

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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[media@vitalvoices.org](mailto:media@vitalvoices.org)

## **Leading Advocates for Women Call on Biden Administration: “Do Not Abandon Afghan Women and Girls”**

*Activists, Policy Experts, and NGO Leaders Come Together in Letter Urging the Biden Administration to Honor its Commitment to Support Afghan Women*

**Washington, DC** – Today, leading advocates for women's rights and gender equality joined together to call on the Biden Administration to act immediately to protect and support Afghan women. Actress and activist Connie Britton, former U.S. Ambassador-at-Large for Global Women's Issues Melanne Vermeer, Poet and activist Amanda Gorman, Actor and activist Allison Janney, and Chief Operating Officer of Facebook, Sheryl Sandberg, are among the nearly 500 prominent Americans and Afghan-Americans calling on the Biden Administration to step up and ensure the safety of women in the ongoing evacuation efforts in Kabul.

Organized by NGOs [Vital Voices](#) and [Women for Women International](#), the group of celebrities, policy experts, NGO leaders and activists came together out of a common concern that the Biden Administration is not honoring its [commitment](#) to the women and girls of Afghanistan and is leaving behind the same female leaders that the U.S. and international community has supported and empowered for nearly two decades.

In the face of this mounting crisis, the letter calls on the administration to immediately take four concrete steps to support Afghan women:

1. Provide direct evacuation flights for women who are under imminent threat.
2. Expand Special Immigrant Visas to include a category for at-risk women and raise the refugee cap.
3. Allocate resources for livelihood assistance and resettlement.
4. Protect and invest in women who remain in Afghanistan.

"There are moments in history where we will be judged not by whether or not we won or lost but by whether or not we did the right thing. This is one of these moments. We need to protect these women's lives for the importance of their voice, for their children, for the future of their country, and our commitment to our values," **said Zainab Salbi, Founder of Women for Women International.**

For decades, Vital Voices has invested in women leaders solving the world's greatest challenges. We know that Afghan women have been on the frontlines, risking their lives for progress. Vital Voices and our entire global network stand firmly behind these courageous leaders - we must act now to protect and defend them," **said Alyse Nelson, President & CEO, Vital Voices Global Partnership.**

**Signatories of the letter include:**

- Amanda Gorman, Poet and Activist
- Sheryl Sandberg, Chief Operating Officer of Facebook
- Allison Janney, Actor and Activist
- Charlize Theron, Actor and activist and United Nation's Messenger of Peace
- Connie Britton, Actor and Activist
- Debra Messing, Actor and Activist
- Alyssa Milano, Actor and activist
- Gina Gershon, Actor and activist
- Maria Bello, Actor and activist
- Natasha Bedingfield, Singer and activist
- Jazmyn Simon, Actress
- Alison Luff, Singer and actress
- Christy Turlington Burns, Founder of Every Mother Counts, Model
- Donna Karan, Fashion designer
- Alyse Nelson, President & CEO, Vital Voices Global Partnership
- Diane von Furstenberg, Fashion designer and activist
- Ambassador Melanne Verbeer, Executive Director of the Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security
- Zainab Salbi, Founder of Women for Women International
- Kate James, Chair of Vital Voices Global Partnership Board
- V (formerly known as Eve Ensler), Founder V Day
- Laurie Adams, President & CEO, Women for Women
- Sonja Hoel Perkins, Founder of Broadway Angels, and Project Glimmer
- Kathryn Vizas, Co-founder and Chair of the Board of TogetHER
- Juliette Boselli, Owner, Denali Mountain Works
- Alice Waters, Restaurateur, activist, and author
- Rina Amiri, Non-resident fellow at NYU's Center for International Cooperation; Senior fellow at NYU's Center for Global Affairs; UN Senior Mediation Advisor
- Saba Ghorri, Vice President, Vital Voices Global Partnership
- Susan Vitka, Philanthropist, producer, environmentalist
- Mary McCormack, Actress
- Amira Yahyaoui, Founder and CEO, Mos
- Chandra Jessee, President, InMaat Foundation
- Nilofar Sakhi, Lecturer in International Affairs at the George Washington University; Afghan Peace Process
- Amy Marks Dornbusch, Director of Marks Family Foundation
- Cheryl Thomas, Executive Director, Global Rights for Women
- Gary Barker, CEO and Co-Founder, Promundo-US
- Mahnaz Afkami, Founder, President, and CEO of Women's Learning Partnership and former Minister for Women's Affairs in Iran
- Julia Drost, Chief of Staff, Population Services International (PSI)
- Yasmeen Hassan, Global Executive Director of Equality Now
- Samay Nadery, Medical specialist at International Health Centre of The Hague
- Stephanie Sinclair, Photojournalist
- Sohrab Azad, Freelance journalist, founder of Advocates for a Prosperous Afghanistan
- Sweeti Noori, Former Country Director for Afghanistan, Women for Women International
- Nooria Faizi, Employee Relations Specialist Supervisor at UC San Diego
- Maryam Faiz, Concerned Citizen
- Zakia Nadery, Concerned Citizen
- Masooma Sharifi, Concerned Citizen

- Noorjahan Akbar, Founder of Free Women Writers
- Sam Worthington, CEO of Interaction:
- Sarah Degnan Kambou, President of International Center for Research on Women
- Elisha Rhodes, CEO of YWCA

## The full letter can be found below:

### ***Urgent Call on Biden Administration: Do Not Abandon Afghan Women and Girls***

We join a growing chorus of global leaders and advocates in raising up the voices of Afghan women's rights activists who are under imminent threat, and urge the Biden administration to honor its [commitment to gender equality](#) by acting swiftly to support women who are trapped in a dire crisis.

There have been [numerous reports](#) of Taliban fighters going door-to-door in search of women's rights activists. These women fear they will be assassinated. This is consistent with their actions of killing activists in the last year and we have no reason to believe these assassinations will stop.

Immediate action must be taken to safeguard Afghan women most at risk: women's rights activists, journalists, educators, civil society leaders, human rights defenders and direct service providers. The very women who have been on the frontlines for decades, risking their safety to realize the promise of equal rights, are being abandoned by those who pledged to protect them. In the face of this mounting crisis. We are calling on the administration to immediately take four concrete steps to support Afghan women:

1. **Provide direct evacuation flights for women who are under imminent threat.** Major roadways and borders have been blocked. Emergency evacuation flights are the only viable option for targeted women's rights activists and their families. The U.S. military must remain on the ground to facilitate safe travel and entry to the airport and evacuation. The deadline must be extended until these women and their families are able to safely evacuate with the support of the U.S. military.
2. **Expand Special Immigrant Visas to include a category for at-risk women and raise the refugee cap.** Bureaucratic red tape is costing lives. The administration must accept more refugees and work with Congress to add a category to SIV visas for at-risk women. Additional staff and resources must be made available so that applications are fast-tracked.
3. **Allocate resources for livelihood assistance and resettlement.** Women and children who are able to evacuate will need urgent support. Emergency funding must be made available for resettlement.
4. **Protect and invest in women who remain in Afghanistan.** The administration must defend and bolster Afghan women's rights organizations and their leaders. We must do all we can to ensure that they can continue to provide crucial services to women and girls who will remain inside Afghanistan regardless of who governs the country.

Twenty years ago, we were told that the U.S. government's invasion of Afghanistan was justified, in part, because of the threat the Taliban posed to women and girls. That threat remains. At this very moment, women are seeking emergency shelter and assistance. They are

fleeing for their lives. Almost overnight, women's hard-earned gains of the last 20 years have vanished. We cannot stand by and watch as a humanitarian tragedy unfolds in real time. There are moments in history when we will be judged by whether or not we did the right thing. This is one of those moments.

We call on the administration to act immediately to protect and support Afghan women, and urge others to join us.

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