

The United States Armed Forces Opens all Combat Roles to Women

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WASHINGTON, D.C. – Statement regarding U.S. Department of Defense Combat Integration Decision

By Dr. Chantal de Jonge Oudraat, President, Women In International Security (WIIS)

Women In International Security congratulates the U.S. Department of Defense and Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter on their decision to fully open all military occupations and positions to U.S. servicewomen. For years, women have pressured the Pentagon to change their policy to align with the realities on the ground. In Iraq and Afghanistan, U.S. servicewomen have experienced direct combat even though they were officially excluded from ground combat positions and units.

In 1992, the last U.S. law limiting women's military service was eliminated, but two years later, in 1994, the Department of Defense established an institution-wide policy that officially excluded women from over 300,000 "ground combat" positions and units. On January 26, 2013, former Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta made the historic decision to eliminate the ground combat exclusion. He said that any future decision to exclude women will be made as an exception rather than the rule, flipping the paradigm from one of automatic exclusion to one of automatic inclusion.

Today's decision finally enables the full integration of women into all combat positions. There will be no exceptions! This "means that, as long as they qualify and meet the standards, women will now be able to contribute to our mission in ways they could not before," according to Secretary Carter. The integration of women into combat positions supports the principles of full inclusion which are enshrined in UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security.

This is a momentous decision that will have a global impact on how women serve, are viewed, and are treated within their security forces. Today, only a few countries allow women full access to military occupations and units. We encourage all countries that have not already opened all

military positions to women to follow the leadership of Secretary Carter and the United States Department of Defense.