

January 26, 2021

Mr. Rob Fairweather

Office of Management and Budget

Executive Office of the President

725 17th Street, NW

Washington, DC 20503

Dear Mr. Fairweather,

We, the undersigned organizations, are writing to respectfully urge you to protect and increase investments in gender equality around the globe in the coming year with a strong FY 2022 funding request. We believe that robust funding for gender programming that is strategic, coordinated, and easy to track, monitor, and evaluate, will increase the effectiveness of U.S. assistance dollars.

A conclusive body of research and experience has shown that when women and girls are meaningfully included in all aspects of decision-making, countries are more likely to be peaceful and prosper economically. As such – even as we face tremendous fiscal challenges - American investments to advance the political, economic, and social status of women and girls is an essential component of our efforts to promote global stability and strengthen our national security. It is also critical to our efforts to promote U.S. global leadership, economic growth around the world, peaceful transitions of power, countering violent extremism, and more. Investing and promoting the empowerment, health and human rights of women and girls supports our broader development goals, including women's increased access to education, employment, and entrepreneurial opportunities, as well as creating a healthier, more sustainable environment.

We urge you to request funding to support the U.S.'s return to global leadership on gender equality. However, such investments in addressing gender equality, gender-based violence, women's leadership, women's health, women, peace and security, and child, early and forced marriage should not come at the expense of other poverty fighting, anti-human trafficking, global health, and humanitarian assistance accounts.

The COVID-19 pandemic did not discriminate against any of its victims and touched the lives of all irrespective of gender, race, ethnicity, and economic standing. However it also served as a canary in a mineshaft, alerting governments and communities to how a humanitarian crisis impacts more severely those in already weakened and disenfranchised positions. The U.S. government in 2021 will face many pressing priorities as it seeks to undo the harm of governmental neglect of initiatives related to gender equality and address the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, but it also has the opportunity not just to re-establish U.S. commitments to elevate the status of women but to offer a bold, progressive vision for removing obstacles to equality globally. Over the past 6 years, as a community we have sounded the alarm and yet seen that the budget request attributed to gender has steadily declined since 2014, from \$1.9 billion in FY 2014, to \$1.8 billion in FY 2015, to \$1.7 billion in FY 2016, to \$1.3 billion in FY 2017, and most recently \$874.6 million in FY 2021. This decline in commitment of resources is

happening despite the continuous and persistent assault on the rights and opportunities of women and girls worldwide; 62 million girls are not in school today, approximately 70% of the 1 billion poorest people in the world are female; 14 million girls are married before the age of 18 each year; 1 in 3 women worldwide will experience gender-based violence in her lifetime; and even though war, violent extremism, and the numbers of refugees and displaced individuals is at an all-time high only 9% of negotiators and 4% of signatories at official peace talks are women. The global cost of violence against women had previously been estimated at approximately 1.5 trillion. That figure can only be rising as violence increases now, and continues in the aftermath of the pandemic.

As such, we urge you to at a minimum use the \$1.9 billion 2014 Congressional Budget Justification (CBJ) including inflation adjustment that would be about \$2.1 billion in 2020 dollars, with a clear delineation of intended programmatic usage. Additionally, the Administration should commit to 100 percent of U.S. international funding incorporating gender and social inclusion in project design, implementation, and evaluation (i.e., be “gender mainstreamed”), and further commit to a benchmark of 20 percent of U.S. international funding having gender equality as a primary objective. This funding and subsequent supported projects and initiatives would cut across all sectors and areas of foreign policy (e.g., trade, migration, defense) to ensure that all of US foreign policy addresses gender inequalities and different needs, perspectives, and challenges faced by people of different genders.

We urge you to consider the wide-ranging impact that investments in women and girls have over entire communities and would like to make the following requests:

1. **GENDER EQUALITY** - We request a minimum of \$2,100,000,000 in FY22 to promote gender equality in United States Government diplomatic, development and humanitarian efforts by raising the status, increasing the participation, advancing economic empowerment, and protecting the health and rights of women and girls worldwide. This should be combined with a commitment to scale up funding.
  - a. The CBJ category “*Gender Equality/Women’s Empowerment-Primary*”, should be updated to include a commitment to be scaled up to 20% of international funding by 2025.
  - b. The CBJ category “*Gender Equality/Women’s Empowerment-Secondary*” should be updated to also include that “all activities should integrate gender” and include a commitment to mainstream gender in all projects by 2025 so that 100 percent of funding qualifies to at least be counted as gender equality secondary.”

An additional category should also be added for funds to feminist and women’s rights organizations. At a minimum, the FY22 request for this new category should be \$270 million, and should be scaled up in subsequent years.

The Biden-Harris Administration should also return to having gender equality as a priority issue that is specifically highlighted in its budget request as it was in 2016.

The Biden-Harris Administration in its first year should invest in building the internal capacity and infrastructure to make this effort effective. **The Administration should request dedicated funding for additional administrative/operating expenses for training for all staff across programs, sectors, offices, and functional staff (like contracting officers and procurement teams) and also for increased staff with gender expertise.** This will lay the foundation to enable teams to integrate and target gender more holistically, with accountability mechanisms to ensure the goal of 100 percent

of foreign assistance integrating gender can realistically be met. The following figures are rough estimates and may need to be adjusted based on the needs of each agency and expanded to all relevant agencies as needed.

1. USAID Operating Expenses: an additional \$15 million for additional gender training and staff.
  2. MCC Administrative Expenses: \$2 million for additional gender training and staff with expertise in gender.
  3. US DFC Administrative Expenses: an additional \$3 million for additional gender training and staff.
  4. State Department Administration of Foreign Affairs: Funds for additional gender experts, training and for a review of current gender experts within the State Department, including an assessment across offices and bureaus, noting whether gender expertise is the core competency of staff or one of many job functions.
  5. Department of Treasury International Affairs Technical Assistance: an additional \$500 thousand for additional gender training and staff.
  6. International Trade Assistance (ITA) and the United States Trade Representative (USTR) -- While not under this budget request, is a key area to address this work: Funds for a review of current gender experts within the ITA and USTR, including an assessment across the institutions, noting whether gender expertise is the core competency of staff or one of many job functions and include a commitment to request funds in the FY23 budget consistent with the findings of such a review.
2. **GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE** - We request the establishment of a GBV Global Fund of no less than \$380 million to support efforts to prevent and respond to gender-based violence worldwide. This GBV Global Fund should build upon existing investments, including implementation of the interagency U.S. Strategy to Prevent and Respond to GBV Globally (\$250 million); launch of a new interagency Presidential Task Force on GBV Globally (\$70 million); activities to end child, early, and forced marriage (\$30 million); and contributions to the [UNICEF-UNFPA Joint Program](#) on Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C) (\$5 million). In addition, given the dramatic increase of GBV as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, we urge the Administration to request no less than \$25 million to support the global response to the rise in violence against women and girls during the pandemic. Across these activities should be a commitment to dedicate no less than \$140 million to programs addressing GBV in humanitarian crises, particularly through the [Safe from the Start](#) program at the State Department and USAID.
- **GBV/COVID (new)** – We request that no less than \$25 million be dedicated to support the global response to the rise in violence against women and girls during the pandemic. [UNFPA estimates](#) that for every three months the lockdown continues, an additional 15 million reports of GBV can be expected. The UN Trust Fund to End Violence Against Women’s (UNTF EVAW) [initial assessment](#) (May 2020) and [second assessment](#) six months into the crisis, showed that the

continued economic insecurity and movement restrictions are still driving increased violence against women and girls. This study highlights the urgent need to resource support services for survivors of violence provided by CSOs and women's rights organizations (WROs) that are on the front line of community responses. These funds should include a commitment to support the UNTF EVAW work as it is the only global grant-making mechanism that is dedicated exclusively to addressing all forms of violence against women and girls. The Fund is managed by UN Women on behalf of the UN System.

- **GBV Presidential Task Force (new)** -- We request no less than \$70 million to establish an interagency Presidential Task Force for GBV Globally (PTF). The purpose of this PTF will be to support the review and update of the U.S. Strategy to Prevent and Respond to GBV Globally, which was most recently updated in 2016, and coordinate the development and execution of new agency-level action plans to implement the revised strategy. The \$70 million requested should support this work, offering additional resources for operating expenses to build the internal structures and capacity of USG agencies to effectively address GBV – including increased training, hiring of additional personnel with GBV expertise to provide technical assistance, and stronger accountability through improved monitoring/evaluation/learning and reporting functions.
- **Child, Early, Forced Marriage (increase)** - We request no less than \$30 million be dedicated to the implementation of a coordinated and comprehensive effort to end child marriage and meet the needs of married girls globally in alignment with the United States Strategy to Empower Adolescent Girls. This represents an **INCREASE** from the \$15 million enacted in FY21. This number is based on a 2012 CBO score, estimating the cost to implement the International Protecting Girls by Preventing Child Marriage Act, and on increased need due to COVID-19. These funds should include a new commitment to the U.S. commitment to the joint UNICEF/UNFPA Global Program to End Child Marriage, which has generated remarkable results addressing child marriage in 12 of the most high-prevalence or high-burden countries.

**Justification:** Gender-based violence (GBV) broadly, and violence against women and girls (VAWG) specifically, is a horrific and widespread human rights abuse that requires a robust response. GBV and VAWG occurs in many forms, including intimate partner violence; child, early, and forced marriage; rape; sexual assault; trafficking; female genital mutilation/cutting; and so-called “honor” killings. These violations occur both in times of peace and during humanitarian crises. Such violence is also an early warning sign of instability and violent conflict. GBV is a critical impediment to the personal safety, economic empowerment, and long-term well-being of people around the world, particularly women and girls who often bear the brunt of such violence. This issue also has grave impacts on the peace, prosperity, and security of communities and nations. In 2016, the [global cost of violence against women](#) was estimated by the UN to be \$1.5 trillion, equivalent to approximately 2% of the global gross domestic product (GDP), or roughly the size of the entire Canadian economy.

In humanitarian emergencies, women and girls face an increased risk of GBV – 1 in 5 women report experiencing sexual violence in crises, with many more facing domestic violence ([sometimes up to 65%](#) of women in certain contexts), child marriage, and human

trafficking during displacement. Despite the critical need to address this issue, GBV funding accounted for just [0.12 per cent](#) of all humanitarian funding – which represents only one-third of funding requested for GBV.

The COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated already high rates of gender-based violence globally. UNFPA estimates an additional 30 million cases of GBV and 13 million child marriages will occur between 2020 and 2030.

- 3. WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT** - We request no less than \$350,000,000 for all activities that foster women's economic empowerment. This budget request includes funding for the Women's Economic Empowerment Fund (the [Women's Global Development and Prosperity Initiative](#) in the previous administration) (\$200 million), previous U.S. Government contributions to the We-Fi Initiative (\$50 million), and implementation of the Women's Entrepreneurship and Economic Empowerment Act of 2018 (\$100 million). Investment in programs that strengthen women's access to employment opportunities, support entrepreneurship, create market linkages, and break down barriers to women's participation in the economy creates far-reaching benefits. Studies show that women reinvest up to 90 percent of their incomes back into their families. Yet, women still hold fewer assets, earn less, and own fewer businesses than men. Programs focused on addressing the full range of factors that hold women back and perpetuate inequality are key to ending poverty and creating vibrant economies and communities. This includes investments in addressing critical barriers to women's engagement in economic activity, including gender-based violence, disproportionate unpaid care burdens, and poor access to quality and comprehensive health services. High-level members of the Administration have made numerous statements supporting women's economic empowerment as an issue area; it is critical that all new and existing efforts, including government-wide initiatives and legislation, are fully funded with new resources.

The U.S. International Development Finance Corporation (DFC) should continue to scale up finance for women owned and led businesses and increase economic opportunities for women through their 2x initiative. The Biden-Harris administration should set a goal of 50% of the DFC's portfolio achieving this criteria as women make up 50% of the population. There need to be funds set aside from the program account to ensure that this work can continue. Additionally, the impact of COVID-19 on women in the economy should influence project decisions.

- 4. ADOLESCENT GIRLS' EMPOWERMENT** - We request \$250,000,000 dollars for the coordination and implementation of the [U.S. Global Strategy to Empower Adolescent Girls](#). A 2017 Task Force convened by the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), which included bipartisan Members of Congress and development experts, recommended funding these kinds of activities at \$250,000,000 annually.

**Justification:** The first-ever strategy of its kind, of any government, the Girl Strategy outlines a comprehensive U.S. government approach to agency-specific responses to educate and empower adolescent girls, as well as mechanisms for inter and intra-agency coordination to harness the full power of the U.S. government and avoid duplication of efforts. The Strategy fulfilled a requirement from the 2013 Violence Against Women Act reauthorization.

Furthermore, the FY 2022 Congressional Budget Justification should enumerate what activities the Department of State and USAID have already undertaken in their agencies with regard to adolescent girls, including diplomatic efforts and programmatic efforts including but not limited to enhancing access to education, providing economic opportunities, promoting access to comprehensive health information and services, and combatting harmful practices, including gender-based violence, female genital mutilation/cutting, and child marriage. They should also further articulate the coordinated, comprehensive, and specific goals and objectives as to how their agencies aim to address the specific challenge of child marriage in their diplomatic or development engagements, including developing, implementing and measuring new or expanded efforts.

5. **WOMEN, PEACE, AND SECURITY** - We request that no less than \$190,500,000 be made available to support the implementation of the Women, Peace, and Security Act of 2017, the [U.S. Strategy on Women, Peace, and Security](#), released in June 2019, and its [implementation plans](#) for the U.S. [Department of State](#), [Department of Defense](#), [Department of Homeland Security](#), and [USAID](#), released in June 2020, to expand, and improve coordination of, U.S. Government efforts to empower women as equal partners in conflict prevention, management, and resolution, as well peacebuilding, transitional processes, and relief and reconstruction efforts in countries affected by conflict, crisis, or political transition, as well as to ensure the equitable provision of relief and recovery assistance to women and girls. In addition to programming, capacity-building, and technical assistance, the U.S. should train U.S. military, diplomatic, development, and other relevant staff, contractors, and grantees, as well as partner governments and militaries, on how the inclusion of women increases the effectiveness of security-related policies, programs, and outcomes, as well as on the specific laws, policies, and programming available to enhance women's participation in all spheres of life. The establishment of senior-level gender advisors will improve conflict prevention, management, and resolution efforts by promoting women's contributions to security, through attention at both the policy and operational levels, and strengthen the U.S. Government's ability to effectively and holistically counter adversaries, promote stability, and provide relief in conflict- and crisis-affected areas of the world. Any and all programming must also include reporting requirements, such as indicators, outcomes, analysis, and the collection of sex-disaggregated data, which will serve to identify and address barriers to women's meaningful participation in the prevention, management, and resolution of conflict, as well as peacebuilding efforts, training, and programs.

**Justification:** As the women, peace, and security (WPS) agenda is now enshrined in U.S. law and policy, and linked to the broader National Security Strategy, appropriate budget support is critical to the promotion and sustainment of peace and democracy and the achievement of U.S. foreign policy and national security objectives.

- \$54,000,000 for the Department of Defense for full implementation of the WPS Act, the U.S. National Strategy on WPS, and the FY21 National Defense Authorization Act, including staffing, programming, research, and training.

- This should include resources for hiring and training full-time equivalent personnel as full-time gender advisors to bolster WPS efforts in the Department of Defense within the six geographic combatant commands, Special Operations Command, Office of the Secretary of Defense, Joint Staff, Defense Security Cooperation Agency, Cyber Command, Transportation Command, Strategic Command, and Space Command.
  - This should also include resources for department-wide training to ensure officials understand how the inclusion of women increases the effectiveness of security-related policies and programs, and specific steps that they can take to promote women's participation.
  - Furthermore, this should include at least \$9,000,000 to support WPS-related security cooperation and partner capacity-building efforts at the Department of Defense. Such support would facilitate implementation of the WPS Act and of the FY21 National Defense Authorization Act by funding the participation of female forces and the integration of gender perspectives in annual training, education, exercises, and engagements. Including women in international security forces advances the primary purpose of U.S. security assistance—making these forces better and stronger and improving our national security. The U.S. should train its partner militaries on how including women improves security outcomes, and specific steps that they can take to promote women's participation.
- \$54,000,000 for the Department of State for full implementation of the WPS Act and the U.S. National Strategy on WPS, including staffing, programming, research, and training. This should include resources for hiring and training full-time equivalent personnel as full-time gender advisors to bolster WPS efforts in the Department of State, in addition to department-wide training to ensure officials understand how the inclusion of women increases the effectiveness of security-related policies and programs, and specific steps that they can take to promote women's participation.
  - \$54,000,000 for USAID for full implementation of the WPS Act and the U.S. National Strategy on WPS, including staffing, programming, research, and training. This should include resources for hiring and training full-time equivalent personnel as full-time gender advisors to bolster WPS efforts in USAID, in addition to agency-wide training to ensure officials understand how the inclusion of women increases the effectiveness of security-related policies and programs, and specific steps that they can take to promote women's participation.
  - \$24,000,000 for implementation of the WPS Act, including staffing, programming, research, and training. This should include resources for hiring and training full-time equivalent personnel as full-time gender advisors to bolster WPS efforts in the Department of Homeland Security, in addition to department-wide training to ensure officials understand how the inclusion of women increases the effectiveness of security-related policies and programs, and specific steps that they can take to promote women's participation.
  - \$4,500,000 to support State, USAID, DOD, and DHS in conducting coordinated research on the impact of WPS principles on the effectiveness of peace and security-related policies and programs.

6. **WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP** - We request no less than \$50,000,000 to increase leadership opportunities for women in countries where women and girls suffer discrimination due to law, policy, or practice, by strengthening protections for women's political status, expanding women's participation in political parties and elections, and increasing women's opportunities for leadership positions in the public and private sectors at the local, provincial, and national levels.
  
7. **WOMEN AND GIRLS AT RISK OF VIOLENT EXTREMISM** – We request not less than \$19,000,000 be made available to support and engage women and girls who are at risk from extremism and conflict and help with the implementation of the [US Strategy to Support Women and Girls at Risk from Violent Extremism](#) and Conflict released publicly in October 2018. This State Department and USAID strategy seeks to “limit the destabilizing effects of violent extremism, including the risks it poses to women and girls, by supporting women and girls as actors in countering terrorist ideology to prevent terrorist radicalization in their families, communities, countries, and online.

**Justification:** An analysis of thirty countries across the Middle East, North Africa and South Asia found that women were substantially more likely than men to be early victims of extremism. Some violent extremist groups use women and girls as a form of currency in a shadow economy, generating revenue from sex trafficking, sexual slavery, and extortion through ransom. According to New America’s research, one-third of individuals associated with jihadist-inspired violence inside the United States had a record of domestic abuse or other sexual violence. Extremist groups don’t only benefit from subjugating women; they also recruit them to act as informants, facilitators, recruiters, and martyrs. In fact, many extremist groups have made a concerted effort to recruit women to their ranks. Some women are motivated by ideological commitment, similar to potential male fighters. Others join in hopes of gaining freedoms and access to resources.

The U.S. government should increase resources to facilitate women’s involvement in efforts to counter terrorism and violent extremism. To address drivers of recruitment, the State Department and USAID should invest in programs to expand gender equality, including women’s access to resources. Department of Defense, the State Department, and USAID should invest in women’s roles to counter terrorism and violent extremism. This includes through prevention-related funds, but also security funds, such as antiterrorism and law enforcement programs. It is also important to make it easier for proponents of women’s involvement in deradicalization efforts to access funding—whether in militaries, police, government, or civil society.

8. **OFFICE OF GLOBAL WOMEN’S ISSUES – U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE** – We request that no less than \$20,000,000 be made available to support the programming of the [Office of Global Women’s Issues](#). The Office ensures that gender equality, including the rights of women and girls, are fully integrated into U.S. foreign policy and programming. These efforts are crucial to ensuring U.S. leadership on gender equality.

**Justification:** Additional funds requested for the Office of Global Women’s Issues reflects the need for supplementary resources arising from a growing body of work the office has taken on in the past four years.

9. **TRACKING EXPENDITURES** - The progress that has been made in tracking US investments in gender programming has not been matched by a systematic tracking of obligations and expenditures. This has inhibited the ability of both advocates and policymakers to accurately assess where and how funds have been used. We strongly suggest including funding in the budget to ensure that financial expenditure tracking systems at the Department of State and USAID are funded and include an explicit focus on gender expenditures in US-funded foreign operations.
10. **GENDER ANALYSIS & DATA DISAGGREGATION** – We request no less than \$15 million be made available to USAID for operating expenses to adequately implement its gender analysis requirement (Sec. 3 of the Women’s Entrepreneurship and Economic Empowerment Act) so that gender equality and female empowerment are integrated throughout the Agency’s program cycle and related processes for purposes of strategic planning, project design and implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. The US government must ensure that all strategies, projects and activities are informed by gender analyses that identify, understand, and explain differences in status between genders, the influence of gender roles, structural barriers, and norms and the differing impacts of development efforts on women and men. Additionally, the U.S. should make significant investments in data disaggregation by sex and age to assess the impact of development assistance on women and girls.
11. **OTHER REQUESTS** – In addition to the priority requests outlined above, the signatories recommend support for other gender-related issues and programs, such as sexual and reproductive health and rights, including bilateral family planning programs and the U.S. contribution to UNFPA, the leading multilateral provider of maternal and reproductive health and GBV services; maternal, newborn, and child health programs; the DREAMS partnership to reduce HIV/AIDS in adolescent girls and young women; and prevention of discrimination and abuse of LGBTI individuals abroad.

We understand you face difficult budget choices and there are many priorities you must consider, but our nation must be a leader in providing these essential resources. We look forward to working with you and with Congress to secure the funding necessary to advance gender equality, which will not only support millions of women and girls, but will in turn promote sustainable development, strengthen national security, and reduce poverty around the world.

Sincerely,

Supporting Organizations

1. Alliance for Peacebuilding
2. American Jewish World Service
3. Amnesty International USA
4. Capital Sisters International
5. CARE USA
6. Center for Civil Society and Democracy in Syria
7. ChildFund
8. Clearinghouse on Women's Issues
9. Double Hope Films
10. Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
11. Faiths for Safe Water
12. Futures Without Violence
13. Girl Rising
14. Global Communities and PCI, a Global Communities Partner
15. Global Rights for Women
16. Global Woman P.E.A.C.E. Foundation
17. Global Women's Institute
18. GreeneWorks
19. Institute of World Affairs
20. International Action Network for Gender Equity & Law (IANGEL)
21. International Center for Research on Women (ICRW)
22. International Civil Society Action Network (ICAN)
23. International Rescue Committee
24. Jewish Women International
25. John Snow, Inc.
26. Just Like My Child Foundation
27. Last Mile4D
28. Milaan Foundation
29. National Alliance to End Sexual Violence
30. National Coalition Against Domestic Violence
31. National Resource Center on Domestic Violence
32. North American MenEngage Network
33. Our Secure Future – One Earth Future Foundation
34. Peace Direct
35. Population Institute
36. Promundo-US
37. Restless Development
38. Saferworld
39. Save the Children
40. Sukaar Welfare Organization
41. The Episcopal Church
42. The Hunger Project
43. The WomanStats Project

44. Together for Girls
45. Too Young to Wed
46. UNICEF USA
47. Union for Reform Judaism
48. Vital Voices
49. Women for Afghan Women
50. Women for Women International
51. Women Graduates USA
52. Women In International Security (WIIS)
53. Women Watch Africa
54. Women's Action for New Directions (WAND)
55. Women's Environment & Development Organization (WEDO)
56. Women's Justice Initiative
57. Women's Learning Partnership (WLP)
58. Women's Refugee Commission
59. Women's Regional Network: Afghanistan, Pakistan and India
60. World Education, Inc.
61. Zonta International