



**Speech to the United Nation's Association Panel
Embassy of the Kingdom of Lesotho
Washington, D.C., 2006**

Patricia Ellis
President, Women's Foreign Policy Group

Exploring Careers in International Affairs

Good evening, thank you all for coming. It is a real privilege to be here this evening to join Ambassador Rapolaki and Dr. Ariel King for this important discussion “Exploring Careers in International Affairs”, a subject near and dear to my heart both personally and professionally.

I would like to use my time tonight to talk a bit about my career path, which has led me to my current position as head of the Women's Foreign Policy Group, an organization which promotes global engagement and the leadership and voices of women in international affairs. I will then turn to a brief discussion of why this is a great time to be involved in international affairs, and where I see some areas of opportunity. Then I hope that you will also have lots of question.

I would like to begin by telling you how fortunate I have been to have had and still have a rich and fulfilling work life which has spanned the public, private, academic, media and think-tank sectors, and has included at least five different careers. I have been lucky since I love what I do, have been able to pursue my passion of helping others get more engaged and learn more about the world and at the same time promote women's leadership and their voices.

You have my bio so I will just give you a few highlights which I think are relevant. I am from NY and so at an early age when on a class trip to the UN, and from that time onward

thought that I wanted to work at the UN. My goal then was to become a tour guide as that was where I saw women. During the Beijing Plus Five conference at the UN, I moderated a panel with female heads of UN agencies. I was urged to tell my story and we all agreed that women had come a long way, but there were still ways to go. While I never actually worked at the UN, I did work across the street during three General Assembly sessions at the UN, covered the UN as a journalist for Macneil-Lehrer and have worked very closely with the UN office in DC.

From an early age, I was interested in travel, studying languages, and thought that I would teach or work at the UN. I studied government and international relations and after college went to live and study abroad first in Paris and received a scholarship to study in The Hague. I thought about the Peace Corps, but after two years abroad, I felt that I should return home. It seemed urgent then, but less so in retrospect. My experience in The Hague really expanded my horizons and perspectives as I was one of the few Americans in an institute where most of the students were professionals mostly from the developing world, as it was called then. While in The Hague, I also started teaching English to foreigners on the side, something I continued when I returned to New York and something I highly recommend as a way to live abroad. I subsequently went to Grad school and worked at the US Mission to the UN, MIT's Center for International Studies and the NYC Department of Consumer Affairs when I thought of pursuing law. Two lessons emerged from these experiences; if they interest you, be willing to take some short-term jobs if they are good learning experiences, and use every experience to learn more about yourself, what you are good at, enjoy, and what you are really interested in. I subsequently gave up on the idea of Law School after working at a law firm, but it helped me get connected with the media as I had worked on First Amendment issues. I was lucky enough to get in when a new public TV program was starting up, the Macneil Lehrer Report, later the

Newshour. At first, I was assigned to domestic issues and then was assigned to foreign affairs, which was my real love. I worked there for 12 years until I was offered a chance to produce a foreign affairs program on public television, this unfortunately did not last. That in itself was a difficult but valuable experience, I had taken a risk, left a safe and wonderful place to progress and in the long run, it allowed me to move on to bigger things. I subsequently worked as a consultant, became a fellow at Harvard, taught journalism at American University, and founded and now run the Women's Foreign Policy Group. I had founded an informal group of women who met around a kitchen table and by the early 90's, when I was teaching, the organization started to grow and the timing was right. We were lucky to be approached by a foundation and so once again I left my job for the unknown and it worked out.

The field of international affairs has grown tremendously today and there are so many ways to be involved. It used to be when people spoke of foreign policy, it just meant working for the State Department or working for the Defense Department. Even if one were interested in government, there are so many other departments to be involved in from commerce to energy to agriculture and trade. The real big changes have occurred in the non-profit, think-tank, international organization, academia, and media sectors. The big explosion has been in the non-profit sector for there are so many new non-profits, corporations are also much more global, and in the academic sector there are more specialized research institutes and projects. Unlike years ago, if you are really interested in a particular issue such as agriculture or environment, there are ways to be involved internationally.

In terms of getting started, do as many internships as possible, participate in the mentoring programs we and other organizations offer, network, network, and network and keep in touch with contacts. Join organizations such as the Women's Foreign Policy Group and

attend events. Recognize that some interesting things can be short-term and might lead to other things. Be flexible, enthusiastic, and work hard. If you are prepared and work hard, you will find something you like and build up your experience and hopefully in the long-run, be able to pursue your passion.

I wish you all good luck. (Applause.)