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May 5, 2015
Senate Foreign Relations Committee

Introduction

Good afternoon, and thank you, Chairman Rubio, Ranking Member Boxer, and distinguished members of the Committee for inviting me to testify today on the resources, priorities, and programs of the Global Women's Issues Office.

My principal responsibility as the Ambassador-at-Large for Global Women's Issues is to develop and help implement policies and initiatives related to promoting gender equality and advancing the status of women and girls internationally. We do this by disseminating best practices for promoting gender issues within the Department of State and also through coordination with USAID and other U.S. government agencies, as well as other governments, international institutions, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). We are an office focused on both policy and diplomacy efforts, and we also implement a handful of targeted programs to strategically advance our objectives.

The Department believes that advancing the status of women and girls worldwide is not only the right thing to do, but the smart thing to do. Study after study demonstrates that countries are more stable, peaceful, and prosperous when women are healthy, educated, and given the opportunity to fully participate in their economies and societies. In other words, we believe women and girls are a good investment.

I would like to begin today by providing you with an overview of my office's three priority areas, and I will then outline how my office uses our resources to support these objectives.

Priorities

Our first priority is preventing and responding to gender-based violence, including early and forced marriage, both in conflict and in peacetime. This work includes addressing cases that capture international headlines, like the rape and murder of young girls in India, Boko Haram's brutal kidnapping of teenage girls who had gathered to take their college entrance exams, and the kidnapping of hundreds of Yezidi women and girls by ISIL. But it also includes the challenging work of changing social norms and deeply ingrained attitudes that lead to more than one in three women around the world experiencing sexual or physical violence in her lifetime. In too many places, far too many people—including women—think domestic violence is justifiable for a variety of incomprehensible reasons, all rooted in the low status of women and girls.

That is why I make sure that addressing gender-based violence is on the agenda of nearly every trip I take. These efforts range from meeting with survivors of acid attacks in Pakistan, to

encouraging the Government of Bangladesh to uphold 18 as the legal age of marriage for all girls, to encouraging the Afghan government to fully implement the Elimination of Violence Against Women Act (EVAW). On a trip to Guatemala, I visited a USAID-supported 24-hour specialized court for cases related to violence against women, exploitation, sexual violence and human trafficking, which takes an innovative and integrated approach combining legal, medical, and psychological services for survivors of gender-based violence. Recently, I met with the President of Afghanistan, Mohammad Ashraf Ghani, and discussed the brutal mob murder of a 27-year-old woman named Farkhunda and the Afghan government's efforts to bring the perpetrators to justice.

My office also works to make sure that our Embassies and Bureaus around the world incorporate best practices for preventing gender-based violence into their strategic planning, diplomatic efforts, and programming and to ensure continued implementation of the U.S. Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Gender-based Violence Globally.

Our second priority is advancing women's full participation in all aspects of society, including in the political sphere. Today, only 22 percent of all of the world's parliamentarians are women, and there are 21 women either serving as head of state or head of government. Only 18 percent of all government ministers are women, with the majority serving in the fields of education and health. Between 1992 and 2011, women have represented fewer than four percent of signatories, two percent of chief mediators, and nine percent of negotiators to major peace processes. These are the places where decisions are made. Decisions that affect women's lives as they do men's. Yet too often women don't have the seats at the table they both need and deserve.

We also work to expand women's economic participation. One of the most effective ways to empower women is to facilitate greater economic independence. Women who take home dependable pay from decent jobs are better equipped to provide for themselves and more likely to stand up for their rights. Being a wage earner can also positively influence a woman's sense of personal empowerment; she may have the means or wherewithal to leave an abusive situation. Becoming a breadwinner may provide a greater voice for her in household decision-making such as the education of her daughter. In addition, investing in women produces a multiplier effect: women spend the majority of their earnings on food, schooling, and immunizations that help secure their children's futures.

Furthermore, ensuring women's participation in the workforce helps boost economies. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) has found that the narrowing gap between male and female employment has accounted for a quarter of Europe's annual GDP growth over the past two decades and that closing gender gaps in the labor market in the Middle East and North Africa could increase per capita GDP in that region by more than 25 percent.

For example, the Women's Entrepreneurship in the Americas Initiative, or WEAmericas, Initiative, which we implement with the Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs, leverages public-private partnerships to support women entrepreneurs.

Through the Equal Futures Partnership—a U.S. led initiative—we are working diplomatically with 26 countries and the European Union to decrease barriers to women’s economic and political participation. We are encouraging every partner country to make and fulfill commitments on these issues and linking more developed countries with others that still face significant challenges to the full inclusion of women. As an example of how Equal Futures countries work together, Italy recently shared with Mexico a successful anti-gender-based violence campaign. Studies show that gender-based violence is and remains a significant barrier to women’s full economic participation.

We are also working to increase the role of women in peace and security efforts. This is part of our strategic commitment to the U.S. National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security, which affirms that ensuring the participation of women in issues such as security, stabilization, justice, and reconciliation is critical to lasting peace and to U.S. national security.

For instance, I was recently in Baghdad and met Iraqi women from a range of different backgrounds as well as UN and minority group representatives to discuss the urgent security and humanitarian challenges, including the needs of traumatized women and girls such as those who have escaped or otherwise returned from ISIL captivity. The Department is actively seeking ways to further assist these and other survivors of sexual and gender-based violence, building on existing interventions by the UN and other international organizations.

In Sierra Leone, a program funded by my office intended to strengthen women’s local leadership proved effective in responding to the Ebola outbreak. The group used its convening authority to engage in public outreach with health care providers and local populations on the Ebola response, helping to ensure that the unique needs of women and girls were addressed.

Our final priority is addressing the needs of adolescent girls. Unfortunately, in too many parts of the world, adolescence is the most precarious time for girls. Far too many people believe that a few years of education is enough for a girl and that once she reaches adolescence, it is time for her to get married or increase her domestic responsibilities.

A quarter of a billion girls live in poverty. In sub-Saharan Africa, only one in 10 girls graduate from high school. One in three girls in the developing world is married by the time she is 18, and one in nine is married by the age of 15. Every year, millions of girls undergo female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C). There are about 380,000 new HIV infections among young women aged 15–24 every year. Millions more live in conflict settings that raise the risks of gender-based violence and further disrupt already perilous situations. And far too few girls have the education they need to participate fully in the economies of their countries.

Through the Let Girls Learn Initiative, a government-wide effort recently launched by President Obama and the First Lady, we are working to make the case that every girl deserves a chance to complete her education, especially secondary education. One World Bank study found that every year of secondary school education is correlated with an 18 percent increase in a girl’s future earning power. Girls’ attendance in formal school during adolescence is correlated with later

marriage, later childbearing, lower rates of HIV/AIDS and other reproductive health problems, fewer hours of domestic and/or labor market work, and greater gender equality.

Resources/Programmatic Activities

As I mentioned, my role is a strategic combination of policy and diplomacy, and I serve to advance the Secretary's Policy Guidance on Promoting Gender Equality to achieve our national security and foreign policy objectives. The majority of programmatic activities related to gender are carried out by State and USAID embassies and missions around the world, and some of our bureaus here in Washington. In addition, my office helps advance these issues through our own targeted programming. In many instances, we use our resources to fill gaps and test innovative, strategic ways to address challenges related to women and girls.

One such initiative is the Secretary's Full Participation Fund, which provides resources to Embassies and Bureaus to implement innovative ideas that integrate gender equality into every aspect of their work.

Last July, my office was proud to announce our largest Full Participation grant ever—\$1.5 million—to help support our Embassy in Guinea in an effort to eliminate FGM/C, which UN data shows affects 96 percent of the female population in Guinea. This horrific practice has zero health benefits—and can even lead to death. Through partnerships with the Government of Guinea, Guinea's First Lady, UNICEF, and 26 local civic and human rights organizations, our Embassy in Guinea has established nationwide educational and media campaigns that engage policymakers, health professionals, FGM/C practitioners, religious leaders, and the general public in an effort to abandon FGM/C. Our Embassy has helped to start a national dialogue about this practice and has implemented programs that will protect up to 65,000 girls and women.

We also have our Global Women, Peace, and Security Grants. In coordination with the Bureaus of African Affairs and International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, we are funding a program in the Democratic Republic of the Congo to help build local capacity to collect the forensic evidence necessary to prosecute rape crimes. The program supports training for local legal, law enforcement, and health professionals in the proper forensic documentation of sexual violence cases, chain of custody procedure, and use of court-admissible evidence to prosecute legal cases against alleged perpetrators of sexual violence.

I am committed to ensuring that our funds are spent on programs that have real impact and that can serve as models for other work. That is why we have implemented procedures to carry out rigorous monitoring and evaluation of the projects we fund, including working with organizations at the outset of each award to establish detailed plans to achieve and demonstrate results, as well as through site visits and tracking of projects through quarterly reporting.

One thing we have learned is that it is difficult to see change without comprehensively addressing the many challenges that women and girls face. For example, it is one thing to provide services to survivors of domestic violence. But to really reduce rates of gender-based violence, we must also

work on prevention and ensuring that women and girls have opportunities for education and economic independence.

We also know that everyone is going to have to play a role if we want to effectively address the challenges women face. We know we can't do this alone—promoting gender equality is everyone's job who works in diplomacy and development.

We cannot effectively counter extremist groups without engaging women. We cannot create stable and prosperous societies without including women. We cannot build stronger economies without making sure that girls can go to school. Across every Bureau and Embassy, we need to make sure that we are making every effort to advance the status and address the needs of women and girls.

Thank you for your time and I look forward to your questions.