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THE FUTURE OF WOMEN LEADERS IN AFGHANISTAN

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. JEFF MILLER of Florida). Under a previous order of the House, the gentlewoman from California (Ms. MILLENDER-McDONALD) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. MILLENDER-McDONALD. Mr. Speaker, a number of my colleagues rose on the floor to speak to the critical issue of women in Afghanistan and their needs during these perilous times. As Democratic chair of the Congressional Caucus on Women's Issues, I wish to add my voice in support of their excellent intervention.

The Women's Caucus has been stressing for some time now that, in working out any transitional settlement in Afghanistan, Afghan women leaders and organizations should be at the forefront of all discussions.

We must recall, in 1977, the women of that country made up 15 percent of the legislators in their legislative body. There is no reason that their representation should be less than that today when new and far-reaching decisions on governance are being made.

In light of the fact that so many Afghan men have been killed over the past 22 years in war and conflict, Afghan women constitute 60 percent of the women's population and should be so represented accordingly.

We must work, therefore, to help restore the women's level of participation in the rebirth of Afghanistan. As they strive both inside the country and outside to contribute toward shaping a meaningful future, we must demonstrate our resolve to help those Afghan women leaders to be involved in all political and economic negotiations from the very beginning.

This is why it was distressing to note the absence of Afghan women's groups at the U.N.-sponsored conference held this past week in Bonn. They should be viewed, I believe, as principal actors in Afghan political negotiations from the outset, not as marginal leaders and players to be brought in to rubber stamp decisions.

As the Afghan journalist Jamila Mujahed pointed out in an article in Sunday's Washington Post, "This is very unfortunate that they have not invited women to join this meeting. No one has experienced such brutality against women anywhere in the world as what happened in Afghanistan. I want to go and tell everyone the things that happened to me and my colleagues these past 5 years."

Mr. Speaker, I will submit the entire article for the RECORD.

[From the Washington Post, Nov. 25, 2001]
IN TALKS ON AFGHAN FUTURE, WOMEN AREN'T
PRESENT

(By Keith B. Richburg)

KABUL, Afghanistan, Nov. 24.—In her 16 years as a professional radio broadcaster,

Jamila Mujahed has been at her microphone for some of the city's most memorable news events: the toppling of President Najibullah in 1992 and the march of Islamic holy warriors into the capital, and, four years later, the arrival of the Taliban.

So it seemed only fitting that when the Taliban fled and the Northern Alliance arrived on Nov. 13, it was Mujahed who brought Afghans the news on the evening broadcast of Radio Kabul.

Now Mujahed has another very public message, one aimed at U.N. officials and German diplomats organizing the Afghan political conference scheduled to begin in Germany on Tuesday: Open the meeting to professional women like herself, and give women a say in shaping Afghanistan's future.

"This is very unfortunate that they have not invited women to join this meeting," she said. "No one has experienced such brutality against women anywhere in the world as what happened in Afghanistan. I want to go and tell everyone the things that happened to me and my colleagues these past five years."

The meeting in Bonn is being hailed as a first step toward ending decades of civil strife and helping Afghanistan's warring factions form a truly representative and broad-based government. Representatives of several Afghan factions will try to hammer out plans for an interim government to replace the Taliban and prevent the country from descending into anarchy.

But many Afghans here—not only women, but also professionals, academics and others—are chafing at the highly restricted invitation list.

The Northern Alliance, the armed anti-Taliban faction that seized control of Kabul and about half the country during the past two weeks, is the only group from inside Afghanistan that is attending the Bonn conference. A delegation representing Afghanistan's former king, Mohammed Zahir Shah, will be attending from Rome, where he has been in exile since 1973. And two other groups that have held political talks in the past—the Peshawar Assembly for Peace, named after the Pakistani border city, and the Cyprus group—also will attend. In all, just 30 Afghans will meet to begin mapping out the country's future.

In the view of many left on the outside looking in, whatever government eventually emerges from the process will be neither representative nor broad-based. "It will be a less-than-50-percent government," said Sariya Parluka, a women's rights activist. Excluding female representatives in Bonn, she said, "is a clear human rights violation."

"This is only the gun barrel that is sending representatives," said Said Amin Mujahed, a history professor at the Academy of Social Sciences in Kabul and the husband of Jamila Mujahed. "It's not the scholars or the professionals or the other educated people in Afghanistan. It's only the war factions and King Zahir's people. It can make a government, but not a broad-based one."

The United Nations is sensitive to such criticism but says the makeup of the conference is for Afghans to decide.

At a recent news conference, U.N. special envoy Francesc Vendrell said, "This meeting will be as representative as we can make it, given the very short notice." When asked about the participation of women, he said it was up to the invited groups to include women as part of their delegations—and not up to the United Nations "to tell the Afghans who to invite."

Today, U.N. spokesman Eric Falt told reporters, "The women of Afghanistan . . . have a central role to play in the country's future." He said the Bonn meeting would demonstrate "how much our encouragement

to include women in the delegation has been listened to."

Even if women are present at the Bonn meeting, no one expects the number to come close to representing their percentage of the Afghan population. Because of the large number of men killed in two decades of war, women make up about 60 percent of Afghanistan's 26 million people, according to most estimates.

"I think women should have more of a role than men," said Faizullah Jalal, a Kabul University professor who has pressed for the inclusion of academics at the conference. "They have faced a lot of disasters in this country."

Women have long been treated as second-class citizens in this conservative Muslim country, but the Taliban stripped women of the few rights they did have. After coming to power in 1996, the radical Islamic movement prohibited women from working, banned girls from attending school and made it illegal for women to be on the streets without a male relative and without being covered head-to-toe in the traditional long, flowing veil known as a burqa. Women caught violating the rules—even allowing an ankle to accidentally show—risked a public lashing by Taliban guardians of "vice and virtue."

Just before the Taliban took over, 70 percent of Afghanistan's teachers, half of its government workers and 40 percent of its physicians were women. There were female lawyers, doctors and journalists, and women helped staff the foreign relief agencies working here.

Jamila Mujahed, now 36, was among those caught up in the Taliban's reordering of society. A journalism graduate of Kabul University and a veteran broadcaster, she was abruptly told by the Taliban that she could no longer work because of her sex.

"We were used to being very free women," she said, describing how she and her colleagues in the pre-Taliban world would remain at the station until late at night working on big stories. "How do you feel, changing to a world where you have no freedom? These five years caused a lot of psychiatric problems for me."

She stayed at home. She wrote poetry. She said she sometimes took her anger out on her children, hitting them. When she sought professional help, she said, doctors told her "the only medicine they could prescribe was going back to your job."

After facing those hardships, women like Mujahed say they deserve a place at the table in forming Afghanistan's next government.

Particularly upsetting, to the women and others, is that so many Afghan exiles will be attending the sessions while so many who stayed in Afghanistan and suffered under Taliban rule will be excluded.

"The presence of women from Afghanistan is necessary," said Parluka, the activist. "Afghan women from Western countries can just tell tales about what a bullet can do. A woman from inside the country can express it with her eyes. She can express it with her body. She can express with her voice how the war has affected her."

While it was left to the Afghani groups to decide on participation at the Bonn meeting, the U.N. agreed that the women of Afghanistan have a central role to play in putting that country back together. The future of women in Afghanistan, and ultimately the stability of any provisional settlement, will rest upon a foundation of inclusion, not exclusion.

Therefore, America, so often viewed as a beacon of freedom and human

rights throughout the world, must ensure that the rights and freedoms denied to Afghan women for so long are restored as soon as possible.

In my national address this past weekend on behalf of the Democratic Caucus, I pointed out that we must strongly support the funding for resettlement and humanitarian efforts to aid Afghan women. We are at a crossroads, Mr. Speaker, since we have reached a stage of military advantage that few of us expected to reach so quickly. We must find common ground to push ahead to support reconstruction at the same time that the military actions are being concluded.

The women Members of the House of Representatives are working with the U.N. women ambassadors and women's NGOs toward this purpose. We will continue to hold meetings and briefings to give public exposure to all of the concerns I mentioned above. Several of us, as I did on November 15, have introduced bills to authorize the provision of educational and health care assistance to women and children of Afghanistan. My bill, H.R. 3304, has been referred to the Committee on International Relations and awaits a full hearing.

Let me say emphatically, we cannot afford to exclude more than half of Afghanistan's population in helping to bring about an interim settlement and peaceful resolution to this troubled country. Afghan women must be assured of their basic human rights once more; to gain access to safe drinking water and sufficient food; to receive decent health and maternal care; and foremost, to again move freely in their society without being subjected to harassment and abuse. Above all, they must be allowed to practice their religious beliefs as Islamic women, veiled or unveiled, without retribution.

I urge all of us to help these women in Afghanistan regain the basic freedom and freedoms we so cherish as a people. I urge us as Members of the House to join together to forge a comprehensive package of assistance that can help achieve the important objectives being sought by Afghans for goodwill everywhere.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, there is an old African saying that women hold up half of the sky. We must do our utmost, therefore, to ensure that the women of Afghanistan resume their part of this equation and help hold up half of the sky. To do less would imperil all of us in the pursuit of democratic governance and the well-being of a global community. Helping Afghan women to regain their rightful place of national life is one of the best ways I know to combat terrorism in Afghanistan, and on behalf of the American women and people of America, let us begin the rebuilding today.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. LATOURETTE) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. LATOURETTE addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

THE PLIGHT OF AFGHANISTAN WOMEN AND CHILDREN

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Texas (Ms. JACKSON-LEE) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. JACKSON-LEE. Mr. Speaker, first, I would like to say to the gentleman from California (Ms. MILLENDER-MCDONALD) and the co-chair of the Women's Caucus, let me thank her for her leadership and for her outstanding commitment, on behalf of the women, to the women of Afghanistan. I would like to associate myself with her remarks, in particular to acknowledge the Women's Caucus, and to make note of the gentlewoman from California (Ms. SOLIS) who I joined just about 2 weeks ago on a briefing on Afghanistan women and children. So I rise today to add to that discussion.

I will need to also assess the status of children of Afghanistan and to be able to lift up the women, so as we lift the women, we lift the children. We are finding that the children of Afghanistan are working at ages 7 and 8, providing for their families, making 50 cents a day building bricks. Those children do not have an opportunity to go to school, and obviously, under the Taliban regime, the girls were particularly discriminated against, but the boys and the girls found themselves building bricks every day to help support their family. The incomes of the families is so far below poverty of any kind that we would ever recognize. The Afghan children are put to work at a very early age, some 4 and 5, 6 and 7 and 8 years old.

I look forward in the future weeks to hold a briefing on the treatment of the children in Afghanistan. It is particularly important as we face a very troubling scenario on the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan; millions of refugees with no place to go; United Nations fighting to provide food and, as well, comfort to those families who are displaced.

It is now time, I believe, for the United States Government in its victory to now begin to establish an exit strategy, an exit strategy out of Afghanistan, but also a response to how we bring back to life this country that is so destroyed. How do we restore the rights of families, of women, of children? How do we restore the economy? How do we find a place for refugees who are now caught between two borders? How do we find relief and harmony between the governments or at least the to-be-established government of Afghanistan and as well Pakistan?

It is extremely important that as we look to rebuild that we look to the children and we look to the families. It is also extremely important that rather than look to Iraq as the next stop of

our efforts, we should look to an exit strategy and peace.

As we relate to unfinished business, let me briefly say, Mr. Speaker, there is work that this Congress still needs to do. I participated, as many did, in the debate on the floor of the House today in the defense appropriations and the emergency supplemental bill, and I just want to again restate that, until we become proactive, we are not truly fighting terrorism at home.

I am very disappointed that the Obey amendment did not pass, and I emphasize two particular aspects of that, that is, our public health system. Shortly after the September 11 attack, I went home to Houston and met with our emergency responders, the first responders, but particularly our hospitals and public clinics and particularly our public hospital system, already, if you will, bending under the pressure. More importantly, a system that already needed funding; without funding, without funding to address any kind of mass attack that requires the health system to rise to the occasion. No funds were given to that system today.

Not enough funds were given to secure our border, the Canadian border, one of the largest borders, and the southern border. No funds were given to provide enough support for customs inspectors, more border patrol agents. An issue that I am particularly concerned about, the ability of individuals to come across the border with infectious diseases like smallpox, no sufficient number of health inspectors to assist us in that effort. Our work is not done.

Tomorrow, it is proposed that we will be dealing with or we were supposed to be dealing with the Anti-Terrorism Risk Act. Here we are looking again to help industry, and yet we still are not helping the unemployed. Unemployed individuals are growing in numbers. We are in a recession, and yet this Congress has refused to pass legislation to help those unemployed individuals.

Again, in my hometown we are fighting a very difficult and very challenging economic time, and that is, the situation occurring with Enron in the 18th Congressional District. There are many issues dealing with Enron I realize, and I hope that we can retain that company in our community, but the most important issue are the numbers of laid-off employees that we may be facing. We have got to address the unemployment and the recession as it impacts the unemployed in this Nation.

This Congress has unfinished business. It is time for us again to act. It is time for us now, if we want to use the terminology, let us bail out the working men and women of America. Let us finish our unfinished work.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Florida (Mr. DEUTSCH) is recognized for 5 minutes.