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UNITED STATES REPORT ON
NATIONAL ACTIONS TO IMPROVE THE STATUS OF WOMEN
CIM ASSEMBLY OF DELEGATES MEETING
NOVEMBER 2006

1. POVERTY ERADICATION

Domestically, the U.S. Government has provided additional funds for programs and resources that help move low-income Americans off welfare, provide child-care services for working mothers, and support early childhood education programs for children. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) has also increased efforts to collect child support payments and return it to mothers who are caring for the children.

Supporting U.S. women Trying to Leave Public Assistance. About 90 percent of adults receiving cash assistance through the U.S. Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (welfare) program are women. The President stands for welfare reforms that provide a helping hand when it is needed, but that also require recipients to move towards independence, gainful employment, and self-sufficiency. Since the welfare reform of 1996 was enacted, welfare rolls have declined 57 percent, and there are currently fewer families on welfare than at any time since 1969. Employment for single mothers has increased dramatically-- 63.1 percent of single mothers were employed in 2003, compared with 49.3 percent in 1996. In January 2006, President Bush signed the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005 which reauthorizes the important provisions of welfare reform, and also strengthens the work requirement which will allow more families to move from dependency into self sufficiency. President Bush also believes that strengthening families is a major element of addressing poverty and welfare dependency. The Deficit Reduction Act of 2005 provides \$150 million annually for healthy marriage and responsible fatherhood initiatives.

Child Care for Low-Income Working Mothers. The Bush Administration is continuing the United States' high levels of support for child care. Declining welfare caseloads and child poverty rates have allowed a significant increase in federal child care funding, which more than tripled between 1996 (\$3.6 billion) and 2005 (\$11.3 billion), serving an estimated 2.4 million children in 2005.

Child Support Enforcement. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) has significantly strengthened efforts to increase child support enforcement and has proposed further incentives to states to give more of the past-due child support payments they collect to mothers and children. In 2005, more than \$23 billion dollars in child support payments were collected, of which about \$21 billion went to families. In addition, almost 1.6 million paternities were established and acknowledged; and close to 1.2 million child support orders were established in 2005.

2. ELIMINATING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN (VAM)

Domestic resources to address violence against women include programs at the Department of State, Department of Justice, and Department of Health and Human Services. The US Government also supports a domestic violence hotline, a network of Family Justice Centers. The US has increased the number of federal prosecutions for crimes against women, and implements a program to help fund transitional housing for victims fleeing domestic abuse. The US also takes an aggressive approach to human trafficking, and is leading the world in the fight against modern day slavery.

Fighting Modern-Day Slavery. Human trafficking is one of the most urgent human rights issues in the world. Each year, an estimated 600,000-800,000 men, women, and children are trafficked across international borders, and the trade is growing. It is believed that more than 80 percent of trafficking victims are women and girls, and that 70 percent of these are forced into the commercial sex industry. Since taking office, this Administration has made available over \$295 million to support anti-trafficking programs in more than 120 countries around the world. In a 2003 address to the United Nations, President Bush announced a \$50 million initiative to combat trafficking in persons worldwide directed to countries that face the most serious trafficking problems, have the most significant financial need, and whose governments have made a political commitment to combat the problem.

The US also spent approximately \$25 million in 2005 for domestic programs to fight trafficking including resources for law enforcement efforts, the identification and protection of victims of trafficking, and to raise awareness of human trafficking.

Assistance for Victims of Trafficking. Since 2001, the President has provided more than \$35 million to 36 faith-based and community organizations across the country to aid victims of trafficking with services such as emergency shelter, legal, mental, and health services and English-proficiency instruction. In addition, the Department of Health and Human Services has launched a referral hotline to help victims escape by providing access to local service providers. Over 600 calls have been handled by the hotline since it began in April 2004. The Trafficking Information and Referral Hotline number is (888) 373-7888. In 2005, HHS launched new anti-trafficking coalitions in ten US cities to increase public awareness of trafficking and to increase the number of victims identified and assisted.

Immigration Relief for Trafficking Victims. The Trafficking Victims Protection Act created a new class of visa (T-visas) that allows trafficking victims to remain in the United States for three years with work authorization and access to benefits and services offered by HHS. At the end of three years, T-visa holders may apply for permanent residence. As of 2005, the Department of Homeland Security has issued 616 visas to human trafficking survivors, and another 573 T-visas to members of their family.

Fighting Trafficking in the United States. Since 2001, the number of trafficking investigations by the US Department of Justice has more than doubled. In 2005, state law enforcement agencies convicted over 26,000 "johns" for trying to buy sex services. The Department of Justice has initiated 42 anti-trafficking task forces around the country that bring together state, local, and federal law enforcement with NGO partners to collaborate on an interdisciplinary approach to fighting trafficking. DOJ has also drafted a model anti-trafficking law for states. As of 2006, 22 states have passed anti-trafficking legislations, and seven more states are considering similar legislation.

Funding for Violence against Women Programs. The Bush Administration is committed to preventing domestic violence and addressing its effects on individuals and families. According to the U.S. Department of Justice's Bureau of Justice Statistics, each year nearly one-third of female murder victims in the United States are killed by an intimate partner. Over the last decade, the domestic violence rate has declined by an estimate 59 percent, and the rate and sexual assault rate declined by 68 percent due to a combination of factors.

President Bush has secured historic levels of funding for Violence Against Women programs at the U.S. Department of Justice and Department of Health and Human Services, which provides state and local communities with the resources and tools they need to prosecute offenders for domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking, and to assist the victims. Since taking office, the President has secured over \$100 million increase in funding for these programs, bringing the total to over \$560 million in 2006. The President has continued to request full funding levels for these programs in each annual budget submission to Congress. In January of 2006, the President signed an important 5 year reauthorization of violence against women programs, which will allow communities and victim service providers to help more victims and prevent further violence.

U.S. Domestic Violence Hotline. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services funds programs crucial to protecting and assisting victims of domestic violence, including battered women's shelters and the Domestic Violence Hotline. The Hotline receives an average of 15,000 calls per month.

Family Justice Centers. During Domestic Violence Awareness Month in October 2003, President Bush announced a new initiative to help local communities provide comprehensive services under one roof to victims of domestic violence. The Department of Justice Office on Violence Against Women has awarded over \$20 million in grants to help establish and support Family Justice Centers in 15 communities around the country.

Safe and Bright Futures for Children. In October 2003, President Bush announced the Safe and Bright Futures for Children initiative. This initiative has provided \$5 million in grants through the Department of Health and Human Services to community and faith-based organizations to bring together services helping children who witness domestic violence to prevent the cycle of violence from continuing from one generation to the next. The Stop Family Violence postage stamp was released in October 2003, which has helped raise money for domestic violence prevention efforts, including the HHS grant program.

Increasing Prosecutions. The Administration believes that the government has a duty to vigorously prosecute domestic violence crimes. Federal prosecutions for violence against women crimes, which include offenses such as possession of a firearm while subject to a protection order and interstate domestic violence, have increased 53 percent since 2003.

"Take the Pledge" Campaign. In October 2003, the U.S. Department of Justice's Office on Violence Against Women launched a campaign to enlist the support of men in the national effort to end violence against women. The campaign included a public service announcement (PSA) featuring the Attorney General asking men to "take the pledge" not to condone or commit domestic violence. The PSA has been shown over 2,500 times in more than 40 states.

Sexual Assault Forensic Exams. In recognizing that we must do more to realize the full potential of DNA technology to solve crime, protect the innocent, and identify missing persons, President Bush announced a five year, more than \$1 billion initiative to improve and increase the use of DNA technology in the criminal justice system. The President's DNA Initiative calls for increased funding, training, and assistance to law enforcement, forensic labs, medical professionals, victim service providers, prosecutors, defense attorneys, and judges. In 2004, the U.S. Department of Justice's Office on Violence Against Women issued a national protocol for sexual assault forensic exams as part of the President's DNA initiative.

3. EDUCATION

Domestically, the United States offers assistance for higher education; promotes science and engineering careers for girls in school; expands opportunities for all student athletes; increases educational options for low-income families; has boosted early childhood education through the Head Start program; and implements the No Child Left Behind Program.

Achievement Data. The data show that across educational levels, females are now doing as well as or better than males in many of the indicators of educational achievement, and that the large gaps in educational attainment that once existed between men and women have significantly decreased or been eliminated altogether. U.S. women have earned more than half of all bachelor's degrees every year since 1982; about 58 percent of all postsecondary degrees are earned by women. They have even surpassed men in some fields that were once male-dominated. Nevertheless, there are areas in both elementary/secondary and postsecondary education in which differences persist and are being addressed.

Domestic Higher Education Assistance. Pell Grants distributed by the federal government are designed to help students with financial need to pay for college. The President has requested a record \$12.9 billion to support Pell Grant awards for over 5.3 million students in 2005. Since 2001, the number of Pell Grant recipients has grown by nearly 1 million. Over the same period, funding for the program has increased by \$4.1 billion, or over 45 percent. Women represent 56.4% of all undergraduate students, but 63.5% of Pell Grant recipients, so a substantial increase in Pell Grant funding will significantly benefit women.

Promoting Science and Engineering Careers for School-Age Girls. A multi-regional technology program called Girls' E-Mentoring in Science, Engineering and Technology (GEM-SET), which is sponsored by the U.S. Department of Labor's Women's Bureau, is designed to provide group mentoring for girls ages 13-18. GEM-SET connects young women with professional women in the science, engineering and technology professions through a listserv and Web site (www.gem-set.org) in 10 regional offices nationwide. In May 2006, U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings participated in the First National Summit on the Advancement of Girls in Math and Science to address the math-science gender gap in our schools and ways to provide more opportunities, and encourage women to enter fields of math and science.

Opportunities for Student Athletes. The Bush Administration is committed to assuring there is no discrimination in federally-funded education programs. In 2002, U.S. Education Secretary Rod Paige created a blue ribbon commission of sports experts and educators to expand Title IX opportunities and to ensure fairness for all college athletes. Pursuant to the recommendations of the Commission, in July 2003 the Department encouraged schools to implement the commission's recommendations.

Increasing Educational Options to Meet Children's Needs. In March 2004, the U.S. Department of Education announced a proposed regulation that would make it easier for schools to offer -- and for parents to choose -- same-sex classes and schools for students. The President's No Child Left Behind Act contains a bipartisan provision that directed the Department to issue guidance to school districts about how innovative single-sex schools and classes could participate in certain No Child Left Behind programs. Research indicates that single-sex educational programs can produce positive results for some students, and this proposed regulation gives parents and schools the option of providing such programs.

Early Childhood Education. President Bush is working to ensure that the Head Start pre-kindergarten program achieves the goal of preparing children to succeed in kindergarten and beyond.

The President has proposed that the program focus more clearly on school readiness, and would give states the opportunity to coordinate Head Start, State Pre-K programs, and child care programs. This would also provide support to working parents, helping them to secure full-day, full-year care for their children.

Since 2001, President Bush has requested \$750 million in new funding for Head Start. In addition, Head Start established a National Reporting System to determine which programs are working and which ones are not, and provided training in early learning to over 50,000 Head Start teachers through a "train the trainers" program.

4. WOMEN AND DECISION-MAKING

The U.S. Government also funds leadership exchange and training programs to enable more women in newly democratic societies to get involved in the political process. Domestically, President Bush has appointed more women to senior posts in his administration than did previous administrations.