

**STATEMENT BY THE SECRETARY  
IN HONOR OF INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY  
AND ANNOUNCING IRAQI WOMEN'S INITIATIVE**

MARCH 8, 2004

ON THE OCCASION OF INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY ON MARCH 8, I SALUTE ALL OF THE WOMEN AND MEN WHO ARE WORKING TO PROMOTE WOMEN'S EQUALITY AND REALIZE THE FULL POTENTIAL OF HALF THE WORLD'S POPULATION. A YEAR AGO, I NOTED THAT "WOMEN'S ISSUES ARE INTEGRAL TO OUR FOREIGN POLICY," BECAUSE "OUR WORLD COMMUNITY CANNOT BEGIN TO TACKLE THE RANGE OF 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY CHALLENGES WITHOUT THE FULL PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN ALL ASPECTS OF LIFE." TODAY, I REDEDICATE MYSELF AND PLEDGE THE CONTINUING EFFORTS OF THE DEPARTMENT, TO HELP MAKE THIS IDEAL A REALITY. I CALL UPON ALL OUR POSTS TO MARK THIS OCCASION, NOT JUST WITH A ONE-DAY OBSERVANCE, BUT ALSO WITH A YEAR-ROUND COMMITMENT TO ACTIVE PARTNERSHIP WITH LOCAL LEADERS AND COMMUNITIES IN SUPPORT

OF WOMEN'S HUMAN RIGHTS AND ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL OPPORTUNITIES.

OVER THE PAST YEAR, WE HAVE MADE NOTABLE PROGRESS IN LIBERATING BOTH WOMEN AND MEN IN IRAQ FROM OPPRESSION, AND IN PUTTING THEM ON THE ROAD TO RECOVERY AND DEMOCRATIC DEVELOPMENT. THE ROOMS WHERE MEMBERS OF SADDAM'S REGIME SYSTEMATICALLY RAPED AND ABUSED IRAQI WOMEN ARE GONE. IN ITS PLACE, WOMEN'S SELF-HELP CENTERS AND GRASS-ROOTS ORGANIZATIONS ARE BLOSSOMING, FROM BAGHDAD TO BABYLON AND BASRA, AND BEYOND.

TODAY, I AM PROUD TO ANNOUNCE A \$10 MILLION INITIATIVE TO TRAIN IRAQI WOMEN IN THE SKILLS AND PRACTICES OF DEMOCRATIC PUBLIC LIFE. I AM ALSO PLEASED TO ANNOUNCE THE CREATION OF A PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP CALLED THE U.S.- IRAQ WOMEN'S NETWORK, WHICH WILL BRING OUR TWO PEOPLES TOGETHER TO IMPROVE WOMEN'S LIVES AND PROMOTE THEIR FULL PARTICIPATION IN CIVIC LIFE. I AM CONFIDENT THAT THESE INITIATIVES CAN MAKE A SPECIAL CONTRIBUTION TO THE PRESIDENT'S FORWARD STRATEGY OF SUPPORTING FREEDOM IN THE MIDDLE EAST - MUCH AS THE KEY WOMEN'S COMPONENTS OF OUR MIDDLE EAST PARTNERSHIP INITIATIVE, AND THE U.S.-AFGHAN WOMEN'S COUNCIL, HAVE ALREADY STARTED TO DO WITH CONSIDERABLE EFFECT.

WE KNOW THAT MANY CHALLENGES REMAIN FOR THE WOMEN OF BOTH IRAQ AND AFGHANISTAN, AND OF MANY OTHER COUNTRIES ON EVERY CONTINENT, INCLUDING OUR OWN. IT IS ALL THE MORE REASON TO CELEBRATE INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY THIS YEAR WITH THIS PLEDGE TO CONFRONT THOSE CHALLENGES HEAD ON, AND ULTIMATELY, TO PREVAIL. BOTH OUR INTERESTS AND OUR VALUES, INDEED OUR OWN NATIONAL SECURITY, DEMAND NO LESS FROM US ALL.