

Women's Rights are Human Rights — Hillary Clinton

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At this very moment, as we sit here, women around the world are giving birth, raising children, cooking meals, washing clothes, cleaning houses, planting crops, working on assembly lines, running companies, and running countries. Women are also dying from diseases that should have been prevented or treated. They're watching their children succumb to malnutrition caused by poverty and economic deprivation. They're being denied the right to go to school by their own fathers and brothers.

Speaking to you today, I speak for them — just as each of us speaks for women around the world who are denied the chance to go to school, or see a doctor, or own property, or have a say about the direction of their lives, simply because they are women. The truth is that most women around the world work both inside and outside the home, usually by necessity. We need to understand there is no one formula for how women should lead our lives. That is why we must respect the choices that each woman makes for herself and her family. Every woman deserves a chance to realize her own God-given potential. But we must recognize that women will never gain full dignity until their human rights are respected and protected.

If there is one message that echoes forth from this conference, let it be that human rights are women's rights, and women's rights are human rights, once and for all. Let us not forget that among those rights are the right to speak freely and the right to be heard. Let me be clear. Freedom means the right of people to assemble, organize, and debate openly. It means respecting the views of those who may disagree with the views of their governments. It means not taking citizens away from their loved ones and jailing them, mistreating them, or denying them their freedom or dignity because of the peaceful expression of their ideas and opinions.

In my country, we recently celebrated the 75th anniversary of women's suffrage. It took 150 years after the signing of our Declaration of Independence for women to win the right to vote. It took 72 years of organized struggle before that happened, on the part of many courageous women and men. It was one of America's most divisive philosophical wars. But it was a bloodless war. Suffrage was achieved without a shot being fired.

Now, it is the time to act on behalf of women everywhere. If we take bold steps to better the lives of women, we will be taking bold steps to better the lives of children and families too. Families rely on mothers and wives for emotional support and care. Families rely on women for labor in the home. And, increasingly, families rely on women for income needed to raise healthy children and care for other relatives. As long as discrimination and inequities remain so commonplace everywhere in the world, as long as girls and women are valued less, fed less, fed last, overworked, underpaid, and not schooled, subjected to violence in and outside their homes, the potential of the human family to create a peaceful, prosperous world will not be realized.

Let this conference be our, and the world's, call to action. Let us heed that call, so we can create a world in which every woman is treated with respect and dignity, every boy and girl is loved and cared for equally, and every family has a hope of a strong and stable future. That is the work before you. That is the work before all of us, who have a vision of the world we want to see for our children and our grandchildren.

The time is now. We must move beyond rhetoric. We must move beyond recognition of problems to working together, to have the common efforts to build that common ground we hope to see. God's blessing on you, your work, and all who will benefit from it. Godspeed, and thank you very much.