

Spain- women's conference

^Women discuss business opportunities in international marketplace at summit in Barcelona^

by Sarah Andrews

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BARCELONA, Spain (AP) _ Although women-run businesses represent more than 30 percent of those in Europe and the United States, women still lag far behind men in earnings and in job status; in developing countries, the disparity is even greater.

This weekend, government and private business representatives from 76 countries including deputy heads of state and international human rights leaders will explore business opportunities for women in the international marketplace during the Global Women's Summit being held in Barcelona.

"We're here to find ways to improve our economic lives and those of the women in our respective countries," said Irene Natividad, former president of the United States' National Women's Political Caucus and director of the summit.

Natividad said the summit was focused on "sharing solutions that work," not on discussing the known problems women face or on making resolutions to governments or aide organizations, although she said she hoped individual participants would make their voices heard in support of international issues like women's rights in Afghanistan. This is about women helping themselves, not about waiting around for the government to come and try to help us," she said.

Most of the 600 women participating in the summit own small or medium-size businesses, although women's rights activists, like Afghanistan's Sima Samar, president of the country's Human Rights Commission, are also present.

Though women do not own businesses there and most girls are still not in schools she said that "the masses of Afghanistan are not really against women. The way the Taliban portrayed the culture is not true." She added that nevertheless, "the women's situation in Afghanistan is really bad. Women are invisible."

She said that the first step the country must take to equalize women's position is to ensure Afghanistan's security and she called on the international community to help.

Topics to be covered at the summit include political issues that are impacting women's development, e-commerce, financing and balancing work and family.

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