's due to our foreign policy objectives, because we are also striving for the same integration Slovenia is. We have also a 30% quota for women in parliament, so the number of women representation has been increased in the past. Regarding the economic empowerment, it's also similar, but the disparities are greater between the urban and rural areas. The government has elaborated the problem of empowering women in rural areas, helping the development of small- and medium-size enterprises, and also tackling the unemployment issue by providing training and pre-qualification for women in rural areas.

Ms. Ellis: Thank you. Okay, now we have Armenia.

Karine Khoudaverdian: Karine Khoudaverdian, deputy permanent assistant for Armenia. Of course, I thank you for this invitation, for this most pleasant company. In some way, what I would like to tell, of course, is the same as those who have shared the same legacy of many countries in eastern Europe. But the only thing I would like to add is that Armenia was chairing for three years the Commission on Status of Women at the UN, and empowerment of women and gender equality was not something that was very far from us. We were working in this direction, and this year also during the CSW—who were organizing a round table in parliament for women in rural areas—it is interesting to hear that the National Bank, who is working in Armenia the microcredit and microfinancing, about success stories they do have. But probably we'll share more next time.

Ms. Ellis: And informally. Okay, we have the deputy permanent representative of Bhutan.

Ambassador Kunzang Namgyel: My name is Kunzang Namgyel, and I'm the ambassador and deputy permanent representative from Bhutan. I don't know if many of you have heard of Bhutan, but it's a kingdom in the Himalayas. [*Laughter.*] We have a progressive monarch. We are in the fifth generation of heritage monarchy, and our king right now is a young gentleman. In Bhutan, gender has never been—we have always had equality among the sexes, we have a long reach goal in terms of coming of par in the political fields as far as women are concerned, but it has nothing to do with having had any gender disparity there. It is just—there are so many things you can say about the Kingdom, but I just wanted to spare time to say I am very happy to be here among a very important group of women and, as the lady before said, we are multi-tasking. And I am happy to be among this group and I thank our host for having invited us for this wonderful evening to share thoughts and maybe some other time I'll give you a lot more information about Bhutan.

Ms. Ellis: Thank you. [*Applause.*] And finally Indonesia—if you could just introduce yourself briefly and then we can continue the conversation informally because it's getting a little late and a little warm.

Rosanna Suparmono: Good evening, everyone. I am Rosanna Suparmono from the Indonesian consulate. I've been here for ten months. In our country, there is no problem with gender equality. We have no disparity between men and women. It is easy for women to enter the government or run for president—there are 30% women in parliament. A good example is in our consulate—there are seven staff members and four of them are women.

Ms. Ellis: Thank you so much. Please continue the conversation, and thank you all so much for coming.