

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

April 3, 2020

The Honorable Mike Pompeo
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C St NW
Washington, DC 20230

Dear Secretary Pompeo:

According to the terms of the recent United States/Taliban agreement, the U.S. has committed to reducing the number of troops stationed in Afghanistan. In return, the Taliban has pledged not to harbor terrorists that could threaten the U.S. or our allies. Importantly, the Taliban has committed to engaging in negotiations with the Afghan government, action the Taliban has previously refused to take. As the Afghan government prepares for what we hope will be comprehensive negotiations with the Taliban, we urge you to state that the U.S. strongly supports Afghan women's rights and demand Afghan women have meaningful and full participation in the intra-Afghan peace talks.

No one has suffered more at the hands of the Taliban than the women of Afghanistan. Prior to 2001, women and girls were prohibited from attending school, barred from seeking employment, and could not go outside without a male guardian. Nearly twenty years later, more than 3.5 million girls attend schools and thousands of women are enrolled in more than 170 public and private universities and colleges, including the American University of Afghanistan. Additionally, women hold important positions within the government as Members of Parliament, as Ministers, as judges and have contributed profoundly to the reconstruction and development of the country over the last eighteen years. Women have used their increased influence to support a moderate Afghanistan and to serve as a bulwark against the return to extremism. As a symbol of this progress, we are heartened to see 5 women among the 21-member negotiating team put forward by the Afghan government. A great deal of this progress is a result of hundreds of millions of dollars in investments provided by the U.S. government in partnership with Afghan women – investments that have advanced development for all Afghans, and elevated human rights across the country, especially the rights of women and girls.

Furthermore, members of Congress on both sides of the aisle have expressed concerns regarding the rights of Afghan women. In June 2019, members of the House sent you a letter requesting that you ensure women are included in peace talks, and that any potential settlement protects their rights, as outlined in the *Women, Peace, and Security Act of 2017* (P.L. 115-68). In July 2019, members also introduced H.R. 4097, the *Afghan Women's Inclusion in Negotiations Act*, which would, among other provisions, require the submission of regular reports on the participation of women in peace talks and of an executive branch strategy to protect women's rights after an agreement is reached. Finally, Section 7044(a)(2) of the annual State Department and foreign operations appropriations (Division G, P.L. 116-94) also directs you to "promote the

meaningful participation of Afghan women” in peace and reconciliation efforts. When women meaningfully participate in national security and governance, we find stronger, more secure societies.

The U.S. has long stood with Afghans as they confront the challenges of terrorism and strive for peace. We urge you to maintain the strong advancements made in the human rights of Afghan women and girls, and not allow vague and unenforceable Taliban promises to respect women’s rights to reverse nearly two decades of progress. It is our hope that a peace, with these basic human rights guaranteed, are part of the legacy of all the sacrifices and investments made by the Afghan people, U.S. and NATO servicemembers, as Afghanistan continues to rebuild following decades of conflict. The participation of women will be essential to ensuring a durable and lasting peace.

We look forward to working with you on this important issue.

Sincerely,

Brenda L. Lawrence
Member of Congress

Debbie Lesko
Member of Congress

Carolyn B. Maloney
Member of Congress

Stephen F. Lynch
Member Congress

Lois Frankel
Member of Congress

Susan W. Brooks
Member of Congress

Michael Waltz
Member of Congress

Cc: Mark Green, Administrator, United States Agency for International Development