

Key-Note Address Inter-American Development Bank

Thank you so much for having me here today. Thanks to the Inter-American Development Bank, and to all of you in the audience, for making the issues of domestic violence, gender equality, and women's economic empowerment a priority.

It seems appropriate to have me here today to discuss domestic violence and the economic empowerment of women. After all, it was just in August of this year that the Global Millennium Development Goals' Torch was passed from the government of Denmark into the capable hands of your President, Louis Alberto Moreno.

As I'm sure you know, the passing of the Torch calls on its recipients to "*do something extra*" to promote and achieve the Millennium Development Goals of Gender Equality and the Economic Empowerment of Women. As Denmark's Soren Jensen said at the Torch-Passing Ceremony here in Washington DC, "Gender Equality is core to accelerating progress on the Millennium Development Goals—and it pays to invest in women."

I appreciate that you have invited me here today because have spent my entire adult life investing in women. Long before the Millennium Development Goals, long before the Beijing Platform, I saw the potential of women as key to advancing nations and lifting communities –and families—out of poverty. And I have also seen how the terrible fact of domestic violence can completely hinder a woman's ability to contribute to her community, her country, or to the betterment of herself and her children.

In a sense, the collective Millennium Development Goals are the singular goals of every individual women in the world. All women seek freedom, equality, peace and security. All women seek a brighter, better future, a future in which their voices are heard, their businesses and careers succeed, their home lives are happy, and their children's futures are secure.

What I have also seen in my years of activism and through my work with Second Chance Employment Services, is that without economic empowerment, without real gender equality, women will continue to fall victim to domestic violence. And without an independent source of income, they will continue to be trapped in abusive relationships. Rendered powerless in both the public and private spheres

I know that everyone here understands the connection between escaping domestic violence, gender equality, and the economic empowerment of women. And I honestly

wouldn't presume to tell you all about something with which you are already familiar. But what I can tell you is that in my years of activism, in my years of running Second Chance Employment Services, and in my travels around the world, I continue to see a serious *GAP in services* aimed at women's empowerment and domestic violence—and that is simply a woman's ability to find work when she desperately needs it.

The difference between securing an independent income and continuing to rely on an abusive husband for support is tantamount to the difference between life and death.

I founded Second Chance because I saw that, in the United States, there was not one single program—public or private—which directly addressed a woman's ability to find employment. There were programs that assisted with job training, education, and entrepreneurship, but not a single one that assisted women in their job searches. It seemed to me that women were being trained, educated, and prepared for the workforce and then they were set free, left on their own to tackle the daunting task of finding a job.

While it may seem so very simple, finding a good job for a woman who has been out of the workforce for years, and for a woman who has suffered domestic violence, is anything but simple. Time after time, these women are ignored by recruiters, employment agencies, and the people doing the hiring within companies. The women who have come to Second Chance have told of dozens, sometimes hundreds of résumés being sent out, and then of the agonizing wait for replies that never come. Weeks pass, more résumés get sent, until a year can just slip by without one single interview.

The women I've helped through Second Chance have only validated what I knew to be true all along, women were being discriminated against in their job searches, and there just wasn't anyone helping them to overcome all the barriers they faced in hiring so they could actually land a job. Many of them had been through training programs, had received government assistance, had taken extension courses to polish their skills. But then when it came time to take the final—and crucial—step of securing an job, they found no programs available to help them.

So I founded Second Chance to fill in this enormous gap between existing services and the end goal—an independent source of income. The very thing that will allow a woman to *permanently* escape violence, develop her talents, save and invest for the future, and dramatically alter the course of her children's futures.... and dare I say, the future of her Nation.

With the success of Second Chance, I've now had the privilege to travel the globe speaking and hearing about domestic violence, gender equality, and the economic empowerment of women in countries that are so very different from the United States. And it is clear to me that these problem of which I speak affect all women, from all backgrounds, in every country on Earth.

In the United States, as in other parts of the world, so many social programs are geared towards minority women, poor women, Latino and Black women.... And yet domestic violence doesn't adhere to these racial or economic boundaries. Domestic violence knows no boundaries, and it respects no borders—neither between nations, nor between *neighborhoods*.

You're just as likely to find a women, to find children, being abused behind the closed mahogany door of a mansion as you are behind the closed metal door of a shack. Ironically, in some ways it can be harder for the wife of a wealthy man to leave when he abuses her than it is for a women whose husband has no money. In the latter case, as I learned in Vietnam, women in lower economic brackets tend to work outside the home while women in wealthy families do not.

Gender Inequality, another big issue for both the IDB and Second Chance, also recognizes no geographic, or economic, or cultural restrictions—it affects all women to some degree. Even in countries like the United States, women have yet to attain *full* gender equality. Yes, gender inequality is more apparent, closer to the surface in other countries than it is in countries like my own, but in NO country has gender equality been undeniably and *permanently* attained. And the prevalence of domestic violence all over the world—in *every* country—speaks to this lack of gender equality.

The issues of gender equality, the economic empowerment of women, and domestic violence are so intricately interconnected that we must deal with all if are to deal with one.

It is clear to all of us here today that without women's economic empowerment there will be no gender equality, and without gender equality there will be no economic empowerment for women. Further, that without both gender equality AND economic empowerment, there will be no end to domestic violence.

The IDB recognizes these facts, not just through words, but through actions, and through financial commitments. The Multilateral Investment Fund is a prime example of IDB programs that focus on gender equality and women's economic empowerment. We

have all seen the tremendous work that goes on through the assistance of the MIF in places like Santiago, Chile and Port-au-Prince, Haiti.

We should also applaud the IDB's Program for the Support of Women's Leadership and Representation—PROLEAD—because it addresses the critical issue of women in positions of power. And we all know that without equal representation in local, regional and national governments—as well as multi-national organizations like the IDB—gender equality and women's economic empowerment will suffer from a lack of priority, and falter in their progress.

The IDB has done a great deal of work on promoting gender equality within its own ranks. Private companies as well as other NGOs could learn a lot from your Gender Mainstreaming Action Plan. I especially appreciate the Action Plan's focus on Best Practices.

I don't think it's too much to say that I'm here today because the IDB believes that the Second Chance Employment Services model is also a Best Practice.

I must say that even if that's not why I'm here, the Second Chance model is nevertheless a best practice. And like with all best practices, it not only can be shared with others, it can also be reproduced by others. The model is simple really.

On the one hand you need Job Partners—companies, universities, government agencies—ANY organizations that hire people. You forge partnerships and make agreements with Job Partners to not just offer training, but to offer priority interviewing and access to positions that will become available but may not always be advertised. In other words, your Job Partners agree to give the women an inside track to employment.

Next, you need Client Partners. These are the organizations and individuals who provide all imaginable collateral services—everything from housing and daycare assistance to free business clothing and make-overs, to legal and psychological assistance. Of course the list goes on, through our Client Partners Second Chance—and anyone adopting its model—is able to provide for every single need a woman escaping domestic violence—or homelessness or illness—needs to secure an independent source of income .

I will share one specific service that any model of Second Chance must provide, and that's Cosmetic Surgery.

Before you frown, think about this... How is a woman whose face - or arms - or hands have been grotesquely scarred by domestic violence—or whose teeth have been knocked out by a punch—or, as happens in Vietnam, whose skin has been melted by the acid her partner threw on her—EVER going to be able to find a job?

Second Chance secured this service because the Chairman of our Board is a Plastic Surgeon. Dr. Ron Perlman provides free cosmetic surgery to every Second Chance client in such need. Because, once again, Second Chance is the only agency—public or private—that provides facial reconstructive surgery for victims of violence. It's part of what makes the Second Chance model so unique, and such a best practice.

Having secured your Job and Client Partners, you now need human resource professionals—in our case, all volunteers—who can work with the women to prepare them for their future careers. As I myself am a human resources professional, I understood the need for—and the lack of—HR professionals working directly with victims to empower them, train them, and to provide guidance and support in their efforts to rebuild their lives.

I believe, like many of you, that the prevention of domestic violence comes in the form of gender equality and the economic empowerment of women. And, as I said earlier, these three issues cannot be separated out and dealt with individually—we must tackle all three if we are to tackle any one. I see hope in the programs and in the work of the IDB because I see that you make this connection... your Conference on Domestic Violence in 1997, your Intervention Programs in places like Suriname and Guyana, your Female Competitiveness Entrepreneurs Programs and your Women in Development Operational Policy, all point to a huge effort on the part of the IDB in addressing the issues for which Second Chance was founded.

The Second Chance model and the support it provides operate from the understanding of the interconnectedness between gender equality, economic empowerment and an end to domestic violence. Taken on a global, and local, scale—all three of these things add up to more rapid development in struggling nations, communities, neighborhoods, and families.

With the passing of the Global Millennium Development Goals Torch into the hands of the IDB—into your hands—I look forward to, I thank you for, and I offer my support in your heightened efforts for gender equality and the economic empowerment of women – and against domestic violence.