

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

December 2, 2011

The Honorable Hillary Rodham Clinton
Secretary of State
United States Department of State
2201 C St, NW
Washington DC 20520

Dear Secretary Clinton,

Thank you for your continued leadership on women's participation in Afghanistan's political and economic future. We are writing to express our views on the upcoming conference in Bonn, Germany, and the role the United States can play to ensure that the progress made by Afghan women over the last decade is not diminished. As you know, the conference comes at a critical time and presents an opportunity to ensure that the Afghanistan that moves forward is one that is united, secure, and self-sustaining.

We believe Afghan women are central to this goal. Representing nearly half of the country's population, Afghan women are the key to the nation's future economic and security successes. History shows that "economically active" Afghan women have the ability to lift their families, the provinces, and the nation out of poverty and despair. In fact, until the early 1990s, Afghan women were critical participants in Afghanistan's development strategy, serving as business owners, nurses, doctors, teachers, and journalists.

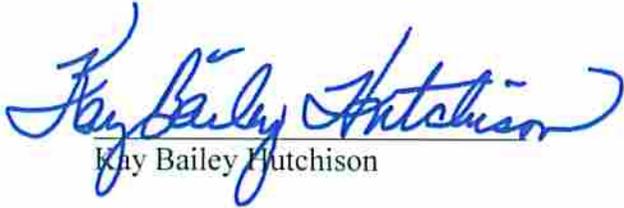
It is Afghan women who have borne the brunt of extremism – experiencing the world's second highest maternal and infant mortality rates and illiteracy rates exceeding 85 percent of all women and girls. The inability of women to participate at any level of government has only exacerbated their situation. Since 2001, women have made their way back into government. Yet, their gains are fragile. Recent events, including the assassination of Professor Burhanuddin Rabbani, only serve to underscore this point. Moreover, they demonstrate that the progress made by women under the Afghan Constitution will only diminish without the United States' and the international community's vigilance.

It is against this backdrop that we seek your support. Afghan women yearn for peace and security—yet they're concerned. They welcome assurances from abroad, but, ultimately, their progress will only be safeguarded if the women themselves are present, in large enough numbers, at every conference, jirga, or negotiation where decisions about their future are being made. With vibrant networks throughout the provinces, Afghan women are eager to do their part in building a national consensus for peace. The upcoming conference provides the international

community and particularly the United States with a unique opportunity to advocate for a more inclusive approach to reconciliation that will open avenues for women's meaningful inclusion and put Afghanistan firmly on the path of peace and prosperity.

We believe that it is only through the commitment by the Afghan government and the nation's communities that change will occur. As you participate in the Bonn Conference, know that we stand ready to work with you in any capacity to ensure that meaningful reform takes place.

Sincerely,



Kay Bailey Hutchison



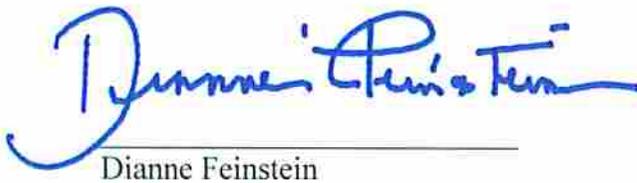
Cathy McMorris Rodgers



Barbara Mikulski



Donna Edwards



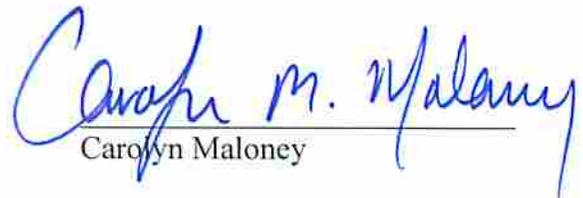
Dianne Feinstein



Susan Davis



Olympia Snowe



Carolyn Maloney



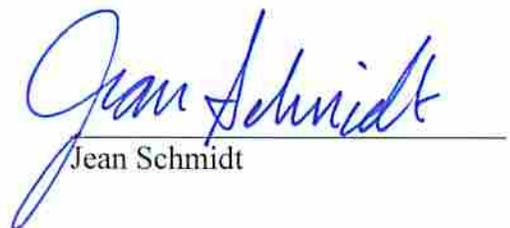
Mary Landrieu



Cynthia Lummis



Susan Collins

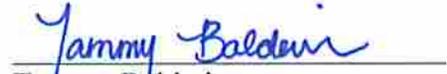


Jean Schmidt

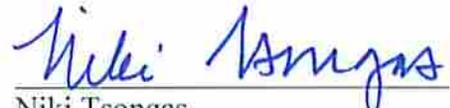

Lisa Murkowski


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