STATEMENT AT A SEMINAR
ON THE OCCASION OF UN DAY
ENTITLED

“WOMEN, PEACE & INTERNATIONAL SECURITY”

22 October 2014

Tehran, Iran
Having just read out the UN Day message from our UN Secretary-General, I would like to now share a few thoughts of my own on the specific focus of today.

Ladies and gentlemen, I believe that in the collective story of our race – the human race, on this planet – we have, in the last few centuries, had to deal with major challenges to the human spirit.

In the 19th century the challenge for us all was to end slavery.

In the 20th century the world had to face the evil of totalitarianism – and we struggled through and succeeded.

My own personal view is that the challenge that we face in the 21st century is the greatest moral outrage right now coursing its way across the planet.

And that is the slavery and abuse of women.

I have worked in the United Nations for almost 3 decades.

And during that time I have come to see some of the worst excesses and evils perpetrated against women.

I’ve seen rape as an instrument of war.

I have seen the consequences female genital mutilation.

I have seen female foeticide and infanticide of young girls. (Female foeticide is when sex-selective abortion takes place and boys are allowed to live and girls are aborted.)

I’ve seen the desperate extreme violence associated with trafficking in women and girls.

And I have seen the consequences of honour killings.

And now I am starting to see – again – acid attacks on women.
Friends, I believe that this comes from the structure of situations where people – both men and women – make choices which favour men over women in far too many contexts.

And I would agree with Ms. Fatemeh Yavari [the previous speaker] when she says that any type of violence against women needs to be opposed.

And yes it is important for us in the international community to come up with our resolutions – and our fine phrases – and our formal statements which forswear such acts of violence.

But I believe that it is perhaps even more important for us to recognize and speak out – on an individual basis – against these atrocities.

For where, after all, do human rights begin? They begin in small places close to home.

Creating a culture of peace and respect means explaining the values of tolerance – respect – understanding – and love – to your children over the kitchen table.

It means that we have to end the old saying that is sometimes repeated in parts of Asia, “may you have a thousand sons”. Why not say: “may you have a thousand daughters”?

And that is why whenever we see the evil of inequity towards women we must speak out about it.

And, it is as a father of three loving daughters, that I speak to you today – very personally – about the importance of recognizing and elevating women.

I leave you with the 5 words that, to me, convey how we ought to be treating women:

- Equality,
- Rights,
- Respect,
- Recognition and
- Dignity.

Thank you for your time.