Sometimes during quiet moments, I remember the heart-wrenching day last spring when my daughter, while relaxing on our family porch, was suddenly grazed by a bullet. If it had come any closer to her heart, she would have died. Although this happened in my St Paul neighborhood, I know there are communities all over the world where violence is a daily occurrence.

The United Nations passed a resolution in 1981 designating September 21 as the International Day of Peace, devoted to commemorating and strengthening the ideals of peace within and among all nations and peoples.

Today, we still strive for peace in a violent world. America is at war in Afghanistan. Other raging conflicts mar world aspirations for peace. We know from experience that peace doesn't happen because official combat stops and troops depart. Peace happens when people have access to education, jobs, healthcare, political participation and civil rights. As we commemorate the International Day of Peace this year, Congress should do their part to promote peace and real security in Afghanistan, and worldwide, by pledging support for the Women, Peace, and Security Act of 2012 (WPS Act).

This legislation is designed to support the implementation of the U.S. National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security (NAP), launched by executive order last December when America joined the ranks of more than 30 countries in developing our plan to promote the essential role of women in securing peace. The bipartisan act recognizes that women's voices are essential at all levels of negotiations.

Women made up only 2.4 percent of all signatories to the 21 major peace agreements established over the past 20 years, and more than half fell apart within the first ten years. What's missing? Women; uniquely effective agents for securing lasting and just peace.

According to Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, "When women participate in peace processes, they focus discussion on issues like human rights, justice, national reconciliation, and economic renewal …They build coalitions across ethnic and sectarian lines, and they speak up for other marginalized groups. They act as mediators and help to foster compromise."

As a woman state legislator, I know that my women colleagues and I often bring unique viewpoints and plans otherwise not presented. For instance, I am the mother of seven who experienced a period of homelessness. No one else in the state house has an experience quite like that and I bring that special perspective with me in my work as a legislator.

Globally, women continually offer innovative solutions that have improved peace outcomes. For example, Somalia's Asha Haji Elmi led a group of women to the Somali Peace and Reconciliation conference in 2002, which prompted the Somali government to adopt a measure to assure that 12 percent of their parliament seats be held by women. And in Liberia, peace activist Leymah Gbowee led a successful women's peace movement to end the Second Liberian Civil War in 2003.

In Afghanistan huge gains have been recently made for women including trained midwives

supporting infant and maternal health, girls' education, and seats for women in Parliament. Women must be at the table and engaged in civil society as U.S. troops leave Afghanistan, to protect and further this progress and build sustainable peace.

With the WPS Act, Congress can participate in recognizing and promoting the invaluable role women play in preventing, mediating, and resolving violent conflict and building peaceful communities. We can be a part of fostering a U.S. approach that will build sustainable peace and enhance our national security.

The International Day of Peace is the perfect opportunity for our U.S. Senators Amy Klobuchar and Al Franken and U.S. Representatives Betty McCollum and Keith Ellison to take a significant step toward actualizing global peace by co-sponsoring the Women, Peace, and Security Act of 2012.

Rena Moran is a State Representative in St Paul, Minnesota (DFL-65A) representing Rondo, Frogtown, Midway, Northend Communities and an active member of the Women Legislator's Lobby – a program of Women's Action for New Directions (WAND).