



December 22, 2022

The Honorable Antony Blinken
Secretary of State
Washington, DC 20520
VIA EMAIL

Dear Secretary Blinken:

I write to thank you for your December 20, 2022, statement, Standing with Afghanistan's Women and Girls, and to urge you to take action with the intent to allow Afghan women more opportunity to study in the United States.

NAFSA: Association of International Educators agrees with your condemnation in the "strongest terms the Taliban's indefensible decision to ban women from universities" and exclude girls from secondary schools. You assert that "education is a human right" and that the United States will "continue to provide robust support to the Afghan people, including women and girls, seek to meet their humanitarian needs, and organize with allies and partners to collectively advocate for their rights."

In this context, standing with Afghan women requires the State Department to reexamine policies or practices standing in the way of opportunities for them to study in the United States. The recent Taliban announcement adds to pre-existing challenges. Women and men who fled Afghanistan during the U.S. and allied troop withdrawals in August 2021, have been admitted to U.S. higher education institutions, and can prove they can pay for that education are being denied F visas at some consular posts around the world because they cannot prove they have residency in Afghanistan. Now after this Taliban announcement banning education for women, Afghan women may face an additional hurdle of convincing consular officers that they intend to leave the United States at the completion of their studies when there are few opportunities for them in Afghanistan and the Taliban does not believe they should have received that education.

I urge you to act on your promise to Afghan women and girls by providing guidance to consular officers to recognize that Afghan women and men remain eligible for F foreign student status even if they are displaced. Please remind consular officials that the Foreign Affairs Manual (at 9 FAM 4025-5(E)(1)) instructs officers to view the foreign student visa applicants with flexibility and that an intent to depart the United States at the completion of studies does not require the intent to return to the country from which they hold a passport. In addition, please quickly announce the creation and implementation of a new student refugee status to address the crisis Afghan women and other refugees are urgently facing. Refugees who have the educational background to study in the United States need

additional support. A student refugee program would allow for these students to receive the education they deserve while receiving the support they need to be successful.

I also urge you to work closely with members of Congress to ensure changes in immigration law are made to address the current and future needs of the United States to welcome international students.

If education is a human right and the U.S. is standing with Afghan women and girls, the United States must provide a meaningful avenue for Afghan women to receive student visas to travel to the United States to begin and continue studies. Far too often, we have seen generations of young people who begin higher education only to have those studies be interrupted temporarily or permanently by acts of governmental aggression, war, or oppression. The U.S. government can and should take action now to ensure that this cycle does not continue with the Afghan women of today.

Thank you for your commitment to improving opportunities for Afghan women in the wake of the disturbing announcement made by the Taliban and for your consideration of NAFSA's recommendations. Please reach out to Jill Allen Murray, Deputy Executive Director, Public Policy at jill.allen.murray@nafsa.org should you have any questions or need our assistance.

Sincerely,

Esther D. Brimmer, DPhil
Executive Director and CEO
NAFSA: Association of International Educators