

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

April 13, 2021

The Honorable Anthony Blinken
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Secretary Blinken:

As Members of the bipartisan Women, Peace, and Security Caucus, we encourage you to work closely with, and promote the inclusion of, Afghan women leaders and organizations in all future efforts to bring peace, stability, and prosperity to Afghanistan.

On April 1, the WPS Caucus held an event with the four women negotiators on the Afghan government's Peace Negotiation Team—Fatima Gailani, Fawzia Koofi, Habiba Sarabi, and Sharifa Zurmati. They made it clear that they are concerned about a full U.S. troop withdrawal in the absence of a negotiated settlement that has the support of the Afghan government.

Additionally, the negotiators share your conviction, stated in your confirmation hearing on January 19, 2021, that no outcome is sustainable without protecting the gains made by women and girls in Afghanistan. Women's meaningful representation at the negotiating table is critical at every step of the process to ensure the gains of Afghan women and girls are protected and prioritized.

Further, we are concerned about the impact of a possible power sharing agreement between the Afghan Government and the Taliban. Although such proposals include directives to provide special consideration for, and inclusion of, women in government positions, that does not guarantee their representation. Any new government structure should ensure women have meaningful representation to help safeguard their rights.

As you know, societies are more prosperous, stable, and peaceful when women have a seat at the table with access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunity. Research and practice also demonstrate that women's inclusion in peace processes increase the likelihood that those agreements will be successful and sustainable. That is why, it is already existing policy of the United States to promote women's participation in peacemaking through the *Women, Peace, and Security Act* (P.L. 115-68). The law states:

“It shall be the policy of the United States to promote the meaningful participation of women in all aspects of overseas conflict prevention, management, and resolution, and post-conflict relief and recovery efforts, reinforced through diplomatic efforts and programs...”

In last month's Extended Troika in Moscow, women were woefully underrepresented. Therefore, should additional peace talks come to fruition in Istanbul, Turkey, we urge you to ensure

increased women's participation and to amplify women's voices both at the formal negotiating table, and in informal civil society-driven events, discussions, and processes. Afghan women leaders and civil society organizations have been meeting and mobilizing for years to gather input from women on what is needed to build peace in their communities and across the country. This vital information must be taken into account and should not be overlooked.

We stand ready to assist and support advancing Afghan women's role to bring a just and sustainable peace to Afghanistan.

Sincerely,



Lois Frankel
Member of Congress
Co-Chair, WPS Caucus



Michael Waltz
Member of Congress
Co-Chair, WPS Caucus



Ted Deutch
Member of Congress



Vicky Hartzler
Member of Congress



Stephen F. Lynch
Member of Congress



William R. Keating
Member of Congress



David E. Price
Member of Congress



Raúl M. Grijalva
Member of Congress

/S/

André Carson
Member of Congress



Jackie Speier
Member of Congress



Grace Meng
Member of Congress



Dina Titus
Member of Congress



Chrissy Houlahan
Member of Congress



Eddie Bernice Johnson
Member of Congress



Jamie Raskin
Member of Congress

CC: Zalmay Khalilzad, Special Representative for Afghan Reconciliation