

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May 18, 2012

The Honorable Anders Fogh Rasmussen
Secretary General
North American Treaty Organization
Boulevard Leopold III
Brussels, Belgium

Dear Mr. Secretary General:

We write to urge you to reaffirm the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's (NATO) commitment to the women of Afghanistan during the upcoming NATO summit in Chicago. We understand that NATO members and partners intend to lay out plans for the future of Afghanistan, including managing the transition of responsibility to Afghan security forces and continued support and assistance for Afghanistan after 2014. It is critical that Afghan women be active participants in the development of these plans, and that their rights and opportunities be protected during the transition and in the future.

Throughout NATO's engagement in Afghanistan, the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) has been committed to expanding the rights and opportunities of women. Empowered Afghan women can have an immensely positive impact on their communities, investing resources in education, health care, and other basic needs. They can also play a role in discouraging violence and dissuading young men from turning to militancy.

NATO's support for Afghan women has been key to raising the profile of women's rights and emphasizing the important role that women can play in conflict resolution and peace building. Since 2001, women have assumed seats in parliament, girls have returned to school, and women's rights have become part of the public dialogue. However, we have very grave concerns that the ongoing political reconciliation process with the Taliban could result in backsliding on key protections for women. It is critical that women be part of the reconciliation process and that their concerns and priorities be addressed. Women continue to face oppression, violence and economic hardship in many parts of Afghanistan, and we must continue to insist that Afghanistan's government and security forces prioritize the protection of women's rights during the transition and after it is complete.

History demonstrates that excluding women, who often suffer the most during periods of armed conflict, from peace negotiations undermines stability and can lead to renewed conflict. Understanding that women are not only victims of conflicts but can be agents of positive change can mean the difference between prolonged conflict and successful peace processes that lead to

long-term stability. It is therefore critical that Afghan women be involved in developing and implementing the policies that will influence their country's future.

We hope that you will use the Chicago summit as an opportunity to assert NATO's commitment to ensuring that women's voices are heard throughout all stages of the security transition. On the local level, ISAF forces should work with women to assess the needs of individual communities and establish processes for holding local authorities and security forces accountable. On the national level, the NATO Training Mission – Afghanistan (NTMA) should work with women officials and civil society representatives to ensure that all Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) personnel are prepared to respond to incidents of violence against women and other rights violations. The NTMA should also work with women leaders to increase the number of women recruited for the ANSF over the next several years.

As you know, in order to ensure a responsible transition, NATO must carefully monitor the security conditions in areas throughout Afghanistan where ISAF forces have drawn down. The continued safety and mobility of Afghan women will be a critical indicator of the transition's success. We strongly encourage you to incorporate measurements of women's security into comprehensive security evaluations. Relevant indicators may include the number of women working outside the home; the participation of women in local government bodies; the rate of school attendance for girls; women's access to government services; and the prevalence of violence against women. Studies have shown that the security of women is unmistakably linked with the security of communities and countries, and the security of Afghan women in post-transition areas will be an important indicator of the strategy's success.

In 2010, you said "My position, and the position of all the allies, is very clear: we will never support any political deal that sacrifices the rights that Afghan women now have enshrined in the constitution." As NATO develops plans for managing the transition and continuing our engagement with Afghanistan beyond 2014, we urge you to demonstrate your commitment to that position by ensuring that Afghan women are an integral part of the process.

Sincerely,




Robert P. Casey, Jr.
UNITED STATES SENATOR



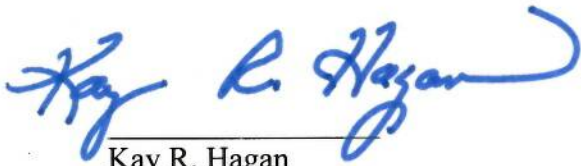
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UNITED STATES SENATOR



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UNITED STATES SENATOR



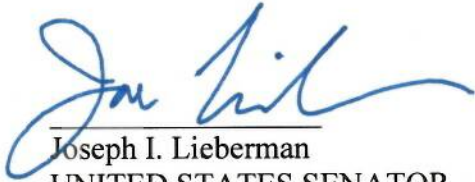
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