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## The Status of Women is the Status of Democracy: Advancing Women's Political and Civic Participation and Leadership at the Second Summit for Democracy

As Vice President Harris has said, “the status of women is the status of democracy.” The ability of women and girls to participate safely, freely, and equally in political life and in society is a defining feature of democracy, but this hard-won progress is increasingly fragile. Wherever women and girls are under threat, so, too, is democracy, peace, and stability—from Iran, where women are courageously demanding respect for their human rights and fundamental freedoms in the face of oppression; to Ukraine, where we are once more seeing rape used as a weapon in Russia's brutal and unjust war; to Afghanistan, where the Taliban bars women and girls from attending school and fully participating in society.

As we face unprecedented global challenges, we must harness the full potential, participation, and leadership of women and girls. In hosting the second Summit for Democracy, the Biden-Harris Administration is committed to advancing women's political and civic participation and leadership and ensuring that they are at every table where decisions are being made. Research shows that the status of women and the stability of nations are inextricably linked, and that societies that foster gender discrimination and allow oppressive gender norms to flourish are more likely to be unstable.

Today, at the second Summit for Democracy, the Biden-Harris Administration is highlighting key actions and progress made during the intervening Year of Action.

Accelerating Women's and Girls' Civic and Political Leadership under the Presidential Initiative for Democratic Renewal. At the first Summit, President Biden established the Presidential Initiative for Democratic Renewal, a landmark set of policy and foreign assistance initiatives that increase the Administration's ongoing work to bolster democracy and defend human rights globally. Today, we are building on those efforts by:

- Expanding the Advancing Women's and Girls' Civic and Political Leadership Initiative, including in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East. Announced at the first Summit for Democracy, this USAID-led initiative works to dismantle barriers to the political empowerment of women and girls by building the pipeline of women leaders and facilitating their safe and meaningful participation in political, peacebuilding and transition processes. This initiative will expand efforts to prevent and mitigate violence against women in politics and public life. USAID is providing more than \$15 million to this initiative and is beginning program implementation in eight focus countries: Côte d'Ivoire, Nigeria, Tanzania, Colombia, Ecuador, Honduras, Kyrgyz Republic, and Yemen.

- Establishing the Network for Gender Inclusive Democracy: USAID is launching a Network for Gender Inclusive Democracy (Network) to provide strategic direction and a platform for bilateral donors, intergovernmental institutions, civil society and academic partners to align their multilateral and country-level efforts in support of women's political and civic participation and leadership. The Network will facilitate coordination, knowledge-sharing, and policy advocacy and carry forward the work of the Cohort on Gender Equality as a Prerequisite for Democracy, including the policy recommendations and roadmap developed during the Year of Action.
- Investing in SHE PERSISTS (Supporting Her Empowerment: Political Engagement, Rights, Safety, and Inclusion Strategies to Succeed). The State Department will invest \$2 million over this year in support of SHE PERSISTS, an initiative announced at the first Summit for Democracy that bolsters women's political participation and empowerment to build and sustain good governance and lasting democracy globally. This multi-year program provides funding for technical assistance to advance women's safety, political participation and empowerment, and initiatives for inclusive democracy, with a focus on diverse groups and marginalized populations.

Advancing Women's Involvement in Peace and Security Efforts. Women's participation in peace and security processes—as peacekeepers, leaders, and members of the defense and security sector—is essential to global security, stability and democracy. To advance women's meaningful participation, the Biden-Harris Administration has taken the following actions:

- Investing in SHE WINS (Support Her Empowerment: Women's Inclusion for New Security): The Department of State is investing an additional \$1.7 million, working with Congress and subject to the availability of funds, for the SHE WINS [initiative](#), a nearly \$10 million program that advances the leadership of local women and women-led civil society organizations to address peace and security challenges in their communities. Since the first Summit for Democracy, SHE WINS has initiated projects in Cameroon, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Papua New Guinea, Uzbekistan, and Yemen. To provide agile, easy-to-access funds that directly support women-led groups facing emerging crises and challenges related to Women, Peace, and Security (WPS), the State Department launched the SHE WINS Rapid Response Fund in November 2022.
- Co-Chairing the Women, Peace, and Security Focal Points Network. The United States, in partnership with the government of Romania, is the 2023 Co-Chair of the UN Women-led Women, Peace, and Security Focal Points Network (WPS-FPN), a cross-regional forum coordinated by UN Women to share best practices and experiences to advance WPS globally. As co-chair, the U.S. will host the WPS-FPN Capital Level Meeting in June 2023, bringing together representatives and leaders from over 95 different countries and organizations, including members of Congress and the Administration.
- Reducing Gaps for Women's Participation in Security Forces: In consultation with the Department of State, the Department of Defense is establishing a pilot program to conduct an assessment of opportunities for women's involvement in the security forces of select partner nations. Through this multi-year program, the Department of Defense intends to standardize the way it assesses barriers to women's participation in partner

nation security forces, in order to inform future security cooperation activities.

The Global Partnership for Action on Gender-Based Online Harassment and Abuse (Global Partnership). A commitment from the first Summit for Democracy and launched at the 66<sup>th</sup> United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, the [Global Partnership](#), which currently has 12 participating governments, brings together international organizations, civil society, and the private sector to prioritize, understand, prevent, and address the growing scourge of technology-facilitated gender-based violence, which disproportionately impacts women and LGBTQI+ political and public figures, leaders, journalists and activists.

Today, alongside the release of the Global Partnership's [2023 Roadmap](#), the Biden-Harris Administration is announcing key actions and investments to prevent and respond to technology-facilitated gender-based violence and counter its chilling effects on women leaders and democratic participation, including more than \$13 million in targeted funding across USAID and the Department of State. Key actions include:

- Combatting technology-facilitated violence targeting women in politics and public life, including gendered disinformation.
  - *Transform Digital Spaces Initiative (Transform)*. USAID is launching Transform, with planned investments of up to \$6 million over three years, to prevent and address technology-facilitated gender-based violence, especially violence perpetrated against women in politics and public life. Transform's pilot projects across three countries will integrate expertise from women-led civil society organizations working to address gender-based violence, women's political and civic participation, and digital democracy. Transform will synthesize and share practical, comparative knowledge drawn from these pilots to inform global efforts to address this problem.
  - *Promoting Information Integrity and Resilience Initiative (ProInfo)*. This week, USAID will announce the Promoting Information and Resilience Integrity (Pro-Info) Initiative, which will build on the work of the Summit for Democracy Information Integrity Cohort, and expand efforts by USAID and the U.S. Department of State to strengthen information integrity and resilience globally, with efforts to address the disproportionate targeting of women and LGBTQI+ leaders, activists, and public figures.
  - *Capacity-building to prevent and address technology-facilitated gender-based violence globally, including access to services for survivors*. Working with Congress and subject to the availability of funds, the Department of State will continue to invest over \$7 million in programs focused on documenting, mitigating, preventing and responding to technology-facilitated gender-based violence and integrating solutions that address online harassment and abuse, including support for women in public-facing roles in politics and the media, through: small grants for awareness, prevention and digital safety workshops; access to legal and psychosocial services for survivors; and programs to encourage collaboration between civil society organizations focused on gender-based violence and digital rights, to support coalitions to promote institutional change.

- Expanding data and research on technology-facilitated gender-based violence.
  - *Deepening the evidence base on gendered disinformation.* Today, the State Department Global Engagement Center (GEC) is releasing a public [Executive Summary](#) of a joint research report on gendered disinformation. Conducted with Canada, the European External Action Service, Germany, Slovakia, and the United Kingdom, the groundbreaking global study finds that state and non-state actors use gendered disinformation to silence women, discourage online political discourse, and shape perceptions toward gender and the role of women in democracies, and underscore the need for more research to tackle this scourge.
  - *Measuring technology-facilitated gender-based violence through Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS).* In 2023, USAID will pilot questions within the DHS Domestic Violence Module in two countries with high internet penetration rates to measure technology-facilitated gender-based violence.
- Advancing U.S. policies to prevent and respond to technology-facilitated gender-based violence. Countries represented on the Global Partnership—including the United States—make a commitment to advance activities within their own countries to prioritize and address gender-based online harassment and abuse. In support of that commitment, the Administration has taken the following key actions:
  - *Building a blueprint for action to prevent and address technology-facilitated gender-based violence.* To tackle this scourge in the U.S, President Biden [established](#) a Task Force with a mandate to identify concrete actions in a Blueprint to prevent online harassment and abuse, provide support for survivors, increase accountability, and expand research. Last month, the White House published an [Executive Summary](#) of the initial Task Force blueprint, which includes a broad range of new and expanded commitments from Federal agencies to address technology-facilitated gender-based violence across four lines of effort: Prevention, Survivor Support, Accountability, and Research.
  - *Integrating a gender lens in the National Cybersecurity Strategy.* Earlier this month, the Administration released the [National Cybersecurity Strategy](#), which integrates a gender lens across key priorities to secure cyberspace and our digital ecosystem, including the imperative of increasing the participation of women and LGBTQI+ persons in the cybersecurity workforce; recognizing how technologies are misused to proliferate online harassment, exploitation, and abuse; and prioritizing partnerships, such as the Global Partnership, and the Freedom Online Coalition, to advance common cybersecurity interests.
  - *Prioritizing technology-facilitated gender-based violence in the U.S. Strategy to Prevent and Respond to GBV Globally.* In December 2022, the Administration released an updated [U.S. Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Gender-Based Violence Globally](#), which bolsters U.S. commitments to prevent and address this global scourge, including a specific objective to prevent and respond to technology-facilitated gender-based violence.

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