

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

August 16, 2021

The Honorable Lloyd J. Austin III
Secretary of Defense
U.S. Department of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301-1000

Dear Secretary Austin:

As the situation in Afghanistan rapidly deteriorates and the Taliban enters Kabul, we request that the United States government take urgent measures to protect the many Afghans who are facing unparalleled danger.

We strongly urge you to keep U.S. troops in Kabul to facilitate the evacuations of Afghan women leaders, ethnic minority leaders, activists, parliamentarians and human rights defenders for as long as is safe for U.S. troops. U.S. troops are currently deployed to Kabul to support the evacuation of U.S. diplomatic personnel and contractors. In addition to supporting these efforts, the security of the airport and the enablement of consistent flights to resume is the only way for targeted and vulnerable Afghans at risk of Taliban retaliation to reach safety.

Humanitarian groups and individuals have chartered private planes to carry these targeted individuals to other countries, but without the security guarantees of U.S. forces and order at Hamid Karzai International Airport, these planes will be unable to land and depart from Kabul. The U.S. military still retains some limited space for negotiation with the Taliban, and that line of communication has the potential to keep the airport secure and operational while U.S. partners are evacuated from Afghanistan. We ask that U.S. troops coordinate with Turkish and other partnered forces to secure the airport until these chartered flights have successfully evacuated their intended passengers. We also ask that the Department of Defense allow all Special Immigrant Visa (SIV), Priority 1 (P1) visa and Priority 2 (P2) visa applicants into the military side of the airport to ensure they are ready to be evacuated as transport becomes available.

We are gravely concerned about the safety of women leaders, ethnic minority leaders, activists, 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 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 are receiving regular reports regarding the targeting, threatening, kidnapping, torturing, and assassinations of Afghan women leaders, ethnic minority leaders, activists, parliamentarians and human rights defenders for their work defending and promoting democracy, equality, higher

education, and human rights. Particularly for those who are currently targets—some of whom are even being hunted by Taliban fighters going house-to-house with their names—the only path to protection is a flight from Hamid Karzai International Airport to another country. Most borders crossings are now closed or controlled by the Taliban. Crossing these borders is a death trap for those families who are known and targeted.

We greatly appreciate your important work in helping to save the lives of Afghans who have advanced U.S. and Afghan joint interests over the last generation, standing for peace, democracy, and equality. They are now in grave danger and we owe them our support.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Bob Casey".

Robert P. Casey, Jr.
United States Senator