

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

July 15, 2013

President Barack Obama  
The White House  
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear President Obama:

Over the last decade, the United States has committed significant time and resources to promote the rights of women and girls in Afghanistan. In that period, advances have occurred in education, access to health care, freedom of movement, employment, and women's participation in public life. Yet today, on the eve of the U.S. military's drawdown of forces in 2014, several areas of progress are at risk, and many other issues have gone unaddressed. We are writing to share with you the enclosed strategic plan prepared by Human Rights Watch. We hope to work with you to further develop and implement this plan to protect the rights of women and girls in Afghanistan beyond 2014.

Afghan women and girls still face enormous difficulties in Afghanistan today. Maternal and infant mortality rates remain among the highest in the world. Half of all girls still do not go to school, and very few complete high school or university. In many parts of the country, women and girls are often not even free to leave their homes.

Afghan women and girls also endure high levels of violence. Forced marriage and underage marriage are endemic: a recent UNICEF study found that 20 percent of girls aged 15-19 were married, 46 percent of women aged 15-49 had married before age 18, and 7 percent of women were in polygamous marriages. Human rights groups have also found an increasing number of women and girls detained in prisons for "moral crimes" of adultery or "running away" —charges typically brought when women have merely fled domestic abuse or forced marriage.

Given that President Karzai's support for the law on the Elimination of Violence against Women may be weakening in the face of opposition, it is clear that only strong pressure by international donors to Afghanistan, such as the U.S. government, can prevent the Afghan government from backtracking on its domestic and international legal obligations to safeguard women's rights. Progress on women's rights in Afghanistan has been achieved in large part because of the diligence and hard work of Afghan women and girls, Afghan men who are their allies, and civil society groups supporting them. This progress, however, could easily be erased: it depends heavily on continuing international political pressure and direct assistance.

We believe that the U.S. government must promulgate a detailed plan for providing U.S. support for Afghan women and women's rights organizations in the years ahead—a plan as detailed as the U.S.-Afghanistan Strategic Partnership Agreement (SPA). The SPA was an effort to send a clear message to Afghanistan and its neighbors, in the context of security and military assistance, that the U.S. will not abandon Afghanistan after 2014. This message is perhaps even more urgent for Afghan women and girls.

If the U.S. can explicitly commit to support the training, equipping, advising, and sustaining of the Afghan National Security Forces, and detail a range of bilateral measures and commitments on the security front, including the creation of a U.S.-Afghanistan Working Group on Defense and Security, certainly the United States and Afghanistan can similarly commit to measures to promote, protect, and fulfill women's rights.

The enclosed report is timely, particularly given the lead-up to the security transition in 2014. Afghan women and girls need a strategic partnership agreement that focuses specifically on the promotion and protection of their rights. We respectfully request that you ask the Secretary of State and the Secretary of Defense to work with Congress to formulate such a strategy. The key components of this strategy would be to:

1. Press the Afghan government at the highest political levels to promote and protect women's rights and, in particular, press them to use women's rights as a key indicator for measuring development and security;
2. Ensure Afghanistan's security strategy is focused on women as much as it is on soldiers and weapons; and
3. Organize and promote broad international support for this strategy.

We look forward to working with you on this important endeavor.

Sincerely,

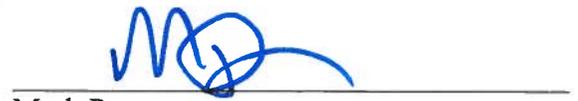
  
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Member of Congress

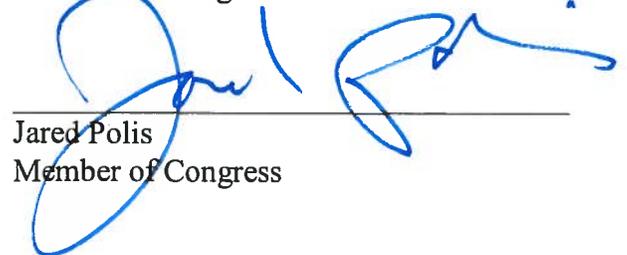
  
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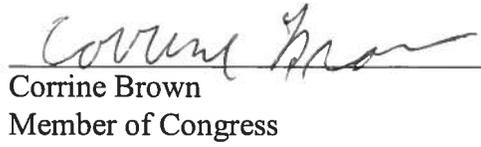
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