



**INDUS Women Leaders' 2006 Leadership Summit
Keynote Address
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Women and Women's Organizations: Their Ability to Shape the Future

Good evening and thank you very much for inviting me to participate in this very impressive conference and to share some insights about women's organizations and women's leadership from the perspective of a practitioner who lives and breathes these issues on a daily basis.

Before I begin I would first like to recognize the hard work of Tina Shah and the advisors and officers of the IWL, Neera Parikh, the IWL DC Chapter leaders, and the conference planning committee and its leadership summit chair Sona Pancholy who I am proud to say is a member of the Women's Foreign Policy Group, for putting on this great conference and for inviting me here this evening.

My remarks relate closely to the topics you have been discussing today such as entrepreneurship, techniques for career advancement such as networking and mentoring, and the quest for balance in your life. Tonight I plan to talk about the following things:

1. The story and the history of an organization like yours that promotes and helps woman advance.
2. The role of women's organizations and why they are important today.
3. The responsibility of individuals in career advancement.

I want to begin by briefly sharing with you the history of the Women's Foreign Policy Group, which I

co-founded. I know that you work in many different fields, but the stories that I will tell from the experience of the Women's Foreign Policy Group and my own career are not relevant only to the field of international affairs, but have parallels to other fields.

Just briefly, the Women's Foreign Policy Group started around the kitchen table and has grown to an active dynamic organization which has existed for 11 years as a full-time non-profit, and for several years as an informal group before that. What brought us together was fact that there were so few women working in foreign affairs. The field was elitist and was dominated by the old boy's network. That was the start of developing a network and holding meetings on important foreign policy issues with female speakers, something we pioneered since one rarely heard from women on these issues. These things are still very much the core of the organization today, even though we have many other activities. I usually arranged the programs since I was working as a journalist then and knew people in many different fields. From the start we have always taken the broad view of international affairs, even though most of the women at that time worked at the State Department or at other government agencies such as the Peace Corps and the Agency for International Development. Today, the field of international affairs is greatly expanded and there are so many ways to be involved including government, NGO's, international organizations, corporations, foundations and the media. The field is now attracting more and more people interested in working on international issues or in a global organization. In addition, more and more young women are entering the field and more women are advancing to positions of leadership. In the United States, we have now had two female Secretaries of State, Madeline Albright and Condoleezza Rice, but that only dates back to 1994. The general trend in terms of women's leadership is positive, and I will just share a few statistics. In just one year, there are now six more women foreign ministers, twelve more US women ambassadors and three more women ambassadors to the US. While this is good news, the fact that there are only twenty-two women foreign ministers, forty-four US women ambassadors and twenty-three women ambassadors to the US also indicates that, while there is progress, there is still a ways to go and a lot of work to be done.

This leads me to my second topic, why women's organizations are still important today and the role that they play.

I am frequently asked why do we still need a women's organization when for example the field of international affairs has changed, opened up, and now includes more women. As I just mentioned, we should celebrate the progress but recognize that in the grand scheme of things, there are still not that many women who have made it to the top and who have real influence and power in many fields. At the same time, we should be encouraged by the number of younger women in the pipeline. Here is where the women's networks are key. They provide women with support personally and professionally in their quest for career advancement, provide access to role models and mentors, and allow you to connect on a personal basis with others you may not know but should know, because everyone is so busy in their own fields. I am a consummate networker, a skill I developed and honed as a journalist and which has served me extremely well in my current position. Women have had to learn the importance of networking and helping each other, as women's networks are much newer phenomenon than the old boys networks through which men have helped and supported each other. In a recent article in Newsweek on Women's Leadership as Karenna Gore Schiff Said: "I've learned that it's very important for women to reach out to each other. I think that we can be very catty and callous and unsupportive of each other at times. I think that we are the ones who can change the world." She contrasted men's behavior which she said was not catty, but supportive of each other while still being competitive, and emphasized that together we are better.

The third and last point that I want to discuss is my view that the ultimate burden for ensuring career advancement rests with the individual. Here I would like to stress the importance of pursuing your dreams and passion which I am fortunate to be able to do. I love what I do even though starting and running a non-profit is hard work. To me the Women's Foreign Policy Group is so much more than a job, and provides me with the opportunity to continually learn and grow. It is rewarding when you can in some way make a contribution to helping others. In the case of the Women's Foreign Policy Group, we

are helping to promote women and their voices in international affairs and are also committed to helping to get the American public more informed about and engaged in international issues. For example, we just completed a fascinating series with Carnegie Corporation of NY Scholars on Islam. Also, in just a week, we will be holding our annual luncheon event with President Sirleaf of Liberia, the first female elected head of state in Africa, which will be very exciting, but is an enormous amount of work. If anyone is interested in attending, please go to our website at www.wfpg.org. The last dimension of my work relates to the next generation of leaders whom we try to help through our internships and mentoring activities such as mentoring fairs where members come and counsel others about careers. No one career pathway will be the same, but I want to share some pointers that are relevant to different fields:

1. Pursue your passions and dreams and do not give them up. In the same Newsweek article on leadership that I mentioned previously, the race-car driver Danica Patrick captured this idea so well when she said: “I tell young women to find what you love and dream really big, have huge aspirations for yourself, and never give up.”

Some people know early on what they want to do, as I did in a general sense. I always wanted to do something international, loved languages, wanted to teach, help others, and was very interested in the UN. In my several different careers in teaching, government, as a researcher, consultant, in the legal field, as a journalist and as a non-profit executive, I have fulfilled and incorporated many of my interests. Some people do not know what they want to do early on, but that is also O.K. as your interests and passions can emerge at any time. One good way is to see what you are good at and what you really like both personally and professionally.

2. Join networks and network, network, network, and always have your business cards with you. That is something I learned as a journalist. Networks can help you find role models, find ideas to pursue and make good contacts.

3. Be entrepreneurial and creative. There are many ways to be involved in certain fields. Once you have some experience and a good idea, if you can't find what you want, think about trying to create it.

That is something that I and other women I know have done and it has been great.

Part of creating something is taking risks and being prepared to fail. Most people who have been successful have experienced both.

I would briefly like to share two experiences of mine to illustrate this. When I was teaching at American University, I was also on a part-time basis running the Women's Foreign Policy Group. In the spring of 1995, I was on a search committee for a counterpart to teach what I was teaching. I had also been approached by a major foundation regarding funding for our organization. They could not tell me until much later about the grant, but I took a risk and gave in my resignation. I thought if the grant did not work, even though we had positive signals, I could survive for a while and then would find something else.

I took an even bigger risk when I was offered a producers job for a new foreign affairs program on public television while I was working at the Macneil-Lehrer Newshour. I had hoped to get a leave of absence, but couldn't. I left a prestigious, comfortable position for something unknown, but which gave me a better title and more money. The program did not get refunded so I was without a job. It was hard, but then I went to work as a volunteer on a presidential campaign which I always wanted to do and couldn't as a journalist. Then I received a fellowship to the Kennedy School at Harvard. If I hadn't taken the risk and pursued something that I wanted to do even though it was short-term, I could still possibly be at the Newshour doing the same job I had been doing for many years. I certainly would not have founded the WFPG and been here today.

4. Be well-prepared to take advantage of opportunities that many present themselves. There is some serendipity in everyone's life, so work hard, have excellent skills that are transferable, learn as much as you can from every experience, make and keep in touch with contacts, and be flexible and willing to take something that is short-term that has potential.

5. Continually work on your self-confidence. This will be important in whatever you do.

6. Lastly, strive for balance in your life, something which is not easy and which many of us who are

busy people struggle with on a daily basis. Work on balance between family and work, but also work on maintaining and developing friends, pursuing cultural interests, exercise, and above all having fun and enjoyment. I wish the organization here and everyone here much luck and success.

Thank you. (Applause.)