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SUPPLEMENTARY MESSAGE

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DATE:

SoS speech

VITAL VOICES CONFERENCE - SPEECH

I would like to add my welcome to you here in Belfast for this Vital Voices Conference.

The conference is part of a global initiative by the US government to promote the advancement of women, to build on existing ties, to establish new relationships, expand partnership and held secure resources to strengthen the role of women in public life.

This is an exciting moment and I am honoured to be part of this event because this is the second such event, the first was in Vienna, the next is in Montevideo, and it shows how serious by Mrs Clinton and the President take their support for the search for peace in Northern Ireland:

- it also shows, just by our very presence, how important and powerful women are in Northern Ireland: you have been there for the last 30 years holding Northern Ireland society together during some of its bleakest moments;

- you have been there in the community and voluntary groups, in the political parties, trade unions and business helping to build up in the community the respect for each other needed to make peace possible. It is no coincidence that 75% of women in Northern Ireland voted for the Agreement.

I get frustrated when people say in Northern Ireland women have done nothing, and are nowhere to be seen. It is simply not true. But what is the case is that women are present in the visible positions of power we work out ways to get what is needed.

There are no women or MPs; only 15% of local Councillors are women and 13 out of 108 members elected to the Assembly are women.

It is no better in employment - women make up half the workforce in Northern Ireland, but only 9% of them hold management jobs.

That is why today is important - it is addressing in practical ways how we change this, through expanding partnerships, new relationships and new ways of strengthening ourselves. What is important for people watching or reading about this Conference is that it's not just saying "hello, we're here, we want part of the cake, we're entitled to it" - which we are - but are also saying hold on, do we want that kind cake, or do we want to have different power relations based on accommodation and compromise rather than domination, do we want to change structures of work to fit in with needs of children, rather than have to - as some men do - say that they are going to an important meeting rather than a school sports day.

Now changes will happen slowly, but not that slowly if we work together. Don't forget that only 25 years ago there was no sex discrimination legislation and women had to resign from their jobs when they married! The good Friday Agreement is important milestone supported by 75% of women in Northern Ireland. A central part

of it is the Human Rights Commission and the Equality Commission. Equality is central to the whole working of this Agreement however these bodies are structured.

Your importance in Northern Ireland is crucial; you are central to making the peace work. We have to find ways of hearing and listening and respecting what others say. An example of what I mean, as many of you know, is that the EU provided partnership. The Commissioner Monika Wulf - Mathies make sure that funding to build cross-community relations. Some of that money allocated through District Partnerships based on the 26 District Councils - Partnerships made up of representatives from political parties, community groups, trade unions and businesses. It was a different way of working - there was a common goal of bringing results for communities. Throughout the difficult times in the last year people of all political persuasions have been sitting down together. This, I hope, will be the kind of model for the civic forum. You are central to the building of reconciliation just as you have been central to the of the peace. We have to look no further than the Women's Coalition for different way of working.

A Government, we are trying to play our parts to help facilitate change. Let me run through some of them quickly:

- Last July, the New Deal for lone parents was launched, backed by an investment of £190m;
- A National Strategy on Child Care has been launched. Northern Ireland will have a separate strategy.
- the Play Care initiative provides out of school play opportunity for children to enable parents to return or remain in work. Our target is to establish 100 play care schemes and 35 have so far been established.
- the new child care tax credit will help parents with the cost of child care - up to £70 per week for one child and up to £105 per week for two or more children;
- targets have been set for increasing the number of women in public appointments;
- we are also working on Northern Ireland Strategy on Violence against women; and
- legislation will provide extra protection for women and importantly extend protection to a wide range of family relationships;
- there is also the new National Minimum Wage which will benefit those women who are among the lowest paid in the work force.

Finally I really have found this last couple of days enormously encouraging and exhilarating.

Thank you Hillary for helping to make it happen.

The Good Friday Agreement will work - days like today strengthen my conviction.

I've learnt two important lessons in the last year. The first is patience, tolerance and flexibility - if you have a problem and can't find an answer, go round it, and when you look back it doesn't seem half as big and difficult. And second - confidence: if you are determined enough, keep going and don't take no for an answer - most things are possible.

I believe a peaceful future for Northern Ireland is inevitable - because the vast, vast majority of people in Northern Ireland and the Republic want it. Working together we can do so much more than we can apart to ensure that the next generation of children so not suffer as so many already have.



Belfast, Northern Ireland

PRESS RELEASE

Women to Convene in Northern Ireland to Plan for Peace

Belfast -- August 20, 1998 -- More than four hundred women leaders will meet in Belfast, Northern Ireland from August 31 to September 2 for a *Vital Voices: Women in Democracy* conference.

The United States government is co-sponsoring the conference with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Dr. Marjorie Mowlam, and the First and Deputy First Ministers of the Shadow Northern Ireland Assembly, David Trimble and Seamus Mallon.

The Belfast meeting was announced by President Clinton on May 7 as part of the U.S. government's initiatives in support of peace in Northern Ireland. "The women of Northern Ireland have borne an enormous share of the trauma of the Troubles," Mr. Clinton said. "Now, their participation will be essential to build a future of peace and reconciliation."

The Vital Voices initiative demonstrates Secretary of State Madeleine K. Albright's commitment to promote the advancement of women as a foreign policy objective.

U.S. First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton, Dr. Mowlam and other leading policy makers will speak at the conference. Participants will come from the U.S., Northern Ireland, Ireland, England, Scotland, Wales and other EU countries.

The conference provides workshops and opportunities to adopt concrete follow-up projects on: participation in public life, legal and social progress in civil society, and economic development in a time of change and opportunity.

The Vital Voices initiative is directed by Theresa Loar, Senior Coordinator for International Women's Issues, Department of State. Additional information on the initiative can be obtained from the Vital Voices website at www.usia.gov/vitalvoices

For press credentialing and other media questions, please contact:

T.J. Dowling at Vital Voices Belfast: 01232-249-467; fax: 01232-249-459.
Robin Greer, U.S. Consulate: 01232-328-239 ext 18.

A Conference sponsored by the Government of The United States & The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland
In conjunction with The First and Deputy First Ministers of the Shadow Northern Ireland Assembly

Vital Voices Conference, c/o 31 Spa Road, Montalto Estate, Ballynahinch, BT24 6PT, Northern Ireland
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Northern Ireland Office
Parliament Buildings
Belfast BT4 3ST

8 August 1998

Dear Ann

"VITAL VOICES"

I hope that you will by now have received your invitation from Hillary Rodham Clinton and myself, to this important conference which will take place in the Waterfront Hall from 31 August to 2 September 1998.

The conference is essentially aimed at encouraging women to make the maximum contribution to the social, economic and political life of Northern Ireland. As you will be aware, there are many voluntary and community groups which have been working to achieve this aim for some time.

Much excellent work has been done by women at community and grass roots level in Northern Ireland, to alleviate many of the problems in society such as social deprivation, drug abuse and domestic violence. Others are providing support to women who want to improve their situation through education, training or employment. Many are working to ensure that women have the opportunity to contribute to the democratic and decision making process in Northern Ireland.

I have been fortunate to see at first hand, some of the outstanding work being done by these groups, often in the face of what appear to be insurmountable odds. I never cease to be impressed by their commitment and enthusiasm particularly since most of these groups are operating with the minimum of resources.

Hillary Clinton and I both hope that the "Vital Voices" conference will result in some much needed support for the work of women's groups in Northern Ireland. Organisations which are prepared to offer assistance to these groups are being targeted in the United States. Already a

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number have agreed to do so. They will attend the conference with the aim of establishing linkages with NI women's groups which can make use of the type of help being offered.

My purpose in writing to you is to ask if there is some assistance which your organisation might offer to one or more of these groups. It could be as modest as donating unwanted office furniture or IT equipment. You might be able to provide a short period of training or work experience or to offer specialist advice in relation to financial/IT systems, event organisation or fundraising. Perhaps you could offer some financial assistance with a specific project.

I am enclosing a reply slip on which you can indicate your interest in providing some form of assistance. You need not be specific at this stage. There will be the opportunity on the final day of the conference for you to link with women's groups which will also be there.

The generosity of the people of Northern Ireland is well known. I hope I can count on your organisation to provide some help, however small, to these women's groups, many of which are working against incredible odds to improve the lives of families in Northern Ireland and to give them the kind of normality which those of us who are more fortunate, take for granted.

I look forward to hearing from you and, hopefully, meeting you at "Vital Voices".

Marjorie

MARJORIE MOWLAM

REPLY SLIP

**TO: DR MARJORIE MOWLAM
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR NORTHERN IRELAND**

"VITAL VOICES CONFERENCE"

My organisation would be delighted to offer some form of support to help encourage women to make the maximum contribution to the social, economic, and political life of Northern Ireland.

We will be represented at the "Vital Voices" conference by:

.....

Signed:

Please print name:

Name of Organisation:

Address:

.....

.....

Telephone No: Fax No:

Please return this slip to:

*Dr Marjorie Mowlam MP
Secretary of State for Northern Ireland
Parliament Buildings
Stormont
BELFAST BT4 2ST*

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