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**House of Representatives**

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**REP. STEPHEN F. LYNCH**

Chairman

Subcommittee on National Security

Hearing on “Empowering Women and Girls and Promoting International Security”

July 23, 2020 at 10:00 a.m.

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Today our Subcommittee will examine the role that women and girls play in overseas crisis prevention, diplomacy, peacekeeping, and post-conflict reconciliation.

According to an October 2016 report from the Council on Foreign Relations, “the substantial inclusion of women and civil society groups in a peace negotiation makes the resulting agreement 64 percent less likely to fail.” Moreover, several studies have shown that “higher levels of gender equality are associated with a lower propensity for conflict, both between and within states.”

The consequences for U.S. national security policy are clear: not only do women deserve a seat at the table, but meaningful consideration of their voices and interests will lead to greater security and stability in fragile states and post-conflict environments around the world.

To that end, in October 2017, Congress passed the “Women, Peace, and Security Act,” which required the Trump Administration to produce a strategy to support “the meaningful participation of women in all aspects of overseas conflict prevention, management, and resolution, and post-conflict relief and recovery efforts.”

In June 2019, the Trump Administration released the U.S. Women, Peace, and Security Strategy, and on June 11, 2020, the Departments of State, Defense, Homeland Security, and the U.S. Agency for International Development each released implementation plans to support the Women, Peace, and Security Strategy.

**While the Women, Peace, and Security Strategy looks good on paper, the Trump Administration has repeatedly failed to demonstrate its commitment to defending the rights of women and girls by attacking access to sexual and reproductive health and sidelining women during conflict resolution and peace negotiations.**

For example, the peace deal negotiated between the United States and the Taliban earlier this year does nothing to protect the rights of Afghan women and girls, threatening to reverse nearly two decades of progress helping them to become successful participants of Afghan political and civic life.

**The Trump Administration has also repeatedly attacked global women's access to sexual and reproductive health.** In April 2017, the Trump Administration announced it would suspend funding to the United Nations Population Fund, which provides family planning and reproductive health services in over 150 countries. In September 2019, Secretary of Health and Human Services Alex Azar told the UN General Assembly that the U.S. does not support “references to ambiguous terms and expressions, such as sexual and reproductive health and rights in U.N. documents.”

I am also concerned that the Trump Administration may not have the political will to invest the necessary commitment and resources to advance the ideals enshrined in the Women, Peace, and Security Strategy. In fact, the document kneecaps itself in its opening pages, cautioning the United States will “engage selectively” and “will likely not be able to advance WPS principles in every corner of the globe.”

**We should also take this opportunity to seriously examine whether the United States is doing enough to promote and encourage women to serve in senior leadership positions within our own government.** For decades, the national security field has been dominated by men, and I look forward to hearing from today's witnesses about how their Departments are working to address gender disparities and inequalities within their own ranks.

Finally, I would like to thank our witnesses for testifying before us today. The Subcommittee previously invited the Departments of State, Defense, Homeland Security, and the U.S. Agency for International Development to testify at a virtual hearing in June, but the agencies refused, citing “White House/OMB guidance sent to all House and Senate Committees on May 29<sup>th</sup>.”

Let me be clear: Congress, not the Executive Branch, determines how to conduct its own business, but the Subcommittee is pleased to accommodate the Administration in this case given the importance of the subject matter at hand.

With that, I will now turn the floor over to Congressman Grothman from the great state of Wisconsin for his opening remarks.