



August 14, 2021

United States Senate  
United States House of Representatives

Re: Petition to Save The Lives of Afghan Women Allies

Dear Honorable Senators and Representatives,

We are writing to respectfully request that you immediately take action to save the lives of American allies who have been advancing one of the U.S.'s prime missions in Afghanistan – advancing women's rights. The Afghan women's rights advocates and professionals who heeded the U.S. call to action to promote women's rights over the last 20 years are now in grave and imminent danger as Afghanistan falls to the Taliban in the wake of the U.S. withdrawal. Specifically, we request that you immediately take the four actions outlined by Melanne Vermeer and Tanya Henderson of the Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security in *Opinion: Here are four concrete actions the U.S. should take immediately to help Afghan women activists*, Washington Post, August 14, 2021, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2021/08/13/afghanistan-taliban-women-us-refugees-protection/>.

These four actions are:

- 1) Charter direct evacuation flights for Afghan women activists and women professionals most imminently under threat;
- 2) Direct a significant portion of the \$1.125 billion appropriated for Afghan refugees in the emergency supplemental passed on July 30 to ensure the priority program is immediately and efficiently implemented in a manner that allows it to quickly respond to the current crisis and include funding specifically for livelihood assistance for women activists who manage to relocate;
- 3) Establish a special humanitarian parole program for at-risk Afghan human rights defenders, women's rights activists, women professionals and politicians, journalists and other highly visible women being targeted for their refusal to conform to Taliban-dictated gender norms to allow them into the U.S.; and
- 4) Establish a high-level interagency refugee coordinator to manage refugee processing and relocation across the U.S. government and greatly and immediately increase processing capacity.

Afghan women's rights advocates and women attorneys, judges, journalists and other women professionals have always been at great risk of harm due to their work on the front lines of advancing women's rights. Now, as Afghanistan is collapsing to Taliban control, these women are in imminent and grave danger of being killed, tortured, imprisoned and persecuted by the Taliban.

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The Alliance for International Women's Rights ("AIWR") has had the privilege of getting to know some of these brave individuals personally through AIWR's long-distance Mentor Program. AIWR is a small volunteer-based not-for-profit organization headquartered in the U.S. For the last 15 years, AIWR has provided long-distance mentoring to Afghan women's rights advocates, attorneys, judges, doctors and other women professionals to help them advance their careers and enhance women's rights in Afghanistan. Over the years, AIWR mentees have reported being targeted by the Taliban through death threats, assassination attempts, and harassment. Many have had to endure their close colleagues being murdered for such advocacy. Yet, they persisted in carrying out their crucial tasks to advance women's rights and human rights in Afghanistan.

The current situation, however, no longer allows these women to continue their important work. With the Taliban in control of the majority of the country and poised to take Kabul within weeks (if not days), it is impossible for these brave women to remain in the country without losing their lives or being imprisoned and persecuted.

Unfortunately, despite their visible work on U.S. objectives of supporting democracy, rule of law, gender equity, and human rights, including working on projects funded by the U.S. government or the UN, most of the women's rights advocates and professionals who are most at risk are not eligible for U.S. SIV or even P-2 visas. Many spent years working on women empowerment projects such as the USAID PROMOTE program, teaching democracy and women's rights after studying in the U.S., developing shelters for domestic violence victims with UN Women, providing training for women judges, and working to implement the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and its Afghan corollary, the Elimination of Violence against Women (EVAW) Law. Due to their work for the Afghan government (courts, ministries, universities), international or non-profit organizations (IDLO, Max Planck, UN Women, World Bank, Oxfam, Asia Foundation), or smaller grassroots organizations, they are viewed by the Taliban as foreign agents and are thus on the Taliban's hit list.

Please recognize the incredible bravery of our mentees in furthering the U.S.'s mission of advancing women's rights and rebuilding Afghanistan in a fair and just way. While they may not have been military translators, their efforts to build an equitable, transparent, democratic society involved just as much personal risk. Now that the U.S. has decided to end the military fight against the Taliban, let's not abandon these important allies.

We urge you to immediately adopt the four steps outlined above and provide immediate safe passage for all AIWR's mentees and similarly situated women's rights advocates and professionals.

Thank you for your prompt consideration.

Sincerely,



Lisa Herb, Executive Director, AIWR



Gayle Zilber, Mentor Program Director, AIWR