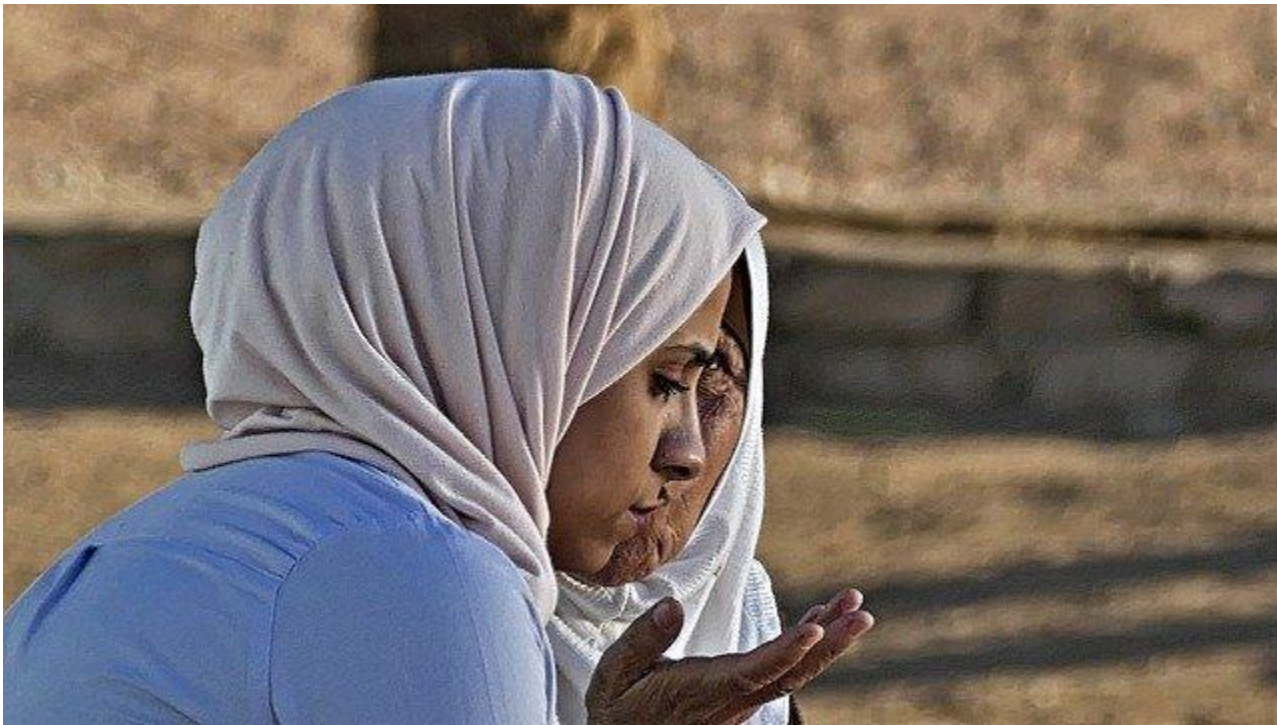


Duckworth Joins Senate Colleagues In Bipartisan Letter Urging Biden Admin To Protect Afghan Women Leaders In Wake Of Taliban Takeover In Afghanistan

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WASHINGTON, D.C. – Combat Veteran and U.S. Senator Tammy Duckworth (D-IL) joined U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Bob Menendez (D-NJ), U.S. Senator Jeanne Shaheen (D-NH) and 43 of their Senate colleagues on both sides of the aisle in urging U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken and U.S. Secretary of Homeland Security Alejandro Mayorkas to take swift, robust action to protect and support Afghan

women leaders facing unparalleled danger following the Taliban's violent sweep across Afghanistan and seizure of Kabul. Duckworth served in the Reserve Forces for 23 years and is Chair of the U.S. Senate Armed Services Subcommittee on Airland.

“We and our staff are receiving regular reports regarding the targeting, threatening, kidnapping, torturing and assassinations of women for their work defending and promoting democracy, equality, higher education and human rights. While we welcomed the expansion of the eligibility requirements for Special Immigrant Visas and the creation of the Priority 2 category in the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program, we must also protect those women who might fall through the cracks of the U.S. Government's response,” the Senators wrote, raising concerns over reports of rampant war crimes—including public beatings and flogging of women, sexual violence and forced marriage—in areas captured by the Taliban. “We greatly appreciate your efforts to help save the lives of Afghans who have advanced U.S. and Afghan joint interests over the last generation, standing for peace, democracy and equality. We are all in agreement that we owe them our unqualified support.”

The Senators called on the Biden Administration to create a humanitarian parole category specifically for women leaders, activists, human rights defenders, parliamentarians, journalists and members of the Female Tactical Platoon of the Afghan Special Security Forces, as well as to streamline the paperwork process to facilitate referrals to allow for fast, humane and efficient relocation to the United States.

In addition to expressing their support for the Administration's efforts to evacuate those who are applying for humanitarian parole and those applying for Priority 1 or 2 pathways, including by allocating seats for them on SIV evacuation flights, the Senators urged the Administration to increase processing capacity within U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services and to immediately appoint an interagency refugee coordinator.

“Particularly for women who are currently targets—even hunted by Taliban fighters who are going house-to-house with their names—the path to protection and safety under the Priority 2 designation is not accessible,” the Senators added. “While we understand there is little processing capacity at the U.S. Embassy in Kabul, for these women to access a third country for processing is almost or completely impossible with all borders crossings now closed or controlled by the Taliban.”

Along with Duckworth, Menendez and Shaheen, the letter was signed by U.S. Senators Patrick Leahy (D-VT), Chuck Schumer (D-NY), Dick Durbin (D-IL), Jack Reed (D-RI), Chris Coons (D-DE), Patty Murray (D-WA), Tim Kaine (D-VA), Chris Van Hollen (D-MD), Tammy Baldwin (D-WI), Tom Carper (D-DE), Richard Blumenthal (D-CT), Jacky Rosen (D-NV), Elizabeth Warren (D-MA), Amy Klobuchar (D-MN), Brian Schatz (D-HI), Tina Smith (D-MN), Ben Cardin (D-MD), Ed Markey (D-MA), Debbie

Stabenow (D-MI), Sherrod Brown (D-OH), Maggie Hassan (D-NH), Raphael Warnock (D-GA), Sheldon Whitehouse (D-RI), Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY), Mark Warner (D-VA), Mark Kelly (D-AZ), Catherine Cortez Masto (D-NV), Kyrsten Sinema (D-AZ), Dianne Feinstein (D-CA), Bernie Sanders (I-VT), Bill Cassidy (R-LA), Michael Bennet (D-CO), Bob Casey (D-PA), Alex Padilla (D-CA), Mazie Hirono (D-HI), John Hickenlooper (D-CO), Jeff Merkley (D-OR), Cory Booker (D-NJ), Chris Murphy (D-CT), Maria Cantwell (D-WA), Jon Ossoff (D-GA), Lisa Murkowski (R-AK) and Jim Inhofe (R-OK).

Full text of the letter can be found [here](#) and below.

Dear Secretary Blinken and Secretary Mayorkas:

As the situation in Afghanistan rapidly deteriorates and the Taliban has taken control of Kabul, we appreciate the urgent measures you and the Department of Defense are taking to protect Afghan women leaders and others most at risk for retaliation by the Taliban.

We strongly urge you to create a humanitarian parole category specifically for women leaders, activists, human rights defenders, judges, parliamentarians, journalists, and members of the Female Tactical Platoon of the Afghan Special Security Forces and to streamline the paperwork process to facilitate referrals to allow for fast, humane, and efficient relocation to the United States. We also urge you to increase processing capacity within U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services and to immediately appoint an interagency refugee coordinator.

We support your efforts to evacuate those who are applying for humanitarian parole and those applying for Priority 1 or 2 pathways, including by allocating seats for them on SIV evacuation flights. Finally, the United States should do everything possible to enable charter flights to safely land at and depart the airport even after U.S. Embassy personnel have been evacuated, and that clear instructions for safely accessing their aircraft are provided to those who are trying to depart and to organizations that have referred people and their dependents.

We are gravely concerned about the safety of women leaders, activists, judges, parliamentarians, and human rights defenders. The shocking violence and alleged atrocities occurring have caused mass displacement which, during a global pandemic and severe drought, has created a major humanitarian crisis. In areas captured by the Taliban, there are reports of war crimes including summary executions, public beatings and flogging of women, sexual violence and forced marriage, as well as clampdowns on media and other forms of communication.

We and our staff are receiving regular reports regarding the targeting, threatening, kidnapping, torturing, and assassinations of women for their work defending and promoting democracy, equality, higher education, and human rights. While we welcomed the expansion of the eligibility requirements for Special Immigrant Visas and the creation of the Priority 2 category in the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program, we must also protect those women who might fall through the cracks of the U.S. Government's response.

Particularly for women who are currently targets—even hunted by Taliban fighters who are going house-to-house with their names—the path to protection and safety under the Priority 2 designation is not accessible. While we understand there is little processing capacity at the U.S. Embassy in Kabul, for these women to access a third country for processing is almost or completely impossible with all borders crossings now closed or controlled by the Taliban.

We greatly appreciate your efforts to help save the lives of Afghans who have advanced U.S. and Afghan joint interests over the last generation, standing for peace, democracy, and equality. We are all in agreement that we owe them our unqualified support.

Sincerely,