

# United States Senate

May 18, 2021

President Joseph R. Biden, Jr.  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

We write to convey our deep concern for the fate of women's rights in Afghanistan following the withdrawal of U.S. and NATO forces in the coming months. Given all that is at stake for Afghan women and girls, we ask you to take immediate steps to ensure women's rights and safety after the U.S. departure, including the appointment of an Ambassador-at-Large for Global Women's Issues to serve as the senior administration official responsible for coordinating all U.S. government efforts for the protection of women's rights in Afghanistan. This is an urgent priority as our forces withdraw from the country and thereafter.

The Taliban rule that preceded U.S. intervention was marked by the violent repression of Afghan women and girls. Women were barred from working, attending school, and the basic freedom of movement. After twenty years of U.S. and NATO presence in Afghanistan, uneven but undeniable progress has been made in advancing rights for Afghan women and girls in society. There is work still to do, but our progress must not be reversed.

This is not a new concern, nor should it be surprising that the futures of women are at stake in the coming months. The agreement the previous Administration entered into with the Taliban in Doha on February 29, 2020, was silent on women's rights, leaving the future of Afghan women up to the outcome of negotiations between the Afghan government and Taliban. Unfortunately, these talks have languished, and in the absence of a peace agreement or even a ceasefire, women and girls have been put at continued risk. The bombing of the girls' school in Kabul on May 8, 2021 demonstrates the bleak future we risk if women's rights and protection are not made a priority. The key to achieving a future where Afghan women and girls are not only safe from violence but allowed to prosper and thrive in society is to ensure that the international community stands firmly behind U.S. leadership for the fair and equitable treatment of women in society.

On April 14, 2021, you stated, "While we will not stay involved in Afghanistan militarily, our diplomatic and humanitarian work will continue. We'll continue to support the government of Afghanistan...And we'll continue to support the rights of Afghan women and girls by maintaining significant humanitarian and development assistance." We agree with this call to action and stand ready to support your efforts in Congress. In pursuit of this end, we respectfully request the expeditious appointment of an Ambassador-At-Large for Global Women's Issues to serve as the senior administration official responsible for coordinating within the U.S.

government and among our international partners and allies in support of Afghan women and girls. This official should work in tandem with the Special Representative for Afghan Reconciliation to ensure that women's rights are not set aside in favor of an unstable peace agreement.

Successful preservation of Afghan women's rights will require a well-planned, whole of government approach that invokes all economic, humanitarian, and diplomatic levers available to the U.S. Government. Your leadership on this matter is critical and we look forward to working with you on this urgent matter.

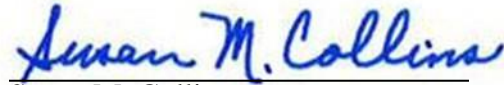
Sincerely,



Mazie K. Hirono  
United States Senator



Jeanne Shaheen  
United States Senator



Susan M. Collins  
United States Senator