

Frances Fragos Townsend Accepts the 2011 Jeane J. Kirkpatrick Award

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While I was at the White House, I had the privilege when I traveling the world to meet with extraordinary women. My travels took me to the Middle East and North Africa. In Bahrain, Qatar and Morocco I met with women diplomats and business owners. In Jordan and the UAE I met with women in the military, including King Abdullah of Jordan's sister who is a senior military officer who recently completed training in the US at the National Defense University. And when she graduated the King was there to look on with pride! In Iraq I met with women seeking political office. In Afghanistan I met with courageous young women who put on the uniform and were members of the Afghanistan counternarcotics force as well as women running for political office. In Saudi Arabia I met with women entrepreneurs and doctors who were working to put an end to violence against women. And I have had the privilege to meet with women political leaders such as Pakistan's slain Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto and only recently I met with Iranian opposition leader Maryam Rajavi. All share in common a commitment and a vision to improve the lives of all their citizens.

Women's active involvement and participation in civic affairs and public life is on the rise. This necessarily makes those countries stronger and strengthens their economies. I was often told that the West is a model for woman around the world and while we have certainly made great strides I am quick to point out that we are not perfect. The UK had its first female Home Secretary during the Brown government. The French only recently had their first female Defense Minister. And although the US has had several notable firsts: the last 3 Secretaries of State have been women, there has been only 1 woman AG, 1 woman Homeland Security Secretary, 1 woman National Security Advisor and 1 female Homeland Security advisor. In the US there has never been a woman Secretary of Defense, and no female heads of the CIA, DNI or FBI. And so we are not done fighting here in the US, not yet!

So with the progress that we here in the US have made, you might ask why focus on what we have yet to achieve? Well last year in NY I hosted a panel for The Daily Beast called Women of the World. The panel I moderated had a group of female Afghan activists who noted that the US needs to do more than simply advocate for their participation but to call specifically for their

involvement in national security issues. These women rightly pointed out that until the security issues are resolved their participation in other issues is only on the margins and they are right. They are calling for a seat at the national security table just as women in the US do today. I am still too often the only woman on a panel or in a policy discussion on these issues and I imagine Secretary Clinton often feels the same way.

But women's voices are now being heard the world over. For example, the mother in Tunisia, whose son, the fruit seller, lit himself on fire and sparked the revolution that continues today. The dignity, pride and sorrow in her voice have moved all who have heard her. And the World looked on with amazement as the women in Egypt and Bahrain marched and slept in Tahrir Square and Pearl Circle carrying their children with them. And in Libya, the woman interviewed by Anderson Cooper last Thursday while her voice was filled with fear, frustration and desperation. He asked her, "if you are frightened of the regime why are you taking the risk to speak out?" and she replied that Gaddafi said he would kill us and that is what he is doing. The world must know we have nothing left, nothing to lose. The world must know.

These women inspire us with their courage, their perseverance and their tenacity. Their voices are a call to action and the Women's Democracy Network is a vehicle that over the years has delivered the assistance and expertise that those women around the world require. Tonight we must recommit ourselves on behalf of those women around the world who are in crisis and desperate need. We who enjoy democratic freedom, prosperity and participation share a responsibility to help them.

But before I close I feel compelled to address a sensitive issue that for too long we have failed to address directly. I anticipate that there will be some tonight who feel that on this evening of celebration I too should have remained silent and to them I will not apologize but hope I persuade you.

As we sit here tonight there are women in dangerous places around the world and even here in the US where the forces of evil and oppression both in the privacy of homes and in public spaces will use rape to intimidate and oppress women. Call it what you will on TV and in polite

company... Sexual assault or sexual violence - but if we eschew the word rape because it makes us uncomfortable, we are wrong. Rape is NOT a sexual act. Let us be honest and clear, it is a crime of violence, it is an assertion of power and intimidation, it is a tool of oppression.

When a female Western journalist, like Lara Logan of CBS is attacked, it is meant to silence and intimidate all women and remind us all that we are not safe. It is meant to intimidate other journalists and the networks they work for not to send women to war zones and dangerous places. But I want to know what Katie Couric and Christianne Amanpour think. I want to hear from Arwa Damon, my colleague at CNN, about what she is seeing. I want no State, no government and no corporation to become a paternal proxy deciding where I am safe. If those institutions want to protect me then they must speak out and demand those guilty of such crimes be prosecuted.

Allow me to close on a positive note, congratulations to Sherry Rehman of Pakistan on her award. I could not help but notice that in the background of her video you could hear the birds singing to remind us that hope has a voice and joyful sound of freedom's song. My congratulations and thanks to Lorne Cramer and Judy Van Rest for the important work that they do each day and for the enormous privilege of being with you this evening. I humbly accept tonight's honor, the Jeanne Kirkpatrick award, on behalf of those women around the world who this very night are fighting for freedom and fighting to be heard. To them I say - we hear you; the world hears you and we will fight with you.