

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

February 4, 2019

The Honorable Michael R. Pompeo
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Secretary Pompeo:

One of the significant achievements of the U.S. intervention in Afghanistan has been the dramatic improvement in the lives of women and girls, who suffered terribly under the unchecked rule of the Taliban prior to 2001. For this reason, we are concerned that the negotiations between the United States and the Taliban in Doha, and the possible withdrawal of U.S. troops to follow, may undo the considerable progress we have made on human rights, especially those of women and girls. We urge you to ensure our investment of time, resources and the lives of U.S. soldiers will not have gone to waste by ensuring that Afghan women are represented and issues central to their rights and needs are part of any negotiation going forward.

Afghanistan's National Action Plan, which was instituted in 2015 in response to United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, stated that Afghanistan cannot achieve equality without protecting the rights of women. Although women form part of the President Ashraf Ghani's negotiation team, the Afghan government has not yet participated in the peace negotiations with the Taliban. Women comprise 49 percent of Afghanistan. They must be afforded the opportunity to participate at every political and social level of the future Afghanistan. Women's issues must also be prioritized in order to achieve the "durable peace and stability" that the Afghan action plan requires.


More broadly, these negotiations are an opportunity for the State Department to advance the Women, Peace and Security Agenda, which President Trump signed into law on October 2017. As emphasized in that law, including women in peace negotiations is not merely a symbolic gesture. According to research by the United Nations, when women have a substantive role in peace negotiations the likelihood the agreement will last beyond fifteen years increases by as much as 35 percent. This research supports what strong, democratic countries know to be true: equality and stability are greatest when the entire society participates in social and political life in a meaningful way.

Ending the war in Afghanistan is a goal we all share. We urge you to make every effort to ensure that the negotiations result in an Afghan society that promotes equality and protects the rights of women and girls. After more than seventeen years, we cannot squander the sacrifices the United States has made.

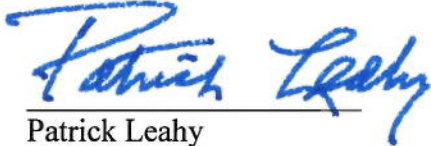
Sincerely,



Jeanne Shaheen
United States Senator



Robert Menendez
United States Senator



Patrick Leahy
United States Senator

CC: Special Representative Zalmay Khalilzad