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**LIEUTENANT COLONEL
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**Remarks on the Role of Women as Actors
in the Armed Forces in North America**

I love my job at US Northern Command (USNORTHCOM) as a Mexico Desk Officer because I really enjoy the Mexican culture. It is rewarding to see the friendship grow between my command and Mexico's Ministry of the Navy (Semar) and Mexico's Ministry of National Defense (Sedena) through my job. I had a chance to experience El Grito in Mexico City in September of last year.

I am an immigrant from South Korea and moved to the US at age 15. I decided to join the military to serve my new country for giving me and my family a better life. Since I joined, opportunities for women in the military have increased in the last 20 years. Nineteen percent of women represent the US Air Force (USAF) demographics, but less than 10 percent are females among the general officer ranks. Women

first entered pilot training in 1976, navigator training in 1977, and fighter pilot training in 1993. Approximately 5 percent of USAF pilots and 7 percent of navigators are females. In the USAF, flying is the main mission, and up until now, the Air Force chief of staff has always been a male pilot. You can see that the 19 percent female statistics are not reflected among aviators and general officers in the USAF.

I ask myself why. Although I don't have perfect solutions, I have a few recommendations for achieving gender equality in the future. In my opinion, we need role models who can share their experiences and give us recommendations, especially in career fields where there are few women. I myself have not taken the time to mentor other women of junior ranks for fear that they may not want it, and I don't want to pressure them, although I have a lot of advice for junior airmen. My point is that, as leaders, we need to serve as mentors to those junior to us, sharing our successes and challenges. Therefore, I recommend setting up a formal mentoring program for senior officers to provide advice to those who are junior to them in rank. It would be a voluntary program. It should be open to men as well; in fact, it should not exclude men from serving as mentors to females.

Another point I would like to make is that we need to maintain the same standards for both men and women in the military. As we integrate women into previously male-dominated career fields, we need to

ensure that women are not treated differently from men. Otherwise, it could adversely affect women's credibility and, possibly, our lives or those of a colleague, friend, or family member.

I am very proud of our armed forces' achievements with respect to gender equality. However, we still have more work to do. I sincerely hope that we can maintain an open dialogue to share our successes and lessons learned with one another between Mexico, Canada, and the US.

