

REMARKS OF MALLIKA DUTT*

I want to share with you two thoughts that I've been having as we've been listening to the various panel presentations today. The first is that as I look around the room and see many of my colleagues and fellow strategists from the Cairo Conference, I am struck by the power that women have so recently demonstrated. At the U.N. World Conference on Human Rights and at the International Conference on Population Development, women have come together across difference, across ideology, across power hierarchies, across a whole range of issues that have divided us greatly in the past. But I am struck by the power that we have demonstrated at these international fora to literally transform the terms of the debate that governments have been engaged in at that level.

Now, that power can reflect a couple of things. The pessimistic view is that these international fora are not really very important—so that it is in the interests of governments to let us let off steam and feel like we have accomplished great victories that don't really mean anything.

Another interpretation, and one that I would like to believe, is that the women's movement, especially at the global level, has shifted from being a movement that has been separatist—and by separatist I mean where women have taken the time to remove themselves in the public policy arena—to begin to articulate and understand what is happening to us. And after three decades of doing this, we have re-entered the political arena with enough of an understanding of our own power to shift the way in which we do our political work. And that shift is reflected in the victories that we have had in these international fora.

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I recommend that we very seriously examine what about those international fora has enabled us to come together to achieve these gains. We need to understand this to enable us to move beyond these fora to accomplish the implementation, the monitoring work, and the accountability work which are far more difficult than the moment of Vienna or the moment of Cairo provide. And that is a challenge that I think we are meeting by having meetings like this. But we have to use these meetings to help us move to real strategies and to continue to struggle with all of the differences, all of the exclusions, all of the issues of representation, all of the issues of us being a certain kind of woman divorced from another kind of woman. All of those struggles need to come with us into that conversation, but that is where we need to move. And I think that is where we are moving.

The second point that I would like to make is that unless those of us who are engaged in doing this human rights work for women at the international level begin to close the dichotomy that exists between domestic women's efforts and our international work—unless those of us who work in organizations who are outwardly focused begin to make the connections between women's organizations in the United States and our work—we will be seriously hindered in our advancement of these strategies, in the implementation of these programmes of action, and in the work that we have to do to move ahead.

This is absolutely critical because the kind of bifurcation that exists between the domestic women's movement and those of us who do international human rights work does not give us the power to move the U.S. Government both on its violations of our rights within the country as well as the violations that it perpetrates on women around the world. And until we can get that intersection to happen, the role of the United States as a superpower, despite the shifting changes in power amongst countries, will continue to plague us in enforcement, in monitoring, and in accountability mechanisms. And given what has happened in the political terrain of our country in the November 1994 elections, I think that that work assumes an even greater urgency.