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THE WHITE HOUSE

OFFICE OF THE FIRST LADY'S PRESS SECRETARY

MRS. REAGAN'S OPENING AND CLOSING REMARKS
THE UNITED NATIONS
OCTOBER 21, 1985

OPENING REMARKS

Thank you Mrs. Perez de Cuellar, and welcome to all of you. Thank you for joining me here today for this important meeting.

I know how far many of you have traveled and that you have come here out of concern. Throughout history, in times of crisis, women have united as mothers concerned for their children. This is a mother-to-mother forum, with concern for a crisis threatening children of the world -- drug abuse. But history also shows that mothers working together can solve some of the toughest problems. It's like a saying I have often used -- a woman is like a tea bag -- you never know her strength until she's in hot water, and as mothers, grandmothers, and concerned citizens, we're all in hot water.

I've become deeply aware of the tragedy of drug abuse in America, and on visits to other countries, I began to realize that it is not unique to us but it is truly an international threat, engulfing the innocent and unaware in its path, without regard to national origin, race or religion. It crosses all boundaries. I have also discovered that First Ladies around the world are beginning to share my concern about this terrible menace.

As you know, last April, I held a First Ladies conference in the White House on the international drug problem. Regardless of cultural differences, we were all mothers sharing the common goal of stopping drug abuse among our young people.

I am happy to report that since our meeting, I've seen and heard of fruitful programs begun by our First Ladies around the world. During trips to Portugal and West Germany this year, I personally witnessed meetings between the First Ladies of those countries and concerned parents who recently formed drug prevention groups there. I am heartened by these and other programs begun because of the dedicated First Ladies behind them.

It's appropriate that we're here at the United Nations to again share experiences and listen to experts. From here we can return to our respective countries understanding the extent of drug abuse, and begin to help. Some First Ladies have returned for this second conference, while others are here for a first time. I am gratified and impressed by the response. We are developing a network of First Lady-to-First Lady, mother-to-mother, by sharing thoughts. It may be a new road, but we will also leave a trail for others to follow.

This morning, we will listen to expert findings, young people's personal stories and progress reports of First Ladies from the April conference. Being a non-political meeting, we cannot change laws, but on a mother-to-mother basis, we can begin plans for work at home. It is a bright beginning. Each nation has unique problems and ways of solving them, but together we set an example. One cannot change the world in a morning, but we can work together on it.

Drugs can kill not just the addict, but the family too. One young girl wrote to me about her brother. On New Year's eve, he threatened to kill them both. "I couldn't believe my eyes," she wrote to me, "my brother who helped raise me was on the needle -- heroin. He began destroying everything in his loving home. One day," she continues, "he was so drugged up that he couldn't walk, he sat on a step and gave me a look of 'Help Me' straight in the eyes. I started to cry. Later that night we found out he overdosed on heroin. I have a dream to be a singer and dancer, but he shattered my dream. He hurt me so bad, but never bad enough that I hated him. I love him more than anyone knows, no matter what he says or does. I will never hate him." And at the bottom of her letter, in large screaming words, she writes, "Help!"

Just one story in just one country, we lost that boy and the little dancer. And our artists, business people, doctors -- everyone in our country is threatened. It is a family issue, and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, drafted here at the United Nations says the family is the natural and fundamental unit of society.

Now is the time, in our visible positions, to halt drug abuse together. I would now like to introduce Dr. Carlton Turner, Special Adviser to the White House for Drug Abuse Policy, who will lead us through our program.

CLOSING REMARKS

My heartfelt thanks to our speakers, and First Ladies for sharing their experiences and knowledge. It took great courage for these young people to open up their personal lives for us. For every one of their stories there are thousands more who suffer and need help -- in all cities, provinces and nations.

A great deal of what you have heard and seen today explains how we in the U.S. are dealing with this problem. But, as we know, there is scarcely a country exempt from this evil and there's no simple answer. But, by exposing, discussing and realizing the depths of tragedy and danger that drugs pose to not just individuals but whole societies, I think we're on the right track.

Now, this morning, mother-to-mother, we've gathered to combat the terror striking every nation. If the interest and programs begun by First Ladies after the April conference are an indication, then I know our meeting here today will prove successful.

There's lots of hope in this room, and I know that working together we can turn this hope into concrete programs to prevent further tragedy, educate our world about its perils and save lives.

And during our luncheon we will have an opportunity to discuss what we've heard today, and consider the different facets of the issue. I hope, too, this won't be the end of our communication, but a beginning of our commitment to save a generation of young people.

I want to take a moment to thank the United Nations and again, Mrs. Perez de Cuellar, for having us here. Nobody said that fighting the international drug situation will be easy. On the contrary, it will take much work. But then, what is work but love made visible. A noted author once wrote that "There is no medicine like hope, no incentive so great, and no tonic so powerful as expectation of something good tomorrow."

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OPENING REMARKS - THE UNITED NATIONS

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OCTOBER 21, 1985

-- THANK YOU MRS. PEREZ DE CUELLAR. AND WELCOME TO ALL OF YOU. THANK YOU FOR JOINING ME HERE TODAY FOR THIS IMPORTANT MEETING.

-- I KNOW HOW FAR MANY OF YOU HAVE TRAVELED AND THAT YOU HAVE COME HERE OUT OF CONCERN. THROUGHOUT HISTORY, IN TIMES OF CRISIS, WOMEN HAVE UNITED AS MOTHERS CONCERNED FOR THEIR CHILDREN. THIS IS A MOTHER TO MOTHER FORUM, WITH CONCERN FOR A CRISIS THREATENING CHILDREN OF THE WORLD -- DRUG ABUSE. BUT

HISTORY ALSO SHOWS THAT MOTHERS WORKING TOGETHER CAN SOLVE SOME OF THE TOUGHEST PROBLEMS. IT'S LIKE A SAYING I HAVE OFTEN USED -- A WOMAN IS LIKE A TEA BAG -- YOU NEVER KNOW HER STRENGTH UNTIL SHE'S IN HOT WATER, AND AS MOTHERS, GRANDMOTHERS, AND CONCERNED CITIZENS, WE'RE ALL IN HOT WATER.

-- I'VE BECOME DEEPLY AWARE OF THE TRAGEDY OF DRUG ABUSE IN AMERICA, AND ON VISITS TO OTHER COUNTRIES, I BEGAN TO REALIZE THAT IT IS NOT UNIQUE TO US BUT IT IS TRULY AN INTERNATIONAL

THREAT, ENGULFING THE INNOCENT AND UNAWARE IN ITS PATH, WITHOUT REGARD TO NATIONAL ORIGIN, RACE OR RELIGION. IT CROSSES ALL BOUNDARIES. I HAVE ALSO DISCOVERED THAT FIRST LADIES AROUND THE WORLD ARE BEGINNING TO SHARE MY CONCERN ABOUT THIS TERRIBLE MENACE.

-- AS YOU KNOW, LAST APRIL, I HELD A FIRST LADIES CONFERENCE IN THE WHITE HOUSE ON THE INTERNATIONAL DRUG PROBLEM. REGARDLESS OF CULTURAL DIFFERENCES, WE WERE ALL MOTHERS SHARING

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THE COMMON GOAL OF STOPPING DRUG ABUSE AMONG OUR YOUNG PEOPLE.

-- I AM HAPPY TO REPORT THAT SINCE OUR MEETING, I'VE SEEN AND HEARD OF FRUITFUL PROGRAMS BEGUN BY OUR FIRST LADIES AROUND THE WORLD. DURING TRIPS TO PORTUGAL AND WEST GERMANY THIS YEAR, I PERSONALLY WITNESSED MEETINGS BETWEEN THE FIRST LADIES OF THOSE COUNTRIES AND CONCERNED PARENTS WHO RECENTLY FORMED DRUG PREVENTION GROUPS THERE. I AM HEARTENED BY THESE AND OTHER PROGRAMS BEGUN BECAUSE OF THE DEDICATED FIRST LADIES BEHIND THEM.

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-- IT'S APPROPRIATE THAT WE'RE HERE AT THE UNITED NATIONS TO AGAIN SHARE EXPERIENCES AND LISTEN TO EXPERTS. FROM HERE WE CAN RETURN TO OUR RESPECTIVE COUNTRIES UNDERSTANDING THE EXTENT OF DRUG ABUSE, AND BEGIN TO HELP. SOME FIRST LADIES HAVE RETURNED FOR THIS SECOND CONFERENCE, WHILE OTHERS ARE HERE FOR A FIRST TIME. I AM GRATIFIED AND IMPRESSED BY THE RESPONSE. WE ARE DEVELOPING A NETWORK OF FIRST LADY TO FIRST LADY, MOTHER TO MOTHER, BY SHARING THOUGHTS. IT MAY BE A NEW ROAD, BUT WE WILL

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ALSO LEAVE A TRAIL FOR OTHERS TO FOLLOW.

-- THIS MORNING, WE WILL LISTEN TO EXPERT FINDINGS, YOUNG PEOPLE'S PERSONAL STORIES AND PROGRESS REPORTS OF FIRST LADIES FROM THE APRIL CONFERENCE. BEING A NONPOLITICAL MEETING, WE CANNOT CHANGE LAWS, BUT ON A MOTHER TO MOTHER BASIS, WE CAN BEGIN PLANS FOR WORK AT HOME. IT IS A BRIGHT BEGINNING. EACH NATION HAS UNIQUE PROBLEMS AND WAYS OF SOLVING THEM, BUT TOGETHER WE SET AN EXAMPLE. ONE CANNOT CHANGE THE WORLD IN A MORNING, BUT WE CAN

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WORK TOGETHER ON IT.

-- DRUGS CAN KILL NOT JUST THE ADDICT, BUT THE FAMILY TOO. ONE YOUNG GIRL WROTE TO ME ABOUT HER BROTHER. ON NEW YEAR'S EVE, HE THREATENED TO KILL THEM BOTH. "I COULDN'T BELIEVE MY EYES," SHE WROTE TO ME, "MY BROTHER WHO HELPED RAISE ME WAS ON THE NEEDLE" -- HEROIN-- . HE BEGAN DESTROYING EVERYTHING IN HIS LOVING HOME. ONE DAY, SHE CONTINUES, "HE WAS SO DRUGGED UP THAT HE COULDN'T WALK, HE SAT ON A STEP AND GAVE ME A LOOK OF "HELP ME"

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STRAIGHT IN THE EYES. I STARTED TO CRY. LATER THAT NIGHT WE FOUND OUT HE OVERDOSED ON HEROIN. I HAVE A DREAM TO BE A SINGER AND DANCER, BUT HE SHATTERED MY DREAM. HE HURT ME SO BAD, BUT NEVER BAD ENOUGH THAT I HATED HIM. I LOVE HIM MORE THAN ANYONE KNOWS, NO MATTER WHAT HE SAYS OR DOES. I WILL NEVER HATE HIM." AND AT THE BOTTOM OF HER LETTER, IN LARGE SCREAMING WORDS, SHE WRITES, " HELP!"

-- JUST ONE STORY IN JUST ONE COUNTRY, WE LOST THAT BOY

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AND THE LITTLE DANCER. AND OUR ARTISTS, BUSINESS PEOPLE, DOCTORS
-- EVERYONE IN OUR COUNTRY IS THREATENED. IT IS A FAMILY ISSUE,
AND THE UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS, DRAFTED HERE AT
THE UNITED NATIONS SAYS THE FAMILY IS THE NATURAL AND FUNDAMENTAL
UNIT OF SOCIETY.

-- NOW IS THE TIME, IN OUR VISIBLE POSITIONS, TO HALT DRUG
ABUSE TOGETHER. I WOULD NOW LIKE TO INTRODUCE DR. CARLTON
TURNER, SPECIAL ADVISER TO THE WHITE HOUSE FOR DRUG ABUSE POLICY,
WHO WILL LEAD US THROUGH OUR PROGRAM. # # #