



**Remarks as Prepared for Delivery by Dinara Aitkulova, Chair
Women's Discussion Club for Democracy (WDC), Kyrgyzstan
Madeleine K. Albright Grant Luncheon
March 22, 2012**

On behalf of the Women's Discussion Club in Kyrgyzstan, I would like to express my gratitude to NDI for awarding our organization the 2012 Madeleine K. Albright Grant. Out of all the talented and deserving groups around the world that work on behalf of women, we are honored that our work to promote women's rights and increase women's political participation in Kyrgyzstan would be noted by Secretary Albright and by the National Democratic Institute.

Kyrgyzstan has overcome incredible challenges to get where it is today, including two revolutions, ethnic conflict and authoritarian regimes. Our country is fortunate to have had strong women to help lead it through these difficult times.

Our former President Roza Otunbaeva showed us the unique and powerful role women can play in resolving conflict and promoting democratic transition under difficult circumstances. Her exceptional leadership propelled Kyrgyzstan from authoritarian rule towards becoming the first parliamentary democracy in Central Asia.

The Women's Discussion Club emerged in 2006 when mothers, wives, and sisters realized they had an invaluable role to play in the building of a democratic and fair Kyrgyz society.

For example, there were no women in parliament when male parliamentarians attempted to legalize polygamy. Women across Kyrgyzstan understood that staying out of this discussion and outside of politics was impossible and that our voices needed to be included in such debates and in all decision making.

Our club helped educate women and men that such legislation was unacceptable and we were able to defeat it. Following on that success the Discussion Club helped to pass a 30 percent quota for women in parliamentary elections.

The quota was successfully implemented in both the 2007 and 2010 elections leading to a number of our Club's members winning parliamentary seats. You just saw one of them in the video about our group.

As four of the women in parliament they have continued to promote our organization's mission to increase women's rights as well as the rights and freedoms of all Kyrgyz citizens.

Today we are working hard to bring women together across political and geographical boundaries to defend the right of women in Kyrgyzstan to be actively engaged in the political process. The Madeleine K. Albright grant will enable us to continue in this critical effort.

We will use the grant money for two activities. First we will advocate for stronger quota laws that would increase the number of women in parliament and local government. And second we will help to form a coalition of political party women's wings to advocate on behalf of women's rights within the legislature and their respective parties. We look forward to being able to report success in these efforts by this time next year.

I would like to thank you on behalf of all of the members of the Women's Discussion Club and the women of Kyrgyzstan. We are deeply honored by your belief in the women of our country and your faith in the future success of Kyrgyzstan's democracy. With your consent Doctor Albright we would be deeply honored if you would agree to be an honorary member of our club.

Thank you.