



**ICRW Gala 2007: *Champions for Change***  
**March 7, 2007 | Union Station | Washington, DC**

*Prepared remarks*

**Remarks by Geeta Rao Gupta, ICRW President:**

Thank you, Meryl Streep – thank you for years of making us laugh and cry and think. You are so skilled you even made us root for the tough old devil with the silver hair! More importantly, thank you for all your work on behalf of women, for the environment, and for children – and thank you, especially, for your generosity in being here with us tonight.

Over our 31-year history, ICRW has been instrumental in persuading audiences worldwide that empowering women is one of the most effective investments available to us for reducing poverty and creating social change: that an investment in women and girls is the most cost-effective investment the world community can make in building a healthier, more prosperous and more equitable world.

As you have seen in the video, at ICRW we know from experience that change is possible, that solutions exist, so we act on that knowledge, by working with partners around the world to gather evidence and find realistic, doable ways to fix seemingly intractable problems. The video shared three examples of how ICRW has made a difference in the lives of many women who live in poor communities around the world. We have also had an impact at the international level – you can find ICRW research at the heart of the action plan adopted by the U.N. General Assembly to meet the Millennium Development Goal to promote gender equality and empower women. And we have had policy impact at the national level, as we did in India when our research on the pervasiveness of domestic violence was used successfully by women’s organizations to demand a national law that protected women.

Moving forward, ICRW is committed to showing not just that change is possible: We are committed to demonstrating the how to – how do we, how do policymakers, take small victories and scale them up. In the years ahead, we recommit ourselves to create practical, evidence-based solutions and to help organizations and governments expand them so that they improve the lives of many.

And in doing so, we will as always begin locally – by talking and listening to women and girls who live in poor communities around the world. They keep us feeling passionate about what we do. From them, we get the wisdom that makes it all possible. It is from individual girls and women that we get our strength and our inspiration.

It is Esther Angudha, an HIV-positive widow and mother, who organized her small Kenyan community to protect women widowed by AIDS from having their property stolen. By training hairdressers and vegetable vendors to be paralegals, Esther ensures that women get to know their property and inheritance rights and can act upon them.

Another inspiration is the rural women in a village in southern India who negotiated with the local government to get the resources to set up a community kitchen to provide food for the most destitute families in their community.

It is women we work with who run the Saartje Baartman Center for Women and Children in Manenberg, South Africa. Well-known as a safe haven for abused women and children, the Center provides shelter, legal assistance, job-skills training and specialized counseling services.

It is the mother of five children, lying weeping in a hospital bed in southern India explaining to me that she was scared to go home and face her husband because she had chosen to abort her sixth pregnancy against his wishes. She asked me for forgiveness and explained that she was not allowed to use contraceptives because she did not yet have a son.

It is Hue, a young HIV-positive woman from Hai Phong in northern Vietnam, who at the beginning of an ICRW workshop on AIDS-related stigma was too nervous and scared to speak, but later blossomed into one of Vietnam's best-known advocates against stigma and discrimination. She has set up her own self-help group for women infected or affected by HIV and in 2005 was named one of *Time Magazine's* Asia Heroes for having the courage to be one of the few to speak publicly about her HIV status in Vietnam.

I could go on and on.

To all these women who have inspired us, and will continue to do so we say "Thank You." We hold ourselves accountable to you. We know that an investment in you is worthwhile because you deserve better. We also know that investing in you and guaranteeing you your rights is not just a matter of economic advancement or political gain: it is a deeply moral imperative.

Please join me in raising a toast to all of those brave women and girls for their courage and indomitable spirit – and to all of you, for being part of the solution. Together we are building a better world.

Thank you.