

**“. . . human rights are women’s rights. And women’s rights are human rights, once and for all”:**

**Hillary Clinton at the United Nations Fourth Conference  
on Women  
Beijing, China  
September, 1995**

**William Jefferson Clinton: The “New Democrat From Hope  
11th Presidential Conference  
Hofstra University  
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## Abstract

Hillary Rodham Clinton had been working on women's and children's issues for twenty-five years when she prepared to serve as honorary chair of the United States delegation to the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women to be held in Beijing, China, September, 1995.

The conference was taking place at a time of tense relations between the United States and China; the situation was exacerbated by the arrest and imprisonment of human rights activist Harry Wu. Concern about the United States' participation in the conference was voiced by some members of Congress, but near the end of August, 1995 it was announced that the delegation and Mrs. Clinton would be permitted to depart.

The Chinese government, which had been roundly criticized for its poor human rights record, was hoping to generate some positive press by hosting the UN conference. While they welcomed Mrs. Clinton, they were also wary of comments she might make about human rights.

Their concerns were justified. On September 5, Mrs. Clinton stepped before the conference and gave a speech that the *New York Times* would later suggest “. . . may have been her finest moment in public life.” The speech castigated the governments of China, India, Bosnia and a number of countries in the Middle East for practices that Mrs. Clinton considered abhorrent and unacceptable. Skillfully constructing arguments that utilized vivid images, logical support and emotional appeals to persuade her listeners, the first lady forcefully advanced the belief that

women's rights were inseparable from human rights.

Hillary Clinton's speech was not only a call to action at Beijing, it also demonstrated that a first lady could be influential in international affairs as she told the world that the status quo was unacceptable.