



## EVENT REPORT

### *Women's Empowerment: Countries Closing the Gender Gap The World Economic Forum Global Gender Gap Report 2009*

*Featuring:*

**Saadia Zahidi**

Director, Head of Constituents, The World Economic Forum

**Geeta Rao Gupta**

President, International Center for Research on Women

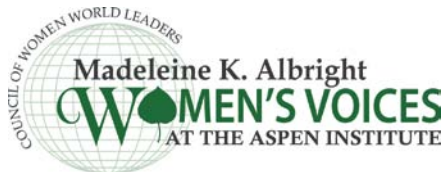
**Laura Liswood**

Secretary General, Council of Women World Leaders

**Friday, October 30, 2009  
12:00pm**

**The Aspen Institute  
Washington, D.C.**

This event is part of the  
*Madeleine K. Albright Women's Voices at the Aspen Institute Series*



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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

On Friday, October 30, 2009, at the Aspen Institute in Washington, DC, the Council of Women World Leaders and the International Center for Research on Women hosted a panel titled: *Women's Empowerment: Countries Closing the Gender Gap – The World Economic Forum Global Gender Gap Report 2009*. The panel featured Saadia Zahidi, Director, Head of Constituents at the World Economic Forum, Geeta Rao Gupta, President of the International Center for Research on Women, and Laura Liswood, Secretary General of the Council of Women World Leaders. The panelists discussed the newly released *World Economic Forum Global Gender Gap Report 2009*. The event was part of the *Madeleine K. Albright Women's Voices at the Aspen Institute Series* and was attended by over 100 individuals from government, nonprofit organizations, businesses, think tanks, and the media.

In addition to introducing the Gender Gap Index and explaining the four areas of assessment – economic participation and opportunity, educational attainment, political empowerment, and health and survival – the panelists discussed the report's findings and changes from previous years. The presentation was followed by an engaging discussion on areas of further research, ways to employ the *Report's* findings to strengthen the case for gender equality, and the trade-offs of assessing gaps between men and women rather than overall levels of achievement.

## ISSUE BACKGROUND

For the past four years, the Council of Women World Leaders has sponsored a series of roundtable discussions - *The Madeleine K. Albright Women's Voices at the Aspen Institute Series* - focusing on the progress that women have achieved worldwide and the challenges that lie ahead in key areas of participation. At each event, internationally acclaimed experts and leaders discuss the progress made by women and the challenges which lay ahead in specific policy and issue areas. The events suggest future actions required for change to occur more rapidly in these policy arenas.

In the discussion on the *Global Gender Gap Report 2009*, panelists Saadia Zahidi, Director, Head of Constituents at the World Economic Forum's Women Leaders and Gender Parity Programme, Dr. Geeta Rao Gupta, President of the International Center for Research on Women, and Laura Liswood, Secretary General of the Council of Women World Leaders examined the current size of the gender gap globally and the extent to which women have achieved equity in four critical areas. The panelists discussed the work conducted by the World Economic Forum to assess the current size of the gender gap globally in 134 economies that cover over 92% of the world's population. The countries examined in the *Report* include all current and candidate European Union countries, countries from Latin America, the Caribbean, sub-Saharan Africa, and from the Arab world.

The *Report* measures the size of the gender gap in four critical areas of inequality between men and women using mainly publicly available "hard data" indicators drawn from international organizations and some qualitative data from the Forum's own Executive Opinion Survey. The *Report* examines the following four areas:

- **Economic participation and opportunity** – salaries, participation levels and access to high-skilled employment
- **Educational attainment** – access to basic and higher education
- **Political empowerment** – representation in decision-making structures
- **Health and survival** – life expectancy and sex ratio

The *Report's* country comparisons are meant to serve as a benchmark to identify existing strengths and weaknesses within each of the 134 countries examined. The *Report* is also a useful guide for policy, and showcases the experiences of countries that have had success in promoting gender equity and that have made progress in this arena over the years. It provides concrete measures of the gender inequity gap within the four categories identified, allowing for an unambiguous framework for policy-making in each of the countries examined.

The Gender Gap Index assesses countries on their performance in allocating available resources and opportunities between their male and female populations, regardless of the overall levels of these resources and opportunities. By using this innovative methodology, the *Global Gender Gap Report* provides a comprehensible framework for comparing global gender gaps and serves as a catalyst for greater awareness and exchange between policymakers.

## DISCUSSION SUMMARY

Laura Liswood, Secretary General of the Council of Women World Leaders (the “Council”), opened the event and introduced the panelists.

Dr. Geeta Rao Gupta, President of the International Center for Research on Women, introduced the *Global Gender Gap Report 2009*. Dr. Gupta noted that the *Report* looks at how far we have come in closing the gender gap worldwide. It serves as an advocacy tool to hold governments and corporations accountable for their lack of sufficient investment in women. She mentioned that the *Report* is important for organizations such as the International Center for Research on Women (ICRW) because it provides a backdrop for the work that they do and allows them to select and prioritize particular issues to focus on. Dr. Gupta concluded her introduction by expressing the need for collaboration among organizations to reach higher levels of economic, social and political participation for women globally.

Ms. Liswood welcomed the audience and thanked them for their interest in the *Report*. She noted that the Council has worked with the World Economic Forum extensively, specifically on the Global Agenda Councils. The Council is happy to participate and work with the World Economic Forum on the *Gender Gap Report* for the third consecutive year in 2009.

Dr. Gupta and Ms. Liswood provided an overview of the *Report* which covers 134 countries and over 92% of the world’s population. The *Report* shows that none of the 134 countries covered by the *Report* has reached gender equality in 2008. The countries not covered by the 2009 *Report* lack sufficient data and have therefore been excluded from the *Report*. It is important to understand that the *Report* measures parity, not quality within each category. For example, the *Report* does not measure the quality of education, but the level of enrollment of men compared to that of women.

The primary purpose of the *Report* is to provide an objective framework to track trends, direction, and magnitude of inequalities over time, and to create opportunities to learn best practices from countries that are making progress in this arena.

The Gender Gap Index measures outcomes and enabling factors; it measures gaps not levels; and it tracks data over longer time spans. The *Report* focuses on four areas:

- Health and survival
- Education attainment
- Political empowerment
- Economic participation/opportunity

The panelists described the four categories in greater detail. Analyses of economic participation look at labor force participation rate, and gender segregated earned income or wage gap. In terms of political empowerment, the *Report* looks at women’s participation in the highest levels of decision-making in government. The *Report* shows that Nordic countries, namely Iceland, Finland, Norway, and Sweden, are leading in all four categories.

Ms. Liswood provided an explanation for the high ranking achieved by top-ranking countries: Nordic countries are historically fishing cultures. In these countries men have been historically absent for long periods of time during which women have run the households and government.

The panelists discussed the *Report's* findings by country: South Africa shows increased participation of women. Lesotho is closing the gaps in health and education. In the bottom 25, Yemen is last and has closed only 46% of its gender gap. Many countries in the Middle East and South Asia are at the bottom of the rankings. Iceland is number one in the *Report's* rankings, but has suffered substantially owing to the economic crisis.

The World Economic Forum publishes an annual competitiveness report ranking countries on their competitiveness, such as the competitive standing of their work force. Competitiveness is based on the productivity of a country's work force. Women represent half of a country's talent base and should therefore be empowered to contribute accordingly. Countries which fail to capitalize on women's talent and on the resources they bring to the workforce fall short on maximizing their human capital.

The *Report* makes a statement on the strong correlation between competitiveness and a country's gender gaps. Ms. Liswood pointed out that, in light of the current worldwide economic crisis, more women in decision-making roles might have contributed to a different outcome.

This year's *Report* shows that 93% of the education gap has been closed globally. 96% of the health gap has been closed. It is important to note that the *Report* measures the health gap between men and women, not the quality of health provided. To date, 60% of the economic gap has been closed but only 17% of the political participation gap.

The *Report* can be used to group countries into three categories according to their progress. Bottom countries are those that are making no progress on closing the gender gaps. Countries in the middle of the rankings are those that are making progress on health and education gaps but still have barriers such as cultural, political, and economic constraints in the way of closing the gender gaps more effectively. Top-ranking countries have closed the gaps in health and education and have made some progress in economics and politics.

By investing in women, countries can improve their ranking in the *Report*. Currently, investments are greater in health and education than in politics and the economy. Health and education are less direct routes to power, compared to political and economic participation. This factor has enabled more progress in these two areas. The distribution of power must shift before further progress can be made in the political and economic realms. As an example, land rights give women power, which is why countries are hesitant to change their property laws and upset the existing power structures.

Nonetheless, governmental policies can bring about big structural changes. Cultures and countries are always subject to and undergoing change and transformation. Social movements are often able to bring about change.

Ms. Liswood examined the ranking achieved by the United States: 31 in the *Report*. She pointed out that some countries are moving faster than the United States. The lack of even distribution of health care has impacted US' ranking negatively.

Ms. Liswood invited two audience members, Ruth Levine from the Center for Global Development, and Patty Stonesifer from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation to present their thoughts on the *Report* and its implications.

Ms. Levine emphasized the power of the Gender Gap Index as a communications tool rather than an analytical tool. She was struck by the fact that we, as a society, accept as a given the male-defined indicators for success. She noted that there are other dimensions where women would do better than men; for example, measures of happiness. Ms. Levine suggested exploring other dimensions in the future. She also pointed out that the World Economic Forum plays an important role in sending signals to companies.

Ms. Stonesifer noted that the trends in the *Report* are important when looking at competitiveness and should be conversation-starters. She urged stakeholders to identify areas where radical policy change is needed to create momentum. She emphasized the need to increase local and national political change.

Dr. Gupta and Ms. Liswood put forth additional questions which arose from the *Report*: the impact of the economic crisis and the countries' use of stimulus money. They concluded that it is too soon to tell what impact stimulus money will have on gender gaps.

Ms. Liswood opened the discussion to questions and comments from the audience. Audience members suggested that future research take into account other types of indicators, for example, work conditions. When looking at the economics perspective, the audience pointed out that assets are not assessed in the *Report*. Several more comments emphasized that gender disaggregated data collection must be a strong priority for global institutions.

Saadia Zahidi, Director, Head of Constituents at the World Economic Forum and the *Report's* co-author, provided additional details on the methodology of the Gender Gap Index. In assessing health and survival, the *Report* examines life expectancy, disease and disability. The gap between education attainment for women and men, not the overall level of education, is examined. To evaluate the education gap, literacy rates of women versus men and the gap in enrollment rates in primary and secondary education were assessed, not the overall education level. For economic participation, the *Report's* authors looked at the shared participation of women versus men and gaps in their salaries. For the political aspect, researchers asked whether women are present at the highest levels of government and policy-making.

Ms. Zahidi pointed out the global messages conveyed by the index, including relative regional categorization. As an example, Sub-Saharan Africa is lacking in health, but closing its gender gaps. Looking at overall economic participation, the *Report* shows that women are not channeled properly into the economy. In regards to political empowerment, the world as a whole needs to make more progress in this category.

Ms. Zahidi noted that, by disassociating the index with the income levels of a country, the *Report* shows how equitably resources are divided between women and men. In the last four years, of 115 countries, 99 have made progress in closing the gender gaps. 16 countries have regressed. The *Report* shows that in terms of health, the world is making negative progress due to falling life expectancy in Africa.

Ms. Zahidi mentioned that the media plays a powerful role in closing the gender gaps. The way in which the media portrays issues and global priorities shapes the way the world views these issues and the actions which ensue. The challenge is to portray women as agents of change, not as victims. Ms. Zahidi also noted that the index is sensitive to fairly small changes, so small changes can have a large impact on a country's ranking.

Ms. Liswood noted that in 2010, the Council will co-host a "research on research" conference to gather gender disaggregated research and to share it among researchers and policy makers.

Dr. Gupta concluded the discussion by thanking the audience. She reminded attendees that we have a window of opportunity to make the case for closing the gender gaps. The economic recession may cause the window to stay open longer. As a final thought, Dr. Gupta asked the audience to think about ways in which we can direct attention to this issue within our own communities.

## **PANELIST BIOGRAPHIES**

### **Saadia Zahidi**

Saadia Zahidi is Director, Head of Constituents at the World Economic Forum's Women Leaders and Gender Parity Programme. Her responsibilities include the engagement of women leaders, gender parity groups, religious leaders, NGOs and labor leaders with the World Economic Forum. The Women Leaders & Gender Parity Programme aims to create awareness and catalyze change by benchmarking and tracking the global gender gap, promoting dialogue among women leaders, and engaging leaders—women and men—to collectively address the challenges and opportunities involved in narrowing gender gaps.

Zahidi was co-author of the Forum's reports *Women's Empowerment: Measuring the Global Gender Gap* and the *Global Gender Gap Report 2006, 2007, and 2008*. Zahidi was previously an economist with the Forum's Global Competitiveness Programme, where her responsibilities included economic analysis for the *Global Competitiveness Reports*, the *Arab World Reports*, and other topical and regional studies.

Zahidi holds a cum laude undergraduate degree in Economics from Smith College, Massachusetts, USA and a Master's in International Economics from the Graduate Institute of International Studies in Geneva, Switzerland. Her professional research interests include gender issues, corruption and financial crises.

### **Geeta Rao Gupta**

Geeta Rao Gupta, Ph.D., is President of the International Center for Research on Women (ICRW), a leading global authority on women's role in development, and passionate advocate for women's empowerment and the protection and fulfillment of women's human rights. She has worked at ICRW as consultant, researcher and officer since 1988, and has headed the private, nonprofit organization based in Washington, D.C. since 1997. Dr. Rao Gupta is an internationally renowned expert on women and AIDS, and is frequently consulted on issues related to AIDS prevention and women's vulnerability to HIV. She has been recognized for her commitment to quality research, her dedication to educating policy makers and the public on the gender-related aspects of HIV/AIDS, and her abiding commitment and overall contributions to the field. Dr. Rao Gupta serves on the board of the Rural Development Institute, on advisory boards for the Nike Foundation and the Global Health Corps, and on the program board for the Moriah Fund. She is co-convenor of the Social Drivers Working Group of aids2031, an international initiative commissioned by UNAIDS to chart a course for a global response to AIDS over the next twenty-five years; and has served as co-chair of the U.N. Millennium Project's Task Force on promoting gender equality and empowering women. Dr. Rao Gupta has a Ph.D. in Social Psychology from Bangalore University, a Master of Philosophy degree from the University of Delhi, and both a Master and Bachelor of Arts in Psychology from the University of Delhi.

### **Laura A. Liswood**

In 1996, Laura Liswood co-founded the Council of Women World Leaders with President Vigdís Finnbogadóttir of Iceland. The Council is composed of women presidents and prime ministers, and is a Policy Program at the Aspen Institute. In 2001, Liswood was named Managing Director, Global Leadership and Diversity for Goldman Sachs. She is now a Senior Advisor to the firm.

From 1992 – 1996 Liswood interviewed 19 current and former women presidents and prime ministers, which she chronicled in her book and video documentary, *Women World Leaders* (1996, 2007 and 2009, Harper Collins). In 1997, Liswood co-founded The White House Project, which is

dedicated to electing a woman President of the United States. Liswood's professional experience includes executive-level positions in Fortune 500 international companies. After the events of September 11, 2001, Liswood became a reserve police officer in the Washington, D.C. Metropolitan Police Department and is now a Sergeant.

Liswood's latest book, *The Loudest Duck*, is a business guide that explores workplace diversity and uses practical stories to offer an alternate, nuanced approach to diversity to create a truly effective workplace for all. (Wiley & Sons, November 2009).

She holds an M.B.A. from Harvard Business School and a B.A. from California State University, San Diego. She holds a J.D. from the University of California, Davis School of Law, and is admitted to practice law in California and Massachusetts.

## REGISTERED ATTENDEES

*Carmen Helena Abobasen*  
Advisory Board Member  
Women's Professional Network

*Indira Abluwalia*  
President  
Development & Training Services, Inc.

*Nilufar Ahmad*  
Senior Gender Specialist  
The World Bank

*Hajira Ahmed*  
Asia Program Intern  
Vital Voices Global Partnership

*Kei Alegria-Flores*  
MPH/MA Candidate  
The George Washington University

*Meirgul Alpysbayeva*  
Grants & Contracts Intern  
Institute of International Education

*Martin Apple*  
President  
Council of Scientific Society Presidents

*Raina Aronowitz*  
MPA Student; Assistant Case Manager  
The George Washington University; The  
National Abortion Federation

*Amy Augustine*  
Manager—Diversity and International Labor  
Relations  
Calvert Group, Ltd.

*Kathleen Barnett*  
Senior Vice President  
International Center for Research on Women

*Sheila Baxter*  
Public Health Graduate Student  
University of California at Berkeley

*Deborah Block*  
Intern  
Council of Women World Leaders

*Miriam Bolaños*  
Consultant  
Inter-American Development Bank

*Tamelia Bolton*  
Assistant to the Diversity Advisor  
Inter-American Development Bank

*Barbara Boyd*  
Consultant

*Gleibys Buchanan*  
Representative for the Advancement of  
Women  
National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of  
the United States

*Marta Calderon*  
Chairman  
Women's Professional Network

*Thu Cao*  
Program Coordinator  
InterAction

*Nadereh Chamlou*  
Senior Advisor  
The World Bank

*Sarah Chatellier*

*Baljinnyam Chinzorigt*  
Finance & Administration Division  
International Food Policy Research Institute

*Mari Clarke*  
Senior Gender Consultant  
The World Bank Social Development  
Department

*Daniel Cohn*  
Senior Program Officer  
Family Health International

*Ann Crittenden*

Writer

The American Prospect

*K. Burke Dillon*

*Jean Duff*

Executive Director

Center for Interfaith Action on Global  
Poverty

*Alina Dumitrasc*

Office Manager

Council of Women World Leaders

*Lydia-Jane Failing*

*Erika Fischer*

Program Manager

U.S. Small Business Administration

*Bevan Flansburg*

Program Officer

National Association of Regulatory Utility  
Commissioners

*Janet Fleischman*

Senior Associate

Center for Strategic and International Studies  
Global Health Policy Center

*Stephenie Foster*

Senior Vice President, Government Affairs

American Legacy Foundation

*Claudia Fritsche*

Ambassador

Embassy of Liechtenstein

*Lucy Gettman*

Director, Federal Programs

National School Boards Association

*Kyle Gibson*

Contributing Editor

The Daily Beast

*Molly Goodwin-Kucinsky*

Intern

Council of Women World Leaders

*Thea Graybill*

Research & Publications Intern

Environmental Law Institute

*Shaya Gregory*

Global Strategies and Issues Ad Hoc Advisory  
Committee Member

National Organization for Women

*Daniela Gressani*

Regional Vice President, Middle East and  
North Africa Region

The World Bank

*Caren Grown*

Economist-In-Residence

American University

*Jeannie Harvey*

Senior Manager, Gender Integration  
InterAction

*Laiiah Idelson*

Executive/Program Assistant

Center for Interfaith Action on Global  
Poverty

*Patricia Indire Pondeca*

*Sarah Jencks*

Director of Education Programming

Ford's Theatre

*Holly Kearn*

AAUW Program Manager

Legal Advocacy Fund

*Milkah Kibunah*

Policy Analyst

CARE USA

*Beverly Kirk*

Anchor

NewsChannel 8

*Lucy Kiruthu*  
First Counsellor  
Kenya Embassy

*Sue Klein*  
Education Equity Director  
Feminist Majority Foundation

*Alyson Kozma*  
Senior Program Manager, Women's Political  
Participation  
National Democratic Institute

*Rebecca Lake*  
Director, Foundation and Corporate Relations  
Plan USA

*Mary Lassen*  
Managing Director  
Center for Community Change

*Dianne Lipsey*  
President  
Sewall-Belmont House and Museum

*Laura Liswood*  
Secretary General  
Council on Women World Leaders

*Emily Lundell*  
Campaigns and Policy Coordinator  
Plan USA

*Chelsea Maughan*  
Special Assistant, Bureau of Educational and  
Cultural Affairs  
U.S. Department of State

*Bridget McHenry*  
Senior Program Advisor  
White Ribbon Alliance for Safe Motherhood

*Kathleen McNamara*  
Margaret McNamara Memorial Fund

*Jehan Mechak Deng*  
Assistant Consular, Social and Community  
Affairs Officer  
Mission of South Sudan to the United States

*Caroline Meledo*  
MA Candidate  
Johns Hopkins University School of  
Advanced International Studies

*Helina Meri*  
Program Officer – Africa  
CHF International

*Sukanya Mitra*  
Managing Editor  
American Institute of Certified Public  
Accountants

*Tabetha Mwita*  
PhD Student  
University of Maryland

*Abisola Noah*  
Public Health Graduate Student  
Johns Hopkins University

*Kimberly Norton*  
President's Office Coordinator  
Population Action International

*Wangui Nyaga*  
Banyan Tree Foundation

*Chloe O'Gara*  
Associate Vice President  
Save the Children

*Catherine Oakar*  
Public Health Graduate Student  
University of Michigan

*Khuloud Odeh*  
IT and Gender Advisor  
Multi-national Development of Women and  
Technology

*Noreen O'Meara*  
Senior Policy Advisor  
USAID

*Angie Peltzer*  
Director  
Global Women's Network

*Lindsey Pengb*  
MPH Candidate and President  
Global Health Network, The George  
Washington University

*Michelle Powers Keegan*  
Director of Development  
Ford's Theatre

*Maggie Range*  
Gender and Health Consultant

*Geeta Rao Gupta*  
President and CEO  
International Center for Research on Women

*Jo Reed*  
Consultant

*Anne Robinson Wadsworth*

*Alicia Rodriguez*  
President and Wisdom Partner  
Sophia Associates, Inc.

*Carolyn Rose-Avila*  
Vice President, Policy and Public Engagement  
Plan USA

*Dana Rosenberg*  
Special Assistant, Bureau of Educational and  
Cultural Affairs  
U.S. Department of State

*Vikki Sant*  
President  
Summit Foundation

*Cassandra Scarpino*  
Volunteer/Internship Program Assistant  
Tostan

*Wendy Schaezel Lesko*  
Coordinator  
School Girls Unite

*Jeannine Scott*  
Senior Vice President  
Africare

*Renae Seeger*  
Development Officer  
Global Women's Network

*Mitali Sen*  
Population Division  
U.S. Census Bureau

*Soce Sene*  
Director of New Business  
IBI International

*Audrey Sheppard*  
Women's Health Consultant

*Anne Simmons-Benton*  
Associate  
Booz Allen Hamilton

*Christine Sommers*  
Program Manager  
IBI International

*Melysa Sperber*  
Global Grants Manager  
Vital Voices Global Partnership

*Linda Stabeli*  
President  
Women in International Security

*Piper Stege Nelson*  
Development Manager  
National Democratic Institute

*Katie Stein*  
Chief Operating Officer  
Rwanda Works

*Patty Stonesifer*  
Senior Advisor to the Trustees  
Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation

*Lytic Thompson*  
Policy Analyst and External Relations Officer  
Women for Women International

*Chris Tirpak*  
Management Integrity Advisor  
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

*Hannah Tran*  
Employment Consultant  
Educational Data System, Inc.

*Marylouise Uhlig*  
Associate Assistant Administrator  
Office of Pesticides, Prevention and Toxic  
Substances, US Environmental Protection  
Agency

*Aditi Vora Mobapatra*  
Sustainability Analyst  
Calvert Group, Ltd.

*Andree Wynkoop*  
Board Director  
Margaret McNamara Memorial Fund

*Susie Yu*  
Washington Representative  
The Hunger Project

*Saadia Zabidi*  
Director, Head of Constituents  
The World Economic Forum



INVITATION



**The Council of Women World Leaders**

and

**International Center for Research on Women (ICRW)**

cordially invite you to

*Women's Empowerment: Countries Closing the Gender Gap  
The World Economic Forum Global Gender Gap Report 2009*

Presented by:

**Saadia Zahidi, Director, Head of Constituents, The World Economic Forum  
Geeta Rao Gupta, President, International Center for Research on Women  
Laura Liswood, Secretary General, Council of Women World Leaders**

This high-level panel discussion, *Women's Empowerment: Countries Closing the Gender Gap - The World Economic Forum Global Gender Gap Report 2009*, will feature report co-author Saadia Zahidi, Head of Constituents at the World Economic Forum. The panelists will lead a discussion on the findings of the *Global Gender Gap Report 2009*, which measures the gap between men and women in four critical areas and covers over 92 percent of the world's population.

**Friday, October 30, 2009  
12:00pm**

**The Aspen Institute  
One Dupont Circle, NW, Suite 700  
Washington, DC 20036**

Lunch will be served.

Seating is limited; RSVP by noon on Tuesday, October 27, 2009, to Alina Dumitrasc:  
(Tel) 202.736.2920 or (Fax) 202.467.0790 or Email: [info@cwvl.org](mailto:info@cwvl.org)

*This invitation is not transferable; Photo ID required.*

This event is part of the  
*Madeleine K. Albright Women's Voices at the Aspen Institute Series*

