

#metoonatsec

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An Open Letter to the National Security Community:

We, the women of the National Security community, come from all walks of life and all corners of this great nation. Those of us who have worked for the United States have sworn an oath to support and defend the Constitution. Diplomats and civil servants, defense civilians, members of the military, development workers, and the locally employed staff workers and contractors who support them brave challenging, at times life-threatening, conditions. Our commitment leads many of us to spend extended time away from our families and loved ones in war-zones and hostile locations in service of our nation.

We, too, are survivors of sexual harassment, assault, and abuse or know others who are.

This is not just a problem in Hollywood, Silicon Valley, newsrooms or Congress. It is everywhere. These abuses are born of imbalances of power and environments that permit such practices while silencing and shaming their survivors. Indeed, in our field, women comprise a small fraction of the senior leadership roles—[30% or fewer in most federal agencies](#).

The pipeline is not the central problem in much of the national security community. Talented women enter most of our agencies in equal numbers as their male counterparts, though this is less true of the armed forces. At the State Department, female foreign service officers enter at equal rates to their male colleagues. Yet, with each subsequent promotion, the numbers of foreign service women decline, [especially at senior levels](#). Women now comprise [15% of all active duty military](#)—a historic high, but the women who are already serving in senior ranks [are being promoted far less frequently than their peers](#).

Many women are held back or [driven from this field](#) by men who use their power to assault at one end of the spectrum and perpetuate-sometimes unconsciously-environments that silence, demean, belittle or neglect women at the other. Assault is the progression of the same behaviors that permit us to be denigrated, interrupted, shut out, and shut up. These behaviors incubate a permissive environment where sexual harassment and assault take hold.

And it's time to make it stop.

The institutions to which we belong or have served all have sexual harassment policies in place. Yet, these policies are weak, under enforced, and can favor perpetrators. The existence of policies, even good ones, is not enough.

We, the undersigned, call on the national security community, including the Department of Defense, the Department of State, the U.S. Agency for International Development, the Department of Homeland Security, the intelligence community, armed forces, National Security Council, think tanks, universities, and contractors who support them to take a comprehensive set

of actions to reduce the incidence of sexual harassment and abuse in the workplace. These include:

- Clear leadership from the very top that these behaviors are unacceptable;
- Creating multiple, clear, private channels to report abuse without fear of retribution;
- External, independent mechanisms to collect data on claims and publish them anonymously;
- Mandatory, regular training for all employees;
- Mandatory exit interviews for all women leaving Federal service.

Finally, this community must also address the serious gender imbalances in senior leadership positions because male-dominated teams have been [found](#) to be more prone to abuses and more diverse teams are consistently [linked to better outcomes](#). And we want to see leaders and managers across the national security community held accountable for creating, nurturing, and enforcing a [workplace culture that respects and includes women](#) as equal peers and colleagues.

We are proud to have served our nation and to have safeguarded its ideals, and we are proud to have worked alongside the talented and dedicated men and women who make up America's national security workforce. Imagine what more we could achieve together if we took steps to ensure women could work free from fear and confident that their gender will not affect their opportunities.

How will you protect, empower, and defend the women who serve our nation?

Sincerely,

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