

**Statement
of the Ambassador of Turkmenistan to the US
Dr. Meret Orazov.
Utah Valley University,
October 7-8, 2015.**

Turkmenistan: Looking Ahead.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

First of all, I would first like to thank Utah Valley State University and personally Dr. R.E. “Rusty” Butler, Ph.D.-Associate Vice President for International Affairs, UVSU, and Principal Organizer of the Conference “*Women of the Mountains*” for inviting me to your Conference.

Along with Mr. Butler I also especially would like to thank my friend former Ambassador Dr. Baktybek Abdrisaev and now a Distinguished Visiting Professor of History & Political Science Department for their outstanding work for organizing this conference.

Above all, I thank you all for your participation in this event.

Central Asia.

Central Asia is a region significant in its geo-strategic position. First of all, it is a cultural and a historic center, which includes many layers of different civilizations. Throughout history, it has been, on one hand, an important trade route between East and West. On the other hand, Central Asia in itself for centuries has been a political center of the region far vaster than itself, encompassing ancient Persia, parts of Mongolia and China, as well as southern Siberia.

Strategic importance of Central Asia is characterized by several factors.

First of all, its geo-strategic location is worth mentioning. It is well-situated on important trade routes and roads that connect East and West, South and West.

Second, its natural resources are diverse and rich.

Third, the majority of the population is Muslim, which connects Central Asia to the wider Islamic world. However, what is unique about Central Asia is that the form of Islam that is predominant in that region is Sufism. It is the most moderate, contemporary, education-oriented and tolerant form of Islam. Muslims of Central Asia have never in their history practiced jihad or any other form of violent extremist or terrorist methods. Their Soviet heritage also makes them very tolerant towards any non-Muslim and their understanding and experience of European culture is much broader than some other Muslim countries have.

Fourth, four major economic powers, Russia, USA, EU and China have considerable economic and strategic interests in the region. Moreover, such significant regional powers as Turkey, Iran, Pakistan and India take a high interest in the developments taking place in the region.

Turkmenistan.

First of all, regional security is among the top priorities in Central Asia. If you look at Central Asian states today you can easily understand that Turkmenistan has served as a factor of stability in Central Asia for twenty four years of its independence. Let us take a closer look at the contribution that Turkmenistan creates in the establishment of stable and secure Central Asia. From our point of view, the defining characteristics of Turkmenistan's significance as a stabilizing factor are the following:

- the status of neutrality of Turkmenistan and its policy of positive neutrality;
- strong social and economic policy of the of the government;

-active participation in and support of Turkmenistan of the efforts of anti-terrorist coalition, as well as its counter-fight against religious extremism;

- energy politics of Turkmenistan.

In this presentation I will focus on the first two factors.

1. The Neutrality of Turkmenistan.

First of all, foreign policy of Turkmenistan is based on the notion of neutrality and non-interference in others' sovereign affairs. This year we celebrate 20 year anniversary of our neutrality under the umbrella of UN.

The President of Turkmenistan G. Berdimuhamedov carries out significant international initiatives on a systematic basis. They contribute to the strengthening of partnership, friendship and cooperation, as well as resolving regional and international geopolitical issues. Policy of "Open Doors" allows the country to develop equal and mutually beneficial relations, both on a bilateral basis, as well as within the framework of international organizations, most importantly, United Nations.

Within the framework of its partnership with UN, Turkmenistan actively participates in a number of crucial programs of this organization. One of them is gender equality. This problem is of global proportions. Today, 70% of the world's impoverished people are women; women hold only 14% of leadership roles, 6% of ministry posts, not more than 11% of parliament seats. Women have almost no influence on decisions in the fields of economic development, resource allocation, state security, diplomacy, politics, all of which have an impact on their own life. The majority of decisions are made by men who dominate political structures.

From the first years of independence, Turkmenistan systematically carries out efforts to improve the lives of women and achieve gender equality. National programs of socio-economic development of Turkmenistan are tied to the UN Millennium

Declaration, in which gender equality was emphasized as one of the principal goals, specifically, as it relates to the healthcare of women and children, education, reinforcement of gender equality, expansion of women's rights and opportunities.

In Turkmenistan, the National Plan for Gender Equality was ratified for 2015-2020. It aims at establishing conditions essential for further participation of women in all areas of state and society. From the first years of gaining its independence, our country promoted gender equality. In 1996, Turkmenistan joined the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). Turkmenistan also accepted the program of the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, 20th anniversary of which is being celebrated this year. Systematically delivering on our commitments, Turkmenistan generated a strategy of promoting gender equality. Following the recommendations of the UN Council, our country developed and approved a National Plan of action as an instrument for further development of gender equality.

Within the framework of its activity, The UN Populations Fund (UNFPA) has been assisting Turkmenistan for several years in the advancement of gender equality through expert and technical support, including organizing seminars, working sessions, as well as improving national legislation and introductory international travel for education in this field.

The National Plan of action for gender equality in Turkmenistan for 2015-2020 calls for the achievement of wholesome system of measures, taking into account new realities of market economy and social partnerships. The plan consists of several strategies and events for implementing the principles of gender equality in all areas of life. Specifically, the plan includes monitoring of the national legislature of Turkmenistan in its reflection of the international norms of gender equality.

In Turkmenistan, the Council of Women is a well-functioning organization. The Council takes responsibility for achieving a wholesome system of measures for active involvement

of women in society and state. The Council plays an active and ever increasing role in educating women in their rights and ways to practice these rights. This is especially true of the rural women.

Today, women constitute 50.2% of the population of our country. The state program for providing women's equality and increasing their role in socio-political life gained a fundamental national and international legal basis.

2. Specifics of the national political and economic reforms.

Having programs is a great development. What about their implementation? Words alone won't suffice. There is a need for a comprehensive and well thought out social and economic government strategy. In Turkmenistan, it is well understood that without the successful economic reforms and restructuring, all social responsibilities of the government will vanish into thin air.

In designing the model of political and economic development, the government of Turkmenistan considered cultural specificities, the unique nature of raw resources, existing economic structures, as well as the global communities' experience in political and economic development. The major tenets of the development program are as follows:

1. The gradual mode of political and economic reforms.
2. The leading role of the state in economic management.
3. The diversified economic structure.
4. The social welfare system.

In their principal goals, the economic reforms of our government are successful. They laid the foundation for accomplishing crucial social programs for women. The retirement age for women in Turkmenistan is set at 57. The maternity leave is up to 3 years with the guarantee of position upon return and salary for 6 months. There are various medical programs for aiding

mothers and children, especially for those in remote and inaccessible areas, such as mountainous and desert areas.

Concluding my remarks, I would like to emphasize that the issue of gender inequality in the world is still a very pressing matter. An important part of this problem is the situation of women in mountainous and remote areas of the world. So, I think of this conference as particularly imperative and would like to again express my gratitude for everyone who helped in organizing this important forum.