
Women and Security

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Over the years, I have met many self-described experts who give lip service to a broader concept of security, but who are really not interested unless guns or bombs are involved. These ‘experts’ conceive of security as a ‘hard issue’ while dismissing such challenges as maternal and child health, environmental protection, global health, and the empowerment of women as somehow ‘soft.’

Balderdash.

There is most definitely a military component to security, but military threats often grow out of other forms of insecurity. To most people in most places, the perils that are most threatening are not clear and present dangers, but chronic absences—a lack of food and clean water, no access to health care, the loss of arable land, the denial of legal rights, and the inability to have their voices heard.

Through the decades and across the globe, women leaders have been held back, shoved aside, and beaten up. Some say that all of this is cultural and there is nothing to do about it—I say it is criminal and we each have an obligation to stop it.

Human security cannot be separated from human dignity, it cannot be sustained when human rights are denied, it cannot be broadened without development, and it cannot be made permanent except by the leadership of men as well as women.

Therefore, it is vital to support organizations working to equip women in emerging democracies with the skills they need to participate. I chair one such organization, the National Democratic Institute, which

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helps women acquire the tools to run for office and works to create a legal environment in which women's voices, when raised, will be heard.

As Hillary Clinton pronounced in 1995 at the Beijing Women's Conference, "Human rights are women's rights, and women's rights are human rights." The message was simple and universal: violence against women must stop; girls should be valued equally with boys; and women should have full access to education, health care, and the levers of economic and political power. That message resonates to this day. *f*