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FROM: Connie Kreshtool

BREAKTHROUGH

The Women, Faith, and Development Summit to End Global Poverty

April 13-14, 2008

The objective of the undertaking to end global poverty is overwhelming but its architects have assembled all the right ingredients- international personalities and organizations- and only time will tell whether it succeeds.

The official opening was indeed ceremonial. With two thousand in attendance in the huge sanctuary of the National Cathedral in Washington DC one hundred and twenty women of the Leadership Council representing participating organizations, of which I was one, marched to the sounds of African drums following dancers and colorful banners down the long aisle to seats in the front of the cathedral. The Summit program was a tour de force in preparation and organization.

I shall only make a few comments and observations about the program itself since much of the details are available on the website www.wfd-alliance.org

Mary Robinson, former President of the Republic of Ireland, and one of the co-chairs of the event explained that the Alliance of the women, faith and development communities will seek to end global poverty by giving women the economic power to change their lives. Representatives from each of the three participating groups repeated their commitment to the goals of the Alliance before all those assembled. I was pleased to be one of the three women chosen to present the commitments from the faith community. The WRJ Commitment, which I presented, is attached separately.

Madeleine Albright gave the keynote address stressing that the Summit was about commitments not promises and emphasizing that poverty is not a force of nature but a result of society's actions and can be changed. She called for the empowerment of women to end poverty and committed herself to continue to advance this effort.

The presence and participation of members of the development community, such as Whole Foods and Exxon-Mobil, and the announcement that 1.4 billion dollars had been pledged to the Alliance gave me some encouragement that progress toward the goal may be possible.

The opening program was followed by a dinner for the members of the Leadership Council hosted by the Egyptian Ambassador in the Embassy. It was a grand affair ending with a to-die-for dessert, a chocolate pyramid filled with chocolate mousse.

The second day brought together the members of the Leadership Council to begin to map out the strategy for the project. Mary Robinson and Kim Campbell, former prime minister of Canada, were the co-chairs for the session and did a fine job of moving the discussions forward to an immediate action plan of institutionalize the Alliance. Reports from the roundtable discussion groups led to the decision to form a Steering Committee and a small secretariat to begin the work of the Alliance. The Exxon-Mobil and World Bank representatives offered to provide the funds for the initial operations.

We await to hear the announcement of the next steps.