

Notes for remarks by Maureen McTeer, BA, MA, LLB, LLM (Health), D. Litt. (h)

On the presentation of the Inaugural DIVA Award for Outstanding Contributions to Women's Health and Well-Being

National Arts Centre, Ottawa, Thursday 29th May, 2008.

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I am greatly honoured to receive this award and want to thank Grace and her team at DIVA. I know how much work is involved in organizing an event like this one. You have done a wonderful job, and I congratulate you.

Chief Justice, your presence, and your words, add immeasurably to this evening. You have been prominent and constant in your personal support of women's health, including as Patron of the Shirley E. Greenberg Women's Health Centre. You are a symbol of strength and service and integrity for all Canadians, but as a woman and as a lawyer, I am extremely privileged to share a platform with you tonight, and thank you sincerely.

Marci, all of us, appreciate your generosity in coming to Ottawa and joining us tonight. In your own field, as a respected national broadcaster, you represent the high standards of accomplishment and example which DIVA exists to encourage among Canadian women. My family and I are delighted you have chosen to be a part of this award evening.

The money which this DIVA award represents will be presented to the foundation at the Ottawa Hospital for the creation of a Clinical Chair in Women's Health Research in the Shirley E. Greenberg Women's Health Centre.

This clinical Chair will ensure Ottawa's national and international leadership in women's health, clinical care and research. By being here tonight, each of you has made a contribution to this new Chair.

I am so pleased that three of the women who played such a key role in making this Centre a reality are here to celebrate with me tonight –

- Shirley Greenberg whose generosity and commitment to women's health gave us our start;
- Elaine Jolly, whose vision of the Centre inspired (and continues to inspire) us all; and
- Linda Schumacher, whose administrative skills guided the building of the centre then and all our volunteer efforts now.

We thank each of you for your commitment.

You and I are fortunate women, blessed with both affluence and influence. We live in the Capital of one of the world's great countries. We are educated. We are free. We have food. We have medicines. We have health care options second to none.

Most of us share the view that we achieve more by working together than we can ever achieve on our own. This concept of community is at the heart of the women's health movement. But the stark reality is that our good fortune is not shared by most of the women in the world.

Today, in our world, almost half a million women die each year from the complications of pregnancy and birth. Half a million women, year in and year out, whose potential and contributions are lost to the world forever. Almost all of these women live in poor and developing countries, the vast majority in Africa, where other diseases, especially HIV/AIDS increasingly have a woman's face.

Responding to such tragic statistics of loss of women's lives is not simply a question of extending care. It is more basic. It requires us to reconfirm that women's health is a human right, not a special interest, and to recognize that women's health and well-being is affected by a wide range of factors.

The "social determinants of health" are an integral part of our approach to women's health care here in Canada and at the SEGWH Centre here in Ottawa. That is a deliberate health policy choice.

For we know that when women are poor their health suffers. When women eat little and eat last, their health and therefore their families' suffer. When women die in childbirth, die from easily preventable causes, their babies die too; and then too often, another woman, usually no more than a child herself, takes her mother's place – and continues the cycle of women trapped in illiteracy and poverty and often abuse, with no real hope of breaking out.

We have to help change that reality, break those cycles of poverty, build new hope and opportunity for women.

In two months, Canada will join the other members of the industrialized world in Japan at the G-8 Summit to discuss many issues. One of those will be health. I urge the federal government to take a stand at that meeting to show us all that Canada will work, will fund, will ensure that we meet the Millennium Development Goals 4 and 5 which will reduce child mortality and improve maternal health by 2015. Last month, health leaders and activists met in Cape Town, South Africa to discuss how to speed up the process to achieve the Millennium Development Goals – especially those relating to the health of women and children.

The \$10.2 billion annual price tag set at the Cape Town Conference last month to achieve these goals may seem high, but as the Executive Director of the United Nations Population Fund noted: "It would cost the world less than two-and-a-half-day's worth of military spending to save the lives of 6 million mothers, newborns and children every year." [Thoraya Ahmed Obaid, Executive Director, UNFPA]

Tonight we recognize women's health as a priority and a precious resource. As this year's DIVA honouree, I ask each of you to use your influence to ensure that it is not just our rights, our health, our needs that are recognized and addressed here in our city, Ottawa, but those of all women and girls around the globe.

Thank you for your presence here tonight; thank you for your commitment to women's health - I am honoured and delighted to share this special evening with all of you.