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May 20, 2019

The Honorable Mike Pompeo
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, D.C., 20520

Dear Secretary Pompeo,

I am writing to express my concern that the United States has been holding talks with the Taliban without representatives from the Government of Afghanistan or Afghan women leaders participating in the talks. Excluding these groups undermines the validity and sustainability of any peace agreement. The omission of women also violates the Women Peace and Security Act signed into law by President Trump in 2017, which requires the meaningful participation of women in mediation and negotiation in resolving conflict. The discussions would benefit from having all points of view represented. Any agreement reached with the support of all stakeholders is more likely to succeed.

Afghan women have widely shared their fears that their exclusion will result in losing rights they fought hard for and won following the removal of the Taliban from power. Women suffered terribly under the Taliban and had no rights under their regime. Afghan women and girls were prohibited from going to school and being employed outside the home. They could not leave their homes without a male guardian, or even go to hospitals where there were male doctors. Infant and maternal mortality was one of the highest in the world. Women could be punished for speaking or laughing in public. Women who were widowed or had no male relatives had no ability to earn a living.

In the last 18 years, with the support of the United States and our international partners, Afghanistan has empowered women and girls throughout the country. With our support, girls have returned to schools and now constitute 39% of K-12 students, 25% of college students and nearly 50% of those earning teacher certificates. Afghan women have returned to work as doctors, lawyers, businesswomen, nurses, teachers and civil servants. They do not want to go back. Women's rights and human rights must be non-negotiable.

Specifically, I respectfully request that you answer the following questions:

1. How is the U.S. addressing Afghan women leaders' concerns that their voices are being excluded from these peace talks?

2. Will the U.S. government commit to ensuring that women have a central role in the peace process?
3. Will the U.S. ensure that any agreement that comes from the ongoing peace talks protects women's rights and human rights in Afghanistan, in accordance with the Constitution of Afghanistan, which ensures equality for women in many areas, including education, medical services, and civic participation? How so?

By holding talks without representatives of Afghan government, the United States is delegitimizing the current system and the elected officials of the country. Excluding the government elevates the Taliban, the very people who gave refuge to Osama bin Laden who murdered nearly 3,000 Americans, including roughly 500 residents of my district. If the talks continue with only Taliban representatives, we will be emboldening a group that has caused tremendous suffering for the United States and the Afghan people.

Recognizing the thousands of American lives lost in Afghanistan and the billions of dollars we have invested in the Afghan people, we should make every effort to make sure that any peace agreement reached honors human rights and the guarantees for women's equality laid out in the Afghan Constitution. United States assistance continues to be important to secure and stabilize Afghanistan and to promote women's rights and human rights. I continue to support the goal of ending the war in Afghanistan, and believe that including Afghan women leaders in planning, negotiations and implementation of the peace process is essential to achieve a lasting peace.

For all of the foregoing reasons, I urge you to resist any talks that fail to include representatives of Afghan women and the Afghan government.

Very truly yours,


CAROLYN B. MALONEY
Member of Congress