

U.S. - AFGHAN Women's Council



February 2, 2021

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

Dear Mr. Secretary:

As the relationship between the United States and Afghanistan evolves, the [U.S. - Afghan Women's Council](#) (USAWC) is uniquely positioned to help support a meaningful and mutually beneficial relationship going forward, one that will honor the sacrifices of both nations and the hard-earned gains. Since it was first established in 2002 the USAWC has worked to direct public and private resources from the United States to help Afghan women contribute to the rebuilding of Afghanistan. The Council was designed to be an equal partnership between Afghans and Americans and includes individuals, companies, and non-profits, all with a goal of improving the lives of Afghan women and girls through initiatives in four key sectors: education, economic opportunity, leadership, and health.

While the experiences of our Afghan and U.S. based members have been unique, all agree that after decades of war the need for peace and security in Afghanistan is paramount, but must not sacrifice the progress of Afghan women. We were encouraged to hear you state as much in your response to Senator Shaheen during your confirmation hearing before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

U.S.-Afghan Women's Council leadership would like to help the Biden Administration navigate the difficult policy choices ahead. Our members have roots in both U.S. and Afghan policymaking institutions, and both political parties in the United States. We have deep experience in Afghanistan, whether as policy makers and implementers, programmatic leaders, entrepreneurs and educators, or thought-leaders. It is with this experience that we stand ready to brief you on our ideas, including those for improving policy actions in Afghanistan that will not only improve the lives of Afghan women and girls, but are the best chances for enduring peace and security.

Programs that advocate for, train, and provide negotiation and leadership skills to Afghan women must be enhanced and supported so that Afghan women are heard and included in decision-making processes. The significant gains in the rights, education, and social and economic well-being of women achieved in Afghanistan must be protected,

preserved, and advanced as part of the peace negotiations. Education and health programs should include gaps analyses at the planning stages to ensure they are feasible, necessary, targeted, adjustable to local circumstances, and not duplicative. Realizing the importance of accountability, these programs should be monitored and evaluated to ensure meaningful benefit and achievement of defined goals.

The Council needs your assistance to once again fulfill its stated purpose – acting as a conduit for public-private partnerships and leveraging our members’ expertise in order to help the U.S. government, international partners, and Afghan people ensure that Afghan women and girls have an enabling environment and opportunities to progress. Civil society, including Council members, should be consulted as the Administration, Department of State, and USAID evaluate programs and policy in Afghanistan.

Furthermore, we ask that you prioritize identifying, nominating, and confirming a new Ambassador for Global Women’s Issues. As one of the primary conduits between the Council and the Department of State in her or his role as the USAWC’s Co-Chair, the Ambassador is an important part of the Council’s operations.

The State Department’s current commitments to the USAWC provide for our Executive Director, a State Department officer on detail to Georgetown University. This position remains essential for the functioning of the Council. The Executive Director is currently working with members on a full strategic review and rethink as we look forward to celebrating our 20th anniversary in early 2022. As part of this process, we ask that you empower the Department to fully support the USAWC as we fulfill our mutual goals. This includes continued and enhanced participation by State Department officials in briefings and consultations with members; joint outreach to members of Congress, where appropriate; and the aforementioned inclusion of civil society, including Council members, in the grants making and program formulation process.

Finally, we ask the Department to grant an annual budget to the Executive Director in order to fully realize the public-private partnership with the USAWC and enable support staff to conduct independent research, draft policy recommendations, and maintain public outreach. It would also allow the Council to recruit talent on the basis of their skills and expertise rather than on their willingness or financial ability to volunteer, to enter collaborations with private partners with resources that demonstrate a respect for their efforts and time, and to manage basic operations while maintaining independence.

We look forward to discussing these ideas with you or a designate at the earliest possible opportunity.

Sincerely,



Mrs. Laura Bush
Honorary Co-Chair,
U.S.-Afghan Women’s Council



Hillary Rodham Clinton
Honorary Co-Chair,
U.S.-Afghan Women’s Council



Ambassador Paula J. Dobriansky
Senior Fellow, Harvard University Belfer
Center
Founding Member and former Co-Chair,
U.S.-Afghan Women's Council



Dr. Phyllis R. Magrab
Endowed Professor, Pediatrics
Vice Chair, U.S.-Afghan Women's Council
Director, Georgetown University
Center for Child & Human Development



Ambassador Roya Rahmani
Ambassador of the Republic of
Afghanistan to the United States
U.S.-Afghan Women's Council



Ambassador Melanne Verwee
Executive Director, Georgetown Institute
for Women, Peace, and Security
Former Co-Chair, U.S.-Afghan Women's
Council

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