

May 19, 2021

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden, President
The White House,
1600 Pennsylvania Ave., NW
Washington DC 20500

cc: The Honorable Kamala Harris, Vice President
The Honorable Antony Blinken, Secretary of State
The Honorable Samantha Power, Administrator for USAID
The Honorable Linda Thomas-Greenfield, US Ambassador to the United Nations
Ms. Julissa Reynoso & Ms. Jennifer Klein, Co-Chairs, The Gender Policy Council

Dear President Biden,

As American, Afghan, and international civil society leaders dedicated to the education and rights of girls and women in Afghanistan, we are deeply concerned by the recent bombing of female students at the Sayed Al-Shuhada School in a Hazara neighborhood in Kabul. We recognize this atrocity is part of a growing pattern.[1] We respectfully ask that you increase humanitarian and development aid to Afghanistan as an important security strategy and call for a United Nations peacekeeping force to ensure that the cost of US military withdrawal from Afghanistan is not paid for in the lives of schoolgirls.

We request that aid be made a central dimension of the security framework put in place, as US troops are withdrawn from Afghanistan. We strongly believe that the failure to provide for the basic security needs of Afghan women is the result of the Trump administration's failure to honor UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security by refusing to insist that women were part of the peace talks. We call on your administration to coordinate more carefully with the United Nations, the Afghan government, and the women's civil society organizations in Afghanistan and to increase humanitarian and development assistance in order to strengthen the basic security of women and girls and of religious minorities like the Hazaras. Anything less will mean that American actions are seen as abandonment.[2]

We call to your attention the recent Human Rights Watch Report, "I Would Like Four Kids—If We Stay Alive." The gains made in women's access to basic health services and in girls' access to primary school education during the past 20 years in Afghanistan [3] are being threatened by the US military drawdown. [4] [5]

We fear that the absence of coordinated aid will turn back the clock in Afghanistan and erase the progress that has been made with US assistance. During the many years of our military presence there, the US dedicated vast resources to women and children. As we exit the country, we should give comparable attention to their concerns.

Dr. Sakena Yacoobi, founder of the Afghan Institute of Learning, which runs schools across 16 provinces, offers a grim assessment of the future if the US continues on its current course. She recently outlined the challenges in a letter to her American supporters:

the overwhelming cost of hiding a program across 16 provinces, retrofitting buildings to blend them in with other local buildings, cameras, and electronic warning systems so we can see when danger approaches the schools. Schools that will now require the ability to function as domestic violence shelters as well as education facilities. We all know what the Taliban does to women. For twenty years the West told the women of Afghanistan they are free. Free to learn, to grow, to be a human being independent of men's expectations of who they are. What the Taliban did in the 1990s was bad enough. What will they do now, with a generation of women taught to expect freedom? It will be one of the greatest crimes against humanity in history. Help us save them. Please. Help us save who we can.

In sum, we urgently request that humanitarian and development aid be provided to protect the human rights and security of women and girls, as US troops exit Afghanistan and that the United States do everything possible to ensure that a United Nations peacekeeping presence remains in the country.

With many thanks for your consideration. We look forward to working with you.

Sincerely,

Dr. Betty Reardon,
Founding Director Emeritus,
International Institute on Peace Education

The Rev. Dr. Chloe Breyer,
Executive Director,
The Interfaith Center of New York
Board Member, Afghans4Tomorrow

Dr. Sakena Yacoobi, Founder and Executive Director, Afghan Institute of Learning

Gloria Steinem, Author, Feminist Peace Activist, Founding Editor, MS Magazine

Carol Bellamy, Former Executive Director, UNICEF

Cora Weiss, Former President and UN Representative, International Peace Bureau

Ellen Chesler, PhD, Research Scholar, Ralph Bunche Institute for International Studies,
Graduate Center, City University of New York

Masuda Sultan, Co-founder and board member, Women for Afghan Women

Naheed Samadi Bahram, US Country Director Women for Afghan Women

Maria Victoria (Mavic) Cabrera Balleza Founder & Chief Executive Officer, Global
Network of Women Peacebuilders

Mark Malloch Brown, President, The Open Society Foundations

Kavita Ramdas, Director, Women's Rights Program, Open Society Foundations

Abigail Disney, Filmmaker and Philanthropist

Dr. Wahid Omar, Deputy Chief of Party, Advancing Higher Education for Afghanistan's Development

Ruth Messinger, Former CEO, American Jewish World Service

Daisy Khan, Founder & Executive Director, Women's Islamic Initiative in Spirituality & Equality (WISE)

Judge Najla Ayubi, COO of Every Woman Treaty

Susanne E. Jalbert, PhD, Senior Advisor, Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) Syria, Iraq, Yemen, Afghanistan (SIYA) Chemonics International

Nasir Ahmad Kayhan, Program Manager, UNESCO, Afghanistan

Asma Eschen, Bare Roots Mission

Dr. Daniel C. Taylor, President, Future Generations University & Future Generations Afghanistan (800 staff working with Hazara and other minority communities)

Patricia Rosenfield, Former Board Chair and Trustee, Future Generations

Joyce S. Dubensky, Esq., Former CEO of Tanenbaum Center for Interreligious Understanding

Mark E. Fowler, CEO, Tanenbaum Center for Interreligious Understanding

Dr. Asha Hans, Director of Sansristi, a Gender Research Institute

Dr. Swarna Rajagopalan, Independent Scholar and Writer

Leymah Gbowee, 2011 Nobel Peace Laureate

[1] Some of the attacks on Hazaras include: Jan 2021 - ISKP kills 11 Hazara coal miners in Pakistan's Balochistan. - Oct 2020 - ISKP kills 30 at school in Dasht-e-Barchi. -May 2020 - ISKP kills 24 at MSF maternity ward. -Sep. 2018 - ~30 killed in blasts at a wrestling club in Dasht-e-Barchi. - Aug. 2018 - ISKP kills ~34 at school in Dasht-e-Barchi. - Oct. 2017 - ISKP kills 39 at Imam Zaman mosque in Dasht-e-Barchi. -Jan. 2014 - ~30 Hazara killed in a suicide bombing on a bus in Pakistan. -Jan/Feb 2013 - LeJ kills ~180 Hazara in bomb blasts in Pakistan. - Sep. 2011 - LeJ forces Hazara to disembark bus in Pakistan & kills 26.

[2] See Statement: "Demilitarizing Security: Troop Withdrawals and Base Closings," Betty Reardon, Founding Director Emeritus of the International Institute on Peace Education

[3] According to the World Bank in its report, "Ensuring Accessible Health Care for Rural Afghans" maternal mortality has gone down by between 19 and 50 percent. April 9, 2020, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2020/04/09/ensuring-closer-health-care-access-to-rural-afghans>.

[4] <https://www.hrw.org/report/2021/05/06/i-would-four-kids-if-we-stay-alive/womens-access-health-care-afghanistan>

[5] From 2001 when estimates were that only 1 in 10 girls were receiving education until today when more than 3.5 million primary school-age girls are enrolled—about one third of all students
<https://www.usaid.gov/afghanistan/education>

[6] https://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/people/features/ihavearightto/four_b/casestudy_art26.shtml