

**EMBARGOED UNTIL 25 APRIL 2013, 1400**

**STATEMENT OF**

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DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE  
AFGHANISTAN, PAKISTAN AND CENTRAL ASIA**

**BEFORE THE**

**UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND INVESTIGATIONS**

**April 25th, 2013**

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Chairman Roby, Ranking Member Tsongas, members of the Subcommittee, thank you for this opportunity to update you on the security of Afghan women as we transition to Afghan security lead.

Overall, circumstances for all Afghans have improved significantly since 2001. For Afghan women and girls, proportionally this progress has been even greater. Women's health, education, and political participation have all increased enormously. The Afghan constitution declares that "The citizens of Afghanistan – whether man or woman – have equal rights and duties before the law." The government of Afghanistan reaffirmed at the Tokyo Conference that the human rights of its citizens, in particular the equality of men and women, are guaranteed under the Afghan constitution and in international human rights law obligations. To reduce discrimination and violence against women, the Afghan Government has enacted laws prohibiting violence against women and ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. However, implementation of existing laws promoting equality and prohibiting violence remains mixed. Despite advances, the troubles of poverty, illiteracy, weak security and poor health care continue to affect women disproportionately, and violence against women and girls remains a problem. Many Afghan women fear a return of the Taliban and a re-emergence of a society hostile toward women.

Areas where Afghan women have made progress include health and education, as well as in the political arena. Women hold 27 percent of the seats in the National Assembly, and 25 percent of the seats in provincial councils are reserved for women by law. There are two women serving on the High Peace Council's 19-person Executive Board. With strong support from the U.S. Government and the international community, Afghan women have taken part in many countrywide political decision-making processes since the end of Taliban rule: the Bonn Conference in 2001; the Loya Jirga in 2002; the 2004 Constitutional Loya Jirga; the Consultative Peace Jirga of 2010; the Kabul Conference in 2010; Bonn Conference 2011; and the Tokyo Conference of 2012. Women have also increased their presence and visibility through the National Solidarity Program and constitute 24 percent of participants in the local Community Development Councils.

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Ensuring women's civic and political participation, as well as enhancing women's status and equality, is dependent on an effective rule of law. Yet an effective rule of law is also dependent upon the participation of women in the justice system. Women's participation in the justice system raises awareness and improves implementation of existing Afghan laws protecting women's constitutional rights. One area of progress has been in the recruitment of female judges: there are now approximately 150 female judges, up from 50 in 2003. Increased participation and a more effective rule of law allow women to rely on the formal sector to provide security and access to justice.

The main focus of the Department of Defense's efforts to support women's security in Afghanistan is through ISAF's Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) development mission. Improving the recruitment of women into the ANSF, their status and treatment within the ANSF, and the ANSF's treatment of female civilians across the country are a priority for ISAF. ISAF, the Afghan Ministry of Defense (MoD) and Ministry of Interior (MoI) have a large number of programs aimed at protecting women's rights and promoting women in the ANSF. Implementation of a gender policy within Afghanistan's armed forces and police is a long-term project. Some of the success Afghanistan has had integrating women into its security forces in the past decade surpasses that of other countries in the region. Across the ANSF, there are policies and programs in place that attempt to address harassment and violence against women. We have also helped design and execute educational projects for women. Formal gender integration policies exist in both MoD and MoI, but need implementation. Support from Afghan leadership is essential and political will is present in some cases.

Many challenges remain, however. Recruitment of women for the Afghan National Army, Afghan Air Force, and Afghan National Police continues to fall short of female recruitment goals. The primary obstacle for this is likely family-related issues. Other impediments have been identified, such as a lack of challenging assignments for females upon graduation, accounts of sexual harassment and violence, and difficulties concerning separate housing and bathing facilities.

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ISAF closely monitors the security of the Afghan population, including Afghan women, in transitioning areas. Transition is a dynamic process: areas proceed on different timelines based on demonstrated improvements in security, governance, rule of law, and ANSF capabilities. During the transition process, functions are steadily transferred to the ANSF as their capability increases. Transition does not mean the absolute withdrawal of ISAF's support. In fact, ISAF continues to provide support at the level required by the ANSF to ensure that they are capable of securing the areas in which they have the lead.

While the Department of State and the U.S. Agency for International Development administer the majority of women's initiatives, DoD also oversees several programs focusing on women outside of the ANSF. These programs include: assistance to the Department of Women's Affairs in Kandahar; assistance to the District Development Assembly for Women's Affairs in Parwan District; and U.S. Cultural Support Teams that provide an enduring female engagement capability in support of special operations and Afghan Local Police expansion. ISAF also has a number of Gender Advisers, who educate personnel, ensure that women's rights and security are factored into decisions throughout ISAF, and coordinate the efforts of their subcommands and external international organizations, non-governmental organizations, and governmental organizations.

These efforts are also consistent with our commitment to implement the U.S. National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security (NAP). The NAP details the actions the U.S. Government will take to accelerate, institutionalize, and better coordinate efforts to advance women's inclusion in peace negotiations, peacebuilding activities, and conflict prevention; to protect women from sexual and gender-based violence; and to ensure equal access to relief and recovery assistance, in areas of conflict and insecurity. The Department recognizes that the goals of the NAP are important to our national security and to ensuring sustainable peace and security in Afghanistan and throughout the world.

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As I close, I would like to thank the House Armed Services Committee and this Subcommittee for your continued support for our men and women in uniform. Ensuring the rights and security of women and girls in Afghanistan is a long-term, generational process. However, our progress in this area has been substantial, and I am confident that through the efforts of the DoD, other U.S. departments and agencies, NGOs, and our Allies and partners in Afghanistan, this progress will continue in the future.