



**EVERY
WOMAN
TREATY**

The next step
in ending violence
against women & girls.

February 15, 2022

To: US President Joe Biden

Re: Six Months After US Withdrawal, Afghan Women Call for Global Agreement to End Violence

Dear Mr. President,

As women's rights activists from Afghanistan exactly six months after the US withdrawal, we commend you on [your commitment to eradicating violence against women and girls](#). Despite our around-the-clock advocacy since August 15, 2021, we have lost loved ones, our homeland, and fellow women's rights activists.

Our wish is for you to champion the campaign for a new global agreement on violence against women and girls.

It is hard to overstate how urgently women and girls in Afghanistan need a new global agreement on violence. [Human Rights Watch reports that women's rights rollbacks followed the Taliban's ascent](#), and on-the-ground accounts of violence are heartbreaking. In September, the Taliban attacked a women's march in Mazar-e-Sharif. Women protestors they took into custody were reportedly [severely tortured and repeatedly gang-raped](#). We have also heard of foreign terrorists coming to Afghanistan to have women as property, and of young women [shipped in coffins to neighboring countries to be used as sex slaves](#).

In the face of this staggering violence, Afghan activists continue to take to the streets and [call on the Taliban to respect women's rights](#). This bravery is breathtaking. An international framework drawing a clear line on violence against women and girls will provide activists with critical support.

A global agreement to end this violence will reflect global values. It is the best chance we have of protecting women and girls in Afghanistan.

Of all today's world leaders, you, Mr. President, are uniquely placed to champion the call for this agreement. Well before the right of every woman to be free from violence was widely recognized, you were fighting for the US Violence Against Women Act. Your subsequent work on the [International Violence Against Women Act](#) speaks to your understanding of the distinctly global nature of this issue.

Presently, the campaign for a global agreement on violence against women is gaining momentum. As the treaty-making process progresses, the Taliban will face increased international shaming, ostracization, and pariahdom if they resist recognizing women's right to be free from violence. This is especially so given the active leadership roles fellow Muslim majority countries are assuming on violence against women.

This is the only viable path to achieving the norm change and accountability essential to safeguarding women and girls in Afghanistan.

With the endorsement of the United States, other countries will come to the table, including those in the Muslim world. The Arab League has spent the past five years developing a [regional convention on](#)



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[violence against women](#), a process that has halted. Key leaders are now eyeing a global treaty as the only viable path forward. Last September, during his UN General Assembly address, Nigerian President Muhammadu Buhari became the first world leader to [call for collective global action through a treaty](#). Muslim countries' efforts indicate that the Taliban will be subject to peer pressure to change their norms on violence. Some countries are [already calling upon the Taliban to respect women's rights](#). Following a September 2021 meeting, Qatar's foreign minister stated: "[We gave them many examples of Muslim countries, including Qatar, a state with an Islamic system, where women enjoy fully their rights.](#)"

In championing this global agreement, the US will stand with other like-minded stakeholders from all over the world and endorse a campaign catalyzed by the leadership of former UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women, South African Professor of Law Rashida Manjoo. In 2012, Professor Manjoo issued a clarion call for a new agreement: "[It is time to adopt a comprehensive international convention on violence against women at the UN level.](#)" Since then, [Every Woman](#), a coalition of 1,700 women's rights activists from 128 countries, has been working to achieve a new global norm. Those coming together in support of this campaign hail from both the Global North and the Global South. Organization of American States Secretary General Luis Almagro has [endorsed Every Woman's campaign](#), and African Union Chair and Democratic Republic of the Congo President Félix Tshisekedi has issued a strident call for a new global treaty. This prevents the Taliban from being able to assert that multilateral action on violence against women represents the imposition of Western values.

Existing international legal architecture meets neither women and girls' needs nor activists' needs. [Long has it been recognized](#) that at the UN level, there is no specific, legally binding agreement on violence against women. While the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women is a strong human rights treaty to end discrimination, violence against women and girls fits poorly into its framework. The right to live free of violence should be a stand-alone human right in and of itself. Despite regional mechanisms – the Americas' Belém do Pará Convention, Africa's Maputo Protocol, and Europe's Istanbul Convention – 75% of the world's women do not have access to an instrument that is specific to violence against women and girls. Curing these legal gaps is crucial.

Nayera Koahistani, who protested at a December march in Kabul, puts things plainly: "[We want freedom, we want justice, we want human rights.](#)" **If you share her sentiment and resolve, we urge you to stand with the women and girls of Afghanistan and champion the call for a new global agreement to end violence against women and girls.**

For a complete list of signatories please contact madeline@everywoman.org. Learn more about the campaign for a treaty on violence against women via [Every Woman's website](#).