

## Remarks on Presenting the Eleanor Roosevelt Award for Human Rights December 6, 1999

*The President.* Thank you very much, Belquis. Congressmen Gilman, Lewis, Jackson Lee; Reverend and Mrs. Jackson; Deputy Attorney General Holder; Harold Koh; Bob Seiple; Julia Taft; Hattie Babbitt; Bette Bao Lord, thank you for coming back.

### *School Shooting in Fort Gibson, Oklahoma*

Ladies and gentlemen, before I begin, I need—because this is my only opportunity before the press today just to say a brief word about this school shooting this morning in Fort Gibson, Oklahoma. The Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms are on the scene now working with the local authorities. I expect to get a detailed briefing shortly. Meanwhile, our prayers are with each of the children and their families, and the entire Fort Gibson community is—right now there are no fatalities, only people who are wounded, and we hope and pray it will stay that way.

### *Eleanor Roosevelt Award for Human Rights*

It occurs to me that at some point tonight someone will be doing what some of us—Hillary says it's mostly a male thing—somebody will be channel-surfing tonight. [*Laughter*] And they will just come upon Belquis speaking. And they may stop and listen, or they may not. They may know what the Taliban is, or they may not. But I wonder if even someone who hears her will recognize that in nearly half the world today—in spite of the fact that for the first time in history more than half the people of the world live under governments of their own choosing—in nearly half the world, doing what Belquis just did, simply standing up and speaking freely, could get her arrested, jailed, beaten, even tortured. That's why we're here today.

I wonder if someone who just happened along her remarks tonight would understand that until people like Eleanor Roosevelt came along, the rest of the world didn't even recognize that the right to speak out is more than something enshrined in the American Constitution. It is truly an international human right.

Sometimes we forget how long it took the world to agree on a common definition, a universal declaration of what freedom actually

means. Half a century ago the Universal Declaration on Human Rights said it in very simple words: "All human beings are free and equal in dignity and human rights. All have the right to life, liberty, and security. All are endowed with reason and conscience. All have the right to a standard of living adequate to health and well-being."

The real genius of the Declaration of Human Rights is that it affirmed that basic human rights are not cultural, but universal; that what a country does to people within its own borders is not its business alone, but the business of all of us. We in the United States know how hard it is to achieve the aspirations of that declaration. We've been living with it since our Founders, and living with our flaws in failing to meet up to its standards.

A hundred years ago Eleanor Roosevelt was a 15-year-old girl growing up in a country where women could not vote. Half a century ago, if the standards of the Universal Declaration were held up to segregated schools and lunch counters in the United States, we would have failed the test resoundingly.

This century has taught us that even though human rights are endowed by the hand of our Creator, they are ensured by the hearts and hands of men and women among us who cannot bear to see it otherwise. Inch by inch, such people have moved the world forward. Today we honor five brave Americans whose lives have made a difference. And we ask that all of us remember, in their triumphs, the struggles of people like Belquis, the continuing tensions in Africa, the continuing tensions in the Balkans, and elsewhere in the world where human rights are not yet secure.

It is said that when Burke Marshall first met Robert Kennedy, they sat across a table for 10 minutes and didn't say a single word. Those of us who had Burke Marshall in law school can believe that story. [*Laughter*] Perhaps now he will tell us who spoke first. But from that silent moment sprang a truly extraordinary partnership.

As Assistant Attorney General for the Civil Rights Division in the Kennedy administration,

Burke Marshall was a bridge between Government and those activists fighting every day to end Jim Crow. Congressman John Lewis, who received this award last year, once recalled that whenever Martin Luther King or James Farmer needed to talk to somebody in Washington—they would simply say, “call Burke.”

His work was crucial to passing the Civil Rights Act and the Voting Rights Act. After he had helped shape a new America, he later worked equally hard to shape young minds at Yale Law School.

I made a joke about Hillary and I being students. But I can tell you, I never will forget the first time I saw him. And I imagined how this man of slight stature and such a modest demeanor could almost shake with his passion for justice. It was quite something to see for the first time, and we are all in his debt.

When Leon Sullivan was 8 years old, he walked into a grocery store, slapped a nickel on the counter and said, “I want a Coke.” The place being in segregated South Carolina, the shopkeeper threw him out. That moment was the beginning of his life’s work. The pastor of two churches by the time he was at the ripe old age of 17, Reverend Sullivan went on to write the Sullivan principles, which called upon companies all around the world to act in a socially responsible manner. By compelling dozens of businesses to desegregate their plants in South Africa, his work helped to pull down apartheid.

Today, as the author of the new global Sullivan principle, Leon Sullivan is still changing the world. He’s too big for anyone to deny him a Coke—[laughter]—but he has helped to win that right for millions of others who aren’t so large.

Reverend Sullivan, thank you for keeping your eyes on the prize for nearly 80 years now. Thank you.

For those of you who wonder from time to time about whether there really could be a divine plan guiding our lives, consider this: In Spanish, the name, Dolores Huerta, means “sorrowful orchard.” But if Dolores has her way, her name will be the only sorrowful orchard left in America.

She began her career teaching young migrant children but couldn’t stand seeing them come to class hungry. So in 1962 she and Cesar Chavez cofounded the United Farm Workers. While

Cesar Chavez worked the fields, she worked the boardrooms and the statehouses, negotiating contracts and fighting for laws that lifted the lives of thousands and thousands of Americans. In the process, she found time to raise 11 children.

Dolores, we thank you for all you have done and all you still do to promote the dignity and human rights of your family and America’s family. Thank you.

It is no accident that when America opened its arms to Kosovar Albanians early this year, one of the first calls that went out was to a Dominican nun in the Fordham section of the Bronx. Scripture tells us that “if you spend yourselves on behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your life will rise in the darkness and your night will become like noontime.” If that is true, there are few people who live their lives in more sunshine than Sister Jean Marshall.

Disturbed by the sight of refugee families picking up garbage off the street to feed their children, in 1983 Sister Jean founded St. Rita’s Center for Immigrant and Refugee Services. In the days since, it has helped thousands of refugees, from Vietnam to Cambodia to Bosnia, to find jobs, learn English, live better lives.

Sister Jean, we thank you for all you are doing to make our democracy real and dreams come true for thousands who flee human rights abuses and come here expecting the Statue of Liberty to live up to her promise. Thank you.

Lastly, there are few people who have done more to directly build on Eleanor Roosevelt’s work on women’s rights around the world than Charlotte Bunch. Gloria Steinem once observed that for every question that comes up regarding women’s rights, sooner or later someone asks, what does Charlotte think? [Laughter]

As the founder of the Center for Women’s Global Leadership at Rutgers University, she has worked to build a worldwide network of activists. As a result, when the World Conference on Human Rights was held in Vienna in 1993, for the first time there was a network in place to raise international awareness of issues like violence against women and gay and lesbian issues. And for the first time, the U.N. acknowledged that women’s rights are human rights.

Today I think the best way to thank Charlotte Bunch is for the Senate to finally ratify the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. Thank you.

We honor these five Americans today with the thanks of a grateful nation. But let me say again, to echo what Hillary said earlier, if we truly want to honor their work, we must stay committed in the places where the glory has not come and continue to speak out for human rights around the world, from Burma to Cuba to Sudan, from Serbia to North Korea and Vietnam. We must do so because it's the right thing to do and the surest path to a world that is safe, democratic, and free.

In Afghanistan, we have strongly condemned the Taliban's despicable treatment of women and girls. We have worked with the United Nations to impose sanctions against the Taliban, while ensuring that the Afghan people continue to receive humanitarian assistance. We are Afghanistan's strongest critic, but also its largest humanitarian donor.

And today we take another step forward. I am pleased to announce that we will spend, next year, at least \$2 million to educate and improve the health of Afghan women and children refugees. We are also making an additional \$1½ million available in emergency aid for those displaced by the recent Taliban offensive. And we're dramatically expanding our resettlement program for women and children who are not safe where they are.

But, as Belquis said, these are but temporary solutions. The Taliban must stop violating the rights of women and respect the human rights of all people. And we must continue to work until the day when Afghanistan has a government that reflects the wisdom of its people.

The whole world is also concerned about the plight of innocent people in Chechnya. Two weeks ago, at the OSCE summit in Turkey, I raised the issue directly with President Yeltsin. The people of Chechnya are in a terrible position, beleaguered by paramilitary groups and terrorists on the one hand and the Russian offensive on the other. I made clear that Russia's fight against terrorism is right, but the methods being used in Chechnya are wrong. And I am convinced they are counterproductive.

We've seen rocket and artillery attacks on largely civilian areas, with heavy losses of life and at least 200,000 people pushed from their homes. I'm deeply disturbed by reports that suggest that innocent Chechens will continue to bear the brunt of this war, and not the militants Russia is fighting.

Russia has set a deadline for all inhabitants, now, to leave Grozny or face the consequences. That means that there is a threat to the lives of the old, the infirm, the injured people, and other innocent civilians who simply cannot leave or are too scared to leave their homes. Russia will pay a heavy price for those actions with each passing day, sinking more deeply into a morass that will intensify extremism and diminish its own standing in the world.

Another country about which we must continue to express concern is China. China is progressing and opening to the world in many ways that are welcome, including its entry into the WTO. Yet its progress is still being held back by the Government's response to those who test the limits of freedom. A troubling example, of course, is the detention by Chinese authorities, of adherents of the Falun Gong movement.

Its targets are not political dissidents, and their practices and beliefs are unfamiliar to us. But the principle still, surely, must be the same: freedom of conscience and freedom of association. And our interest, surely, must be the same: seeing China maintain stability and growth at home by meeting, not stifling, the growing demands of its people for openness and accountability.

For all these challenges, we have to say that we enter the new millennium more hopeful than we have been at any time in the past century. The second half of this century began with delegates from 18 nations, including the United States, coming together to write the Universal Declaration. The century ends with 18 nations having come together with the United States to reaffirm those basic rights in Kosovo—with progress from Indonesia and East Timor to Nigeria.

Now, as I've said, more than half the world's people live under governments of their own choosing. Shortly before the Congress went home, the United States Senate unanimously ratified the International Convention against Child Labor, and I became the third head of state to sign the convention. We are moving, but we have much to do as we enter a new century. And again I would say to my fellow Americans, we all know that our efforts have to begin at home.

On the 10th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Eleanor Roosevelt dedicated a book called "In Your Hands." On that day she said, and I quote, human rights

begin “in small places, close to home . . . Unless these rights have meaning there, they have little meaning anywhere. Without concerted citizen action to uphold them close to home, we shall look in vain for progress in the larger world.”

Today we honor that message by honoring five people whose work close to home has made the whole world a better place. May their work continue to inspire us all for generations yet to come.

Lieutenant Colonel, read the citations.

[At this point, Lt. Col. Carlton D. Everhart, USAF, Air Force Aide to the President, read the citations, and the President and First Lady presented the awards.]

*The President.* Thank you for coming. Thank you for honoring these great people. Thank you for reminding us of all the important work still to be done, Belquis.

We’re adjourned. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:17 p.m. in Presidential Hall (formerly Room 450) in the Dwight D. Eisenhower Executive Office Building. In his remarks, he referred to Afghan refugee Belquis Ahmadi, who introduced the President; civil rights leader Rev. Jesse Jackson and his wife, Jacqueline; Commissioner Harold H. Koh, Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe; Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom Robert A. Seiple; and President Boris Yeltsin of Russia.

## Statement on Signing the Healthcare Research and Quality Act of 1999 December 6, 1999

Today I am pleased to sign S. 580, the “Healthcare Research and Quality Act of 1999,” which authorizes appropriations for the Agency for Health Care Policy and Research (and renames it the “Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality”) and authorizes a new grant program to support children’s hospitals with graduate medical education programs.

This legislation combines two important health care priorities of my Administration: first, ensuring that our Nation’s children, especially those who suffer from complex or unusual diseases, continue to receive the highest quality care that our health care system can provide; and second, developing the scientific evidence that we need to improve the quality and safety of our health care system.

The Act takes an important first step to ensure the delivery of high quality health care for America’s children by investing Federal funds in graduate medical education at free-standing children’s hospitals. This long overdue initiative was included in my Administration’s FY 2000 budget and was strongly advocated by the First Lady. Her leadership in this area is longstanding, and it is with great pride that I sign this groundbreaking legislation.

In an increasingly competitive health care market dominated by managed care, teaching

hospitals struggle to cover the significant costs associated with training and research as private reimbursements decline. Millions of American children each year are treated by physicians affiliated with or trained in one of 60 independent children’s hospitals across the country. While other teaching hospitals receive support for these costs through Medicare, children’s hospitals receive virtually no Federal funds, even though they train nearly 30 percent of the Nation’s pediatricians and nearly 50 percent of all pediatric specialists. This inequity exacerbates an already difficult financial situation for children’s hospitals, which often serve the poorest, sickest, and most vulnerable children. In many cases, they provide the regional safety net for children, regardless of medical or economic need, and they are the major centers of research on children’s health problems.

This Act creates a new grant program to provide much-needed support for the training of these critical health providers. I am pleased that the Consolidated Appropriations Act that I recently approved included my full \$40 million request to get this program started.

The Act also authorizes appropriations through 2005 for the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) and represents the culmination of a genuine bipartisan effort to