

**Special Envoy for Afghan Women, Girls, and Human Rights, Rina Amiri**  
**Written Statement**  
**"Examining the Biden Administration's Afghanistan Policy Since the Withdrawal: Part II"**  
**House Foreign Affairs Committee**  
**Subcommittee on Middle East, North Africa, and Central Asia**  
**Thursday, January 11, 2024**

Chairman McCaul, Ranking Member Phillips, Committee Members: thank you for the opportunity to speak today about the devastating human rights situation in Afghanistan, particularly facing Afghan women and girls, and for your sustained, bipartisan support on improving the situation.

When I assumed the position of Special Envoy for Afghan Women, Girls, and Human Rights in January 2022, I knew that it would be a difficult undertaking and that, despite the Taliban's rhetoric promising to respect women's rights, the struggle to ensure respect for human rights and the rights of women and girls in particular would be an uphill battle.

Unfortunately, that assessment has borne out to be devastatingly true. In the last two years, the human rights situation in Afghanistan has deteriorated severely. Many former government officials, security force members, and those suspected of ties to the resistance face serious risks; members of ethnic and religious minority communities and any who oppose and openly express disagreement with the Taliban's interpretation of religious law are relentlessly exposed to threats and violence; media freedom has been sharply curtailed, and other vulnerable groups struggle in the face of widespread discrimination and persecution by the Taliban. Restrictions against women and girls have been the most calamitous. The Taliban have systemically targeted Afghan women and girls with more than 50 discriminatory edicts. There is no indication this will subside. They have attempted to erase Afghan women and girls from society, banning women and girls from accessing education beyond the primary level, prohibiting women's employment in most sectors, restricting their freedom of movement, and effectively removing them from public spaces. Those who raise their voices to protest or resist risk harassment, detention, and violence.

Given the extreme ideology and power dynamics within the Taliban, the road ahead continues to look difficult. But even as we acknowledge these difficulties, we must remain resolute in our support for Afghan women and girls. Violent extremist groups around the world are closely watching the world's response to what the Taliban are doing. If we don't continue to stand up for the rights of women in Afghanistan, we put at peril women's rights everywhere.

My team's efforts have focused on five key areas.

First, we promote respect for the human rights and Afghan women and girls through our diplomacy. We recognize many are worried that engaging with the Taliban could provide them with the legitimacy that they seek. We bear this in mind in our discussions, and it is why we are clear with the Taliban in every meeting that women's rights are central to U.S. policy toward Afghanistan and cannot be siloed or deprioritized. Both bilaterally and in coordination with our partners and allies, we have repeatedly made clear to the Taliban that the United States will not support steps towards normalization unless the rights of Afghan women and girls – and indeed, all Afghans – are respected. Their extreme policies are opposed by Afghans and run counter to international norms. Moreover, excluding half the population severely hampers efforts to improve the Afghan economy, maintain any normal system of health care, and ensure a sustainable future for Afghanistan.

Second, we work with our partners to ensure that efforts to support the rights of Afghan women and girls are led not only by Western countries, but also championed by those in the region – and by Muslim-majority countries in particular – to form a global effort. To this end, I have engaged counterparts from more than thirty countries throughout the world since my appointment.

Third, we recognize the importance of amplifying the voices of Afghan women themselves, including both those inside the country as well as those forced into exile. In the year since we established the U.S.-Afghan Consultative Mechanism, Afghan women and men from all major ethnic groups and areas of the country have had regular, direct engagements with leading U.S. policymakers, providing valuable perspectives to inform U.S. deliberations on Afghanistan policy across a range of shared priorities.

Fourth, we complement our diplomatic efforts with concrete support to advance education and economic resilience for women and girls. Across the government, we are working on virtual educational programs including computer and job skills training for Afghan women inside and outside Afghanistan. My office launched the Alliance for Afghan Women's Economic Resilience (AWER) last year on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly. AWER is a public private partnership with Boston University focused on advancing Afghan women's entrepreneurship, workforce participation, and educational opportunities in Afghanistan and third countries by fostering collaborations with the private sector. We have efforts underway intended to support millions of Afghan women both inside and outside the country with access to virtual education opportunities and employment support.

And fifth, we are working to support protection and accountability measures for the short and long term through our ongoing engagement with the UN Human Rights Council, the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan, the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), and Afghan and international human rights organizations.

I look forward to continuing to engage Congress as we support Afghan women, girls, human rights defenders, and vulnerable communities in the valiant struggle for their rights.

We are under no illusion about the challenges ahead. But we must at least match the resiliency and determination of Afghans themselves. Supporting human rights, particularly the rights of women and girls, offers the best prospect for an inclusive, secure, and stable Afghanistan, at peace with itself and its neighbors. The Afghans we invest in today will determine the Afghanistan of the future.