

August 14, 2012

The Honorable Hillary Rodham Clinton  
Secretary of State  
2201 C Street N.W.  
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Madam Secretary:

According to the International Finance Corporation, women own 32-39% of all private businesses in the formal economy. According to the UN, women do 66% of the world's work, receive 10% of the income and own 2% of the property. Based on global data collected by WEConnect International, women are awarded less than 1% of business contract opportunities offered by large corporations and governments. If women are to play a more powerful role in building strong, sustainable economies, women need access to business knowledge and networks that can help them grow their companies, create wealth, and deliver jobs.

The International Council on Women's Business Leadership (ICWBL) seeks to increase opportunities for women-owned businesses to engage and succeed in an increasingly competitive global economy. In order to achieve this goal, the ICWBL recommends that the U.S. Department of State promote the success of women-owned businesses at the national and international levels. International trade policy and international development frameworks are typically developed without due regard for the impact on women's economic empowerment. In particular, we recommend policies be developed that could i) be adopted by governments to improve access to markets for women-owned businesses and ii) advance the goals established under the Millennium Development Goals.

The ICWBL and its Subcommittee on Access to Markets encourage a dual-tracked approach to promote the competitiveness of women owned businesses. First, at the national level, the ICWBL recommends a cooperative effort between the Council and the State Department to identify the best corporate and public policy practices conducive to improving women's access to markets. We recommend that this be executed through a partnership with WEConnect International; WEConnect can aid efforts to identify key stakeholders, buyers, and sellers. Second, we recommend amplifying efforts at an international level, specifically in connection with the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). When women are successful in business, they spend on the health and education of children, which can break the cycle of intergenerational poverty (MDG #1). Increasing access to markets for women-owned businesses is consistent with the overarching goals of the MDGs. Therefore, the pressing challenge of the moment is to ensure that robust language on women's economic empowerment is included in any internationally agreed upon goals and indicators established to guide the development community's efforts in the post MDG world.

The ICWBL and its Subcommittee on Access to Markets recommends a two-phased approach. Phase I (2012): Partner with WEConnect in target markets of Brazil, Chile and Mexico, while expanding the current State Department/USAID project in Peru. Specifically, we recommend that the State Department support the Senior Executive Round-Table on Sourcing from Women Vendors in Mexico City; the event takes place in November and is jointly organized by the International Trade Centre and WEConnect International. Phase II: Expand the focus to the target markets of Afghanistan, China, India, Russia, and Turkey. Collaboration with WEConnect into these rapidly growing markets will provide an opportunity for women-owned businesses to empower themselves by formulating economic connections all over the world.

Regards,



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Cherie Blair  
Vice Chair ICWBL



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Indra Nooyi  
Vice Chair ICWBL



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Sally Susman  
Sub-Committee Chair ICWBL