United States Senate  
WASHINGTON, DC 20510  

August 16, 2021  

The Honorable Antony J. Blinken  
Secretary of State  
U.S. Department of State  
2201 C Street, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20520  

The Honorable Alejandro Mayorkas  
Secretary of Homeland Security  
U.S. Department of Homeland Security  
245 Murray Lane, S.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20528  

Dear Secretary Blinken and Secretary Mayorkas:

As the situation in Afghanistan rapidly deteriorates and the Taliban has taken control of Kabul, we appreciate the urgent measures you and the Department of Defense are taking to protect Afghan women leaders and others most at risk for retaliation by the Taliban.

We strongly urge you to create a humanitarian parole category specifically for women leaders, activists, human rights defenders, judges, parliamentarians, journalists, and members of the Female Tactical Platoon of the Afghan Special Security Forces and to streamline the paperwork process to facilitate referrals to allow for fast, humane, and efficient relocation to the United States. We also urge you to increase processing capacity within U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services and to immediately appoint an interagency refugee coordinator. We support your efforts to evacuate those who are applying for humanitarian parole and those applying for Priority 1 or 2 pathways, including by allocating seats for them on SIV evacuation flights. Finally, the United States should do everything possible to enable charter flights to safely land at and depart the airport even after U.S. Embassy personnel have been evacuated, and that clear instructions for safely accessing their aircraft are provided to those who are trying to depart and to organizations that have referred people and their dependents.

We are gravely concerned about the safety of women leaders, activists, judges, parliamentarians, and human rights defenders. The shocking violence and alleged atrocities occurring have caused mass displacement which, during a global pandemic and severe drought, has created a major humanitarian crisis. In areas captured by the Taliban, there are reports of war crimes including summary executions, public beatings and flogging of women, sexual violence and forced marriage, as well as clampdowns on media and other forms of communication.

We and our staff are receiving regular reports regarding the targeting, threatening, kidnapping, torturing, and assassinations of women for their work defending and promoting democracy, equality, higher education, and human rights. While we welcomed the expansion of the eligibility requirements for Special Immigrant Visas and the creation of the Priority 2 category in
the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program, we must also protect those women who might fall through the cracks of the U.S. Government’s response.

Particularly for women who are currently targets—even hunted by Taliban fighters who are going house-to-house with their names—the path to protection and safety under the Priority 2 designation is not accessible. While we understand there is little processing capacity at the U.S. Embassy in Kabul, for these women to access a third country for processing is almost or completely impossible with all borders crossings now closed or controlled by the Taliban.

We greatly appreciate your efforts to help save the lives of Afghans who have advanced U.S. and Afghan joint interests over the last generation, standing for peace, democracy, and equality. We are all in agreement that we owe them our unqualified support.

Sincerely,

Robert Menendez
United States Senator

Patrick Leahy
United States Senator

Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator

Christopher A. Coons
United States Senator

Tim Kaine
United States Senator

Jeanne Shaheen
United States Senator

Charles E. Schumer
United States Senator

Jack Reed
United States Senator

Patty Murray
United States Senator

Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator
Tammy Baldwin
United States Senator

/S/ Thomas R. Carper
Thomas R. Carper
United States Senator

Jacky Rosen
United States Senator

Amy Klobuchar
United States Senator

Tina Smith
United States Senator

Edward J. Markey
United States Senator

Sherrod Brown
United States Senator

Tammy Duckworth
United States Senator

Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator

Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator

Brian Schatz
United States Senator

Benjamin L. Cardin
United States Senator

Debbie Stabenow
United States Senator

Margaret Wood Hassan
United States Senator
Raphael Warnock
United States Senator

Sheldon Whitehouse
United States Senator

Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senator

Mark R. Warner
United States Senator

Mark Kelly
United States Senator

Catherine Cortez Masto
United States Senator

Kyriстиen Sinema
United States Senator

Dianne Feinstein
United States Senator

Bill Cassidy, M.D.
United States Senator

Bernard Sanders
United States Senator

Bill Cassidy, M.D.
United States Senator

Michael F. Bennett
United States Senator

Bob Casey

United States Senator

Alex Padilla
United States Senator

Robert P. Casey, Jr.
United States Senator

Mazie K. Hirono
United States Senator
John Hickenlooper
United States Senator

Cory A. Booker
United States Senator

Maria Cantwell
United States Senator

Lisa Murkowski
United States Senator

Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator

Christopher S. Murphy
United States Senator

Jon Ossoff
United States Senator

James M. Inhofe
United States Senator