



NEWS

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Service Women's Action Network (SWAN) Issues Statement on the Pending Release of New Department of Defense (DOD) Report on Women in Combat

SWAN calls the long overdue report a step in the right direction, but DOD ignores Blue Ribbon Panel recommendations to provide equal job opportunities to deserving women

New York, NY – Today, the Service Women's Action Network issued a statement on the pending release of a long-delayed Defense Department report on the role of women in combat.

Pentagon officials have indicated that the report will allow women to serve in units that are closer to the fighting, but will maintain the long-standing and archaic ban on women serving in combat-specific job fields.

“Based on initial reports, our response to this report is mixed,” said Anu Bhagwati, former Marine Corps Captain and executive director of the Service Women's Action Network (SWAN). “On the plus side, this is a huge step in the right direction. If adopted, this new policy will allow women to be assigned to units at the Battalion level. It will have a huge impact on the units that are most frequently exposed to direct ground combat.”

“Now talented women will be serving alongside their male peers in infantry and tank battalions, for example, in skills that are critical to the unit's operational success,” Bhagwati said. “This policy will also present some relief to war-weary battalions by providing an influx of fresh personnel that will help alleviate the burdens that frequent deployments present to troops.”

However, reports also indicate that the DOD is not lifting the long-standing, obsolete and unfair Combat Exclusion Policy that prohibits women from accessing career opportunities in the combat arms, meaning they can serve alongside infantry, but they can't become infantry themselves. “This is extremely disappointing,” Bhagwati said. “To continue such a ban is to ignore the talents and leadership that women bring to the military and it further penalizes service women by denying them the opportunity for future promotions and assignments that are primarily given to personnel from combat arms specialties, a phenomenon SWAN calls the *Brass Ceiling*.”

“Over 255,000 women have deployed to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan thus far, including 145 women who have made the ultimate sacrifice. And yet, because the DOD continues to enforce this obsolete barrier on women’s entry into combat arms fields, women who have served in the Middle East alongside their male peers have been denied the awards, badges, and even veterans’ benefits that their male counterparts have been granted for doing the same job. Women have more than proven they are capable of defending our country during war. It’s time military leadership establish the same level playing field to qualified women to enter the infantry, Special Forces, and other all-male units. It’s simply un-American to arbitrarily prohibit U.S. service women the equal opportunity to excel and serve their nation at the highest levels.”

“This week, in fact, the Senate is in the process of confirming only the second woman 4-star general in history of the U.S. military,” Bhagwati said. “Two top generals in 200 years isn’t exactly a stellar track record for upward mobility.”

SWAN is a national human rights organization founded and led by women veterans. SWAN’s vision is to transform military culture by securing equal opportunity and the freedom to serve in uniform without threat of harassment, discrimination, intimidation or assault. SWAN also seeks to reform veterans’ services on a national scale to guarantee equal access to quality health care, benefits and resources for women veterans and their families. You can follow Service Women’s Action Network on Twitter at <http://twitter.com/servicewomen>, or on Facebook at <http://www.facebook.com/servicewomen>.

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