

*Congressman Salud Carbajal*

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Good Afternoon,

I would like to first thank the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission for asking me to co-chair this important discussion on ending violence against women in politics.

It is an honor to have such a distinguished panel before us today, and I would like to thank all of you for your continuous effort and passion to protect and change the lives of women around the world. Thank you for taking time out of your busy schedules to be with us today.

As we commemorate National Women's History Month, I believe it is especially important to not just celebrate the incredible accomplishments of women but also to recognize the ongoing challenges women continue to face. This briefing serves to shed light on an issue that I believe is overlooked and ignored.

Secretary Clinton said it best, "Women's rights are human rights" and I believe violation of these rights should never be tolerated—especially when violence is involved.

Women are increasingly becoming involved in politics as they see public participation as an impetus for change.

However, in countries like Guatemala, Cote d'Ivoire (COAT-DIH-VWAR), Uganda and Bolivia women risk their lives running for office and exercising their civic rights to bring change to their government.

Gender-based persecution is becoming more prevalent in many countries and many believe it is because women are becoming more and more influential within their societies in forcing governments to make changes.

Violence against women in politics is not just a threat to those courageous women who decide to be vocal but to the democratic process.

Anything that prevents an individual from equal participation in her or his government goes against all democratic values.

According to the National Democratic Institute, women make up only 22% of parliamentarians and only 11 of the world's heads of state are women.

As long as we allow women to be threatened, harassed, and assaulted these numbers will only decline, and their voices will no longer be heard.

It is time for countries like the United States to take a stand against governments that tolerate such violence against women.

It is all of our responsibility to speak up for those who are denied a voice—which is why briefings such as these and the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission is so important—it provides us a venue to prioritize and discuss human rights, and highlight an issue that is often considered secondary.

Thank you again to our distinguished panelists and I look forward to today's discussion.