



March 30, 2021

President  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Ave NW  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President,

We applaud and support your Administration's commitment to upholding democratic values as a cornerstone of our country's foreign policy. As you review your strategy for Afghanistan, we reinforce the need to defend and build on the progress made over the last two decades on women's rights and the role of women in Afghan society. We reiterate the call to ensure that women play an active role in the Afghan peace negotiations, and emphasize to all parties that the U.S. government expects the Afghan and Taliban leaders to preserve and promote the rights of women and girls during and following a negotiated peace agreement. This message aligns with commitments the U.S. government has already made with the signing of the Women, Peace and Security Act of 2017, which Congress passed with broad bipartisan support. We stress the importance of having Afghan women meaningfully engaged in the peace process and able to participate fully in discussions on a comprehensive and permanent ceasefire, transitional arrangements, implementation mechanisms, and national and local peacebuilding processes.

Under the new U.S. Administration, there is an opportunity to realign the U.S.-Afghan Partnership and consistently support the unequivocal importance of the protection of women's rights. As the U.S. determines its path to a continued engagement in strengthening a democratic Afghanistan while balancing a responsible military exit, it is critical that support for a peace settlement between the Afghan government and the Taliban is rooted in a process and agreement that embodies the aspirations of all Afghan citizens, including and particularly women.

Decades of data support women's participation in peace negotiations increases the likelihood of their success, and their involvement in post-conflict recovery lowers the risk of relapsed conflict. When women are equal and active participants in politics, countries are more prosperous, peace is more sustainable, and governance is more inclusive. In Afghanistan and globally, calls have been made on raising women's representation and meaningful participation in the Afghan peace negotiations. In a September 2020 open letter, 26 former presidents and prime ministers, and 34 foreign ministers—including former U.S. Secretaries of State Madeleine Albright, Hillary Clinton, Condoleezza Rice, Colin Powell and John Kerry—affirmed that women's participation in the peace negotiations are crucial in the pursuit of a peaceful and stable Afghanistan. Much of what these former officials and experts are calling for is already enshrined in U.S. law through the Women, Peace, and Security Act. This law also set a further ambition beyond the peace process, recognizing the "political participation and leadership of women, particularly during democratic transitions" as "critical to sustaining lasting democratic institutions."

We call on you to ensure a lasting peace in Afghanistan by holding true to the intent and implementation of both UNSCR 1325 and the Women, Peace and Security Act. Specifically, we make the following recommendations:

1. Publicly declare the U.S. government's full support for Afghan women's leadership in the peace process and in Afghanistan's recovery, for the preservation of women's rights currently enshrined in the Afghan constitution; further, that the U.S. government will not support any part of the negotiation that would sacrifice the rights of women and girls.
2. Demand that the Afghan government and the Taliban specify actual mechanisms to increase women's meaningful participation in intra-Afghan peace talks, and in implementation of a potential peace agreement. Encourage an increase in the number of women leaders at the negotiating table, and stress that any agreement preserves women's rights and liberties and reflects the perspectives of Afghan women and youth—who have a vital role in Afghanistan's future.
3. Require the Taliban, during ongoing peace negotiations, to articulate its views and understanding of women's rights, education and role in society.
4. Stress the urgency of having and implementing a comprehensive ceasefire, a priority that Afghan women have repeatedly raised. Without a ceasefire, genuine participation in dialogues across the country on the peace process -- including those meant to engage women from the rural areas -- will be impeded.
5. Support lasting peace and stability in Afghanistan through continued U.S. foreign assistance, conditional upon certification that there is:
  - Active participation of women leaders and women-led civil society organizations in the implementation of any intra-Afghan peace agreement;
  - Preservation and active promotion of the rights of women and girls as currently enshrined in the Afghan constitution and that any future changes to the Afghan constitution also protect the rights of women and girls; and
  - Establishment and implementation of a legitimate monitoring mechanism for ensuring the maintenance of women's rights (such a mechanism should be outlined in the peace agreement).

The future of a democratic and stable Afghanistan depends on how gains on human rights and women's empowerment are protected, and how the country's political processes and institutions are safeguarded to be inclusive and representative. In supporting a peace process that meaningfully and fully involves Afghan women, and in bringing the country closer to a sustainable peace, we honor the monumental commitment and sacrifice that U.S. military and civilians have made in Afghanistan. The United States can and should ensure that women are substantively involved in the peace process and that their rights are preserved moving forward.

Sincerely,

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/s/  
Tammy Baldwin  
United States Senator

\_\_\_\_\_  
/s/  
Jeanne Shaheen  
United States Senator

\_\_\_\_\_/s/  
Benjamin L. Cardin  
United States Senator

\_\_\_\_\_/s/  
Robert P. Casey, Jr.  
United States Senator

\_\_\_\_\_/s/  
Richard J. Durbin  
United States Senator

\_\_\_\_\_/s/  
Margaret Wood Hassan  
United States Senator

\_\_\_\_\_/s/  
Jack Reed  
United States Senator

\_\_\_\_\_/s/  
Sherrod Brown  
United States Senator

\_\_\_\_\_/s/  
Patty Murray  
United States Senator

\_\_\_\_\_/s/  
Amy Klobuchar  
United States Senator