

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

"The Role of Women in the Peace Process"

Remarks Delivered by Ambassador Patterson to the Security Council

27 October 2005

Mr. President, I wish to congratulate you on your selection of this topic for your Presidency's thematic discussion. The United States agrees that the UN must acknowledge and strengthen the role of women in the peace process and we take seriously the challenge of bringing women, as equals of men, into the mainstream of decision-making in this regard.

Owing to their particular experiences, we believe women can and do bring certain unique qualities and perspectives to the peace process. Women account for over 50% of the people in the world and therefore certainly represent a voice that needs to be heard. Yet, women have been historically under-represented in most peace negotiations. In the past, women's traditional roles in society have often been the excuse for this exclusion. Ironically, those same roles as child bearer and nurturer lend a perspective that is all too often ignored.

Mr. President, as Ambassador to El Salvador I had the opportunity to witness first-hand the role women can play in the peace process. Not only were women believed to have comprised up to forty per cent of the total combat forces of the revolutionary FMLN, but after the war they were fully involved in the peace and political processes that have since shaped their country. El Salvadoran women lobbied to include women and gender equality within the FMLN and their advocacy led to the establishment of a Women's Secretariat in 1993 and the establishment of a 30 per cent quota for the FMLN in 1996.

Women in El Salvador were also very active in local and national reconstruction efforts. Many women who had been members of armed groups became involved in large and small-scale

construction projects. Their experience as combatants challenged many of the pre-war prohibitions against such labor and forced society to further recognize the role they could play. Today, women in El Salvador continue to be key actors in El Salvadoran society. Galvanized and infused by political activism during the war, El Salvadoran women continue to be a highly organized factor in all levels of El Salvadoran society. The success of El Salvador's peace process is in many ways, the result of women being involved in the peace process from the outset.

Mr. President, women have proven to be the equals of men in intellectual and creative capacity. We have increasingly seen women take on greater roles as agents of change throughout society. Among the 191 Member States of the UN and their territories, there are 24 women serving as heads of government, including 5 Presidents and 4 Prime Ministers. Yet, despite rational arguments for the inclusion of women in the peace process, there seems to still be an almost involuntary resistance to the notion. The exclusion of women from important decision-making is still deeply ingrained in many societies. Changes to this way of thinking will require a conscious, deliberate effort by all of us, in order to further involve women in the peace process. Society not only dictates the need for women to be involved in the peace process—it demands it. Thank you.