

**Statement on Afghanistan from
Recently Exiled Afghan Women Leaders and Human Rights Defenders**

September 14, 2021

Secretary Blinken and Members of Congress:

With the fall of the Afghan government, it has been a blow to many of our achievements of the last twenty years that have been gained with your government's support. In the last few weeks since being overtaken by the Taliban, it is evident that the peace process has been a fallacy that had no guarantee of securing what the United States and people of Afghanistan invested in over the last two decades.

Many of us women activists have been working for an inclusive and just peace for years. We repeatedly warned the United States government and the international community that if the withdrawal was not managed responsibly, and if the peace process was not Afghan-centric, it would be a disastrous failure.

We were incredibly disappointed with the peace process that your government facilitated, especially when the talks in Istanbul were supposed to happen but then the announcement of the non-conditional troop withdrawal effectively ended them before they could begin. We do understand the United States spent 20 years in Afghanistan as its longest war, however a few months more where your troops were not involved in combat would have at least helped with reaching an acceptable political settlement that would have allowed some level of inclusivity.

Today the Taliban government is run by unqualified fighters and by Pakistani proxy. Women are nowhere in the new structure of government and women's activities and freedoms are being limited in health and education in 7 out of 34 provinces. The media is strictly under scrutiny and minorities have been marginalized in the disorganized new government structure. Protests have been met with brutality, with women protestors arrested and tortured badly. Many people were massacred in Panjshir, and elsewhere in Afghanistan.

Some of us have made it to the United States through the parole process and with the support of US women's rights groups and political leaders. This journey started under extremely difficult conditions, and we still don't know when it will end. We women leaders and activists have been mixed with US trained Afghan troops and other groups. The entire evacuation process was gravely mismanaged for women. Even those who had US visas were denied safe entry into the airport as timely information was not communicated with relevant troops managing the airport gates. Worst of all, not all of our friends made it out with us. At the airport gates we faced gun fire from both Taliban and US troops, tear gas, and a suicide bomb attack. Many people died trying to escape a regime that they don't believe in.

The Taliban has proven to be an extreme regime lacking law and order, essentially being run by several groups of outlaws. They are now targeting activists, former government employees, and

women Members of Parliament, and entering their homes, taking their cars, and collecting any means of security that they possessed in the past. Even NGO offices run by women have been shut down and their valuables, such as cars, have been taken from them.

While we are disheartened by the way things evolved on the ground, the United States still has an opportunity to support the Afghan people. We women leaders of Afghanistan call on the US government to provide a humanitarian response to the double catastrophe of the Taliban regime and the drought and famine that are causing suffering across the country. **Beyond humanitarian assistance, we call on the US to support women's groups across Afghanistan as the real drivers of change. Women should be given any and all political support to help ensure their safety as they continue their life saving work on behalf of thousands of women across the country.**

We also call on the United States to include a more responsible team in the peace process and help end the current catastrophe before it engulfs everyone in the country and region. Particular pressure should be maintained and increased on Pakistan for supporting the Taliban and offering safe haven to ISIS.

Today Al-Qaida, ISIS, the Haqqani network, and other terrorist groups are in Afghanistan enjoying safe sanctuary. This is a threat to the US and the world that needs to be contained through a revised strategy in Afghanistan and the region. Just like all other strategies, women should be at the center if there is to be a guarantee for a safe and balanced Afghanistan. As we have been saying all along, our rights are not separate from peace and security, but are necessary for peace and security to be achieved.