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Global Women's Action Network for Children Conference: Mobilizing for Action

(transcript from simultaneous interpretation from Farsi)

I am happy to be here in Jordan – the only country in the Middle East which has joined the International Criminal Court – in practice it has demonstrated her adherence to human rights. I hope it will provide a model for other governments in the region who by joining the ICC will prove that they too adhere to international human rights standards. Every country which joins the ICC will allow people of that country recourse – if a government violates human rights of its people, if a government commits a crime against humanity, people of that country are entitled to take their case to the ICC and against their own government. That court is a guarantor of human rights and the only way to expand human rights and democracy in the world.

Ladies and gentlemen, I want to express my condolences to all the mothers who from the beginning of clashes between Palestine and Israel have lost their children, hope with the establishment of peace no mother will have to mourn the loss of her children. We have a proverb in Persian which says the strength of a train is in its weakest link – as the children are notable to defend their own rights, and it is the duty of every government to defend their rights, under the International Convention on the rights of the Child. The convention has safeguarded these rights – they should be at the top of any macro policies of governments.

However, we often see children are ignored, rights violated and they forget about the future. The best evidence for this is the ratio between military and education budgets of various countries. There are very few countries in the world that don't have armed forces, a small number of the 6.2 billion in the world are lucky enough to have their financial resources devoted to education rather than wars or probable wars in the future. In the rest of the countries with armed forces we see that the military budget is many times larger than the education budget – this is a great tragedy for humanity. Instead of using resources for the teaching of children so the future of the country could be assured, governments spend resources on militaries, which is planning to kill other people, while education budget means spending money for building a better future.

Every year millions of children remain illiterate due to the lack of educational facilities; every year millions of children leave school desks due to poverty and just to get a piece of bread engage in black market labor, while armies are getting more dangerous every day. Many governments are not prepared to dissolve their armed forces – if they do, they think, their security would be endangered and they would fall prey to foreign armies. But many of us know this is not true. Armies can themselves pose a threat to the establishment of peace at the domestic and international level.

I always dream of a world free from armed forces and weapons. I know this is purely a dream which at the moment cannot be implemented but a challenge we are facing here is not to think of dreams but to act concretely. Yesterday some speakers said we should act,

not just talk, and make sure our words are put into action. As an explicit proposal I suggest that in our final resolution of this conference we should include that governments should be urged to reduce at least 10% of military budgets and to devote these resources to education.

Every one of us who is taking part in this conference must also remember, when we vote in our own countries, to challenge the views and opinions of candidates in elections and question the expenditures for military purposes. We can vote for those candidates who believe education enjoys a priority over militarism.

Another point is making use of children and young adults in ethnic and civil wars. The religious and patriotic feelings of young children are misused by political parties or governments who make use of boys younger than 18 in military conflicts.

I would like to make use of the remaining time to refer to discrimination against women and girls in Islamic countries. The prophet of Islam, peace be upon Him, fourteen centuries ago, appeared among primitive Arabs who believed it was a disgrace to have daughters. Yet he would kiss his daughter Fatima and praise her. In such a religion in the 21<sup>st</sup> century in some Islamic countries blood money for women is ½ that of a man. If a man and a woman are involved in an accident in the street, the damages paid to a woman are legally half the damages paid to a man. In some Islamic countries women still do not have the right to vote and take part in elections. In some other Islamic countries if women wish to study in the university they must receive permission from their husband or their father. In most Islamic countries if women wish to travel or receive a passport they must receive permission from their husband. In many Islamic countries polygamy is still allowed. In some Islamic countries mothers are called after the names of their sons while in some other Islamic countries such as Indonesia, Bangladesh and Pakistan, women have been able to become even President or Prime Minister.

But the main question is what does real Islam have to say about women? What acts against the interests of women and girls in Islamic countries is not Islam – it is the patriarchal culture which is more prominent in Islamic countries than other countries. The patriarchal culture always interprets Islam against the interests of women and like other religions it has many different interpretations, like in the west one church marries homosexuals while another shuns them, and all of them are Christian. The same in Islam – there are different interpretations of the status of women in Islamic countries. In fact this can be caused by the patriarchal culture which does not believe in the equal nature of human beings – discrimination against women does not even tolerate democracy. The rights of women and democracy are two sides of the same scale. Do you know of any truly democratic country where women's rights are being suppressed or discrimination is allowed? History has proven that women are the last group to enjoy the benefits of democracy. It seems some concepts of freedom, human rights and democracy have only been created for men. If anything is left it is given to women. Rights given to women in Islamic countries will pave the way for democracy, in true meaning of the word. Victory means success for all women. If only a few women receive power under the influence of

foreign governments or international organizations that does not solve the numerous problems. Some active women struggling for rights are the harbingers of peace. Non democratic governments have always seen the women as their strongest opponents. My dear sisters when I'm talking about a patriarchal culture I am not referring to the male sex but to the wrong culture which does not accept the equality of all human beings. Although women are the victims of this wrong culture, unfortunately at times they even transmit this wrong culture. Let's not forget that every bullying, oppressive man has grown up on the lap of a woman. I compare the patriarchal culture to hemophilia – in this illness a woman herself does not fall sick but transfers the gene of the sickness to her male child. What Muslim women should come to understand and fight against is the patriarchal culture or else you should at least be certain that Islam does not oppress women. With wishes for all of the victims and for success for women all throughout the world, I leave you with good wishes.