

In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Most Kind



April 21, 2016

## Mother Earth Day

April 22 is celebrated internationally as Mother Earth Day so as to emphasize the importance of the earth and its environment and highlight the challenges it is facing by the growing population, pollution and degradation.

The United Nations General Assembly, recognizing that Mother Earth is a common expression for the planet earth in a number of countries and regions, reflecting the interdependence that exists among human beings, other living species and the planet we all inhabit, and noting that Earth Day is observed each year in many countries, decided to reserve April 22 as International Mother Earth Day in 2009, with resolution A/RES/63/278. However, the Earth Day was first celebrated in the United States in 1970 and it is organized by the Earth Day Network. Its mission is to extend and diversify the environmental movement worldwide and to activate it as the most effective vehicle to build a healthy, sustainable environment, address climate change, and protect the Earth for future generations. With this year's theme, looking forward to its 50th anniversary, it sets the goal of planting 7.8 billion trees over the next five years.

Trees are very much helpful for human beings in so many ways. They are also essential to keep our environment stable and fresh. Different researches show that they are helpful in absorbing excess and harmful CO<sub>2</sub> from environment. In one year, an acre of mature trees absorbs the same amount of CO<sub>2</sub> produced by driving the average car 26,000 miles. They can absorb odors and pollutant gases (nitrogen oxides, ammonia, sulfur dioxide and ozone) and filter particulates out of the air by trapping them on their leaves and bark. They can help counteract the loss of species, as well as provide increased habitat connectivity between regional forest patches. They are also helpful for the communities in achieving long-term economic and environmental sustainability and providing food, energy and income.

On the Mother Earth Day it will be crucial to understand that our earth's environment has been experiencing large scale degradation due to addition of excessive pollutants. These pollutants are basically the result of chemicals and products that are being invented and used with a great speed in the modern world. These evils have the ability to disrupt our environment and introduce disorder within the ecosystem which is crucial for the life to exist on earth. It is of vital importance to note that the possibility of life to exist within the known universe is limited to the planet earth alone. The distance of the earth from the sun, its temperature and other physical conditions exist in such an ordered manner that life is guaranteed here. Furthermore, the dependence of living beings on one another, their interactions and their reaction and influence over the environment have certain proportional arrangement, which is termed as eco-system by the scientists. If this eco-system is disturbed in some way or the other, the life is disturbed and the contaminants that are let loose by human beings in the environment has the capacity to disturb it greatly and has the capacity to endanger existence on earth.

The contaminants basically form pollution, which can influence environment in many different ways. Today, we are standing at a stage where many serious minds think that we have to be solemn about saving our earth from the menace of pollution. There are some important concerns that most of the environmental scientists believe should be pondered upon extensively. The first one is the degradation of natural environment to the extent that can prove lethal for most of human beings. The other concern is regarding the overall warming up of the globe – the global warming.

The need of time is to save the earth by adopting appropriate policies. Any effort in this regard needs to be twofold. Firstly, every individual must feel his/her responsibility towards the earth and must make sure that he/she does not become an irresponsible being and must prove supportive for the environment. Nonetheless, extensive awareness programs in this regard can be really helpful. The Mother Earth Day, April 22, can be used very positively in this regard and much can be taught to the people through different sorts of programs and techniques. Secondly, there have to be efforts on national level as well. The governments in different countries can adopt strict laws regarding the safeguard of the environment and can make sure that different industries and enterprises adopt atmosphere-friendly attitude.

This year, Mother Earth Day also coincides with the signing ceremony for the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, which will take place at UN Headquarters in New York. The Agreement was adopted by all 196 Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change at COP21 in Paris on December 12, 2015. In the agreement, all countries agreed to attempt for limiting global temperature rise to well below 2 degrees Celsius, and given the grave risks, to strive for 1.5 degrees Celsius. The signing ceremony takes place on the first day that the Agreement will be open for signatures, marking the first step toward ensuring that the Agreement enters into legal force as quickly as possible, which is a good sign and may help control the climate change to a certain extent. More actions of this sort are needed immediately to save the Mother Earth from further degradation.



# Taliban's Lukewarm Response to Peace Talk

By Hujjatullah Zia

The Tuesday's deadly attack, a week after the insurgents launched their annual spring offensive, left hundreds dead and wounded behind for which the Taliban claimed responsibility. This assault in a densely packed neighborhood marks the first major Taliban attack in the Afghan capital since the insurgents announced the start of this year's fighting season.

The Taliban's brazen attack drew strong words of condemnation from national and international officials. Afghan president Muhammad Ashraf Ghani denounced the attack with the strongest possible term and believed that it would not weaken the morale of Afghan soldiers. Moreover, UN chief Ban Ki-moon strongly condemned the Taliban truck suicide bombing. "I would like to express my deepest condolences for the victims and their families and friends," the UN secretary general said at a press conference during a visit to The Hague.

Despite seeking peace and siding with the doves, Afghan nation bears the brunt of terrorism. As a result, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) has reported an increase in civilian casualties in 2016. Based on the report, in all 161 children that were killed from January to March and 449 were injured, marks a 29 percent rise over the first three months of 2015. The majority of the 257 incidents documented in 2015 were comprised of threats and intimidation, including death threats, assaults of health and education personnel, forced closures of schools and letters prohibiting school attendance. Similarly, the UN reports that conflict-related violence led to the partial or complete closure of more than 369 schools in 2015, affecting nearly 140,000 students and 600 teachers across Afghanistan. It further noted attacks, threats and explicit prohibitions imposed to restrict girls' education in restive parts of the country.

The Taliban warned they would "employ large-scale attacks on enemy positions across the country" during the offensive dubbed Operation Omari.

The insurgents began the fighting season last week by targeting the northern city of Kunduz, which they briefly captured last year in a stunning setback for Afghan forces.

The annual spring offensive normally marks the start of the "fighting season", though this past winter the lull was shorter and rebels continued to battle government forces, albeit with less intensity.

A four-nation group comprising Afghanistan, Pakistan the United States and China has been holding meetings since January aimed at resuming peace talks. The fourth round of Quadrilateral Coordination Group (QCG) meeting was held in Kabul on February 23

to bring the Taliban to the negotiating table. However, a number of Afghan people were killed and injured on the eve of the talk when a suicide bomber donated himself. Although the QCG group called all the warring factions to hold talks, the Taliban have been giving lukewarm response to the peace negotiation and set some preconditions. Taliban sources with the organization's Qatar office said they did not plan to join the talks. They persist on reopening of their political office in Qatar, lifting of travel curbs on their leaders, release of their prisoners and end to "propaganda in Afghanistan". Experts and analysts have never expressed optimism over peace negotiation since it has frequently met deadlock and the Taliban elements never ceased war and violence. It is constantly said that the government will have to intensify the soldiers and the rise in militancy must be an eye-opener for the state. It is to be a lesson for Afghan officials that Hamid Karzai left no stone unturned and knocked each and every door during his administration to bring the Taliban to negotiating table and called them "discontented brothers". Can the National Unity Government go further than Karzai? It is not only the Taliban to be condemned but the government should also take the responsibility of lax security. The question remains is that why the Ministry of Defense is being controlled by acting head in spite of the escalated insurgency? The same is the case with some significant posts. There is not a definite term for the Taliban yet, from the government, to define them. If warring factions are the enemies of Afghanistan, they should be fought and if they are friends, why do they spill our blood rather than making peace? So, the government should define the Taliban and adopt a decisive mechanism about them. In short, the word of condemnation has changed into cliché and it neither carries a meaning nor mitigates the pain and anguish of the bereaved families and bleeding nation.

It is said that Afghan President had intended to refuse the future meeting of QCG. Political pundits believe that the four-nation meeting will not bear the desired fruit – it is what Russia had already stated. It is a right decision and should be replaced by military deal. So, first of all the state political parties should bridge the gap among themselves. Then, the government must reinforce the soldiers to counter terrorism.

The world is to join forces to eradicate the terrorism not only from Afghanistan but from the surface of earth. The international community will not have to turn blind eye to the war-torn countries, especially Afghanistan, which has always extended the hand of peace to warring factions.

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## The Impacts of Kabul Bombing

By Abdul Ahad Bahrami

The Taliban's Tuesday's attack in Kabul shocked the whole nation and renewed questions over the prospects of security and stability in Afghanistan. The bombing was the first major devastating militant attack in the country after the Taliban announced the group's spring offensive more than a week ago. A day after the bombing, officials updated the tolls, putting the tolls to 64 dead and 347 injured. According to the officials, most of the casualties are civilians; while in the meantime, there are unofficial reports of much higher number of casualties from the employees and operatives of the National Directorate (NDS) for Security. The attack is said to be the deadliest in the capital in last five years, and seems to be ushering a difficult year ahead for the Afghan government struggling to contain the Taliban's fresh resurgence.

The Tuesday coordinated assault on the NDS department responsible for providing security to dignitaries and government officials will have inevitable consequences and potential impacts on the war and peace efforts. The immediate consequence would be growing calls on the government to improve security and boost the military campaign against the Taliban. The Afghan government is coming under increasing pressures to escalate its response against the Taliban's spring offensive. The government has been accused of lack of war leadership and mismanagement of the anti-insurgency campaign. Reacting to the Tuesday's bombing in Kabul, President Ashraf Ghani said the government would avenge for every drop of the bloods spilled in the attack in Kabul.

However, such comments by the government leaders are going to do little to ease public unease over the deteriorating security in the country. The national unity government has been credited with taking some concrete measures to ensure there would sufficient support from the international community, particularly NATO and the United States, to the embattled Afghan security forces. The national unity government has managed to get weaponry and warplanes from Afghanistan's international supporters. It has also managed to improve relations and security partnership with the US as the main donor and supporter of Afghanistan in the international community. This will help the Afghan security forces to do better performance in providing security and fighting the Taliban.

However, the government has long been criticized for its infighting and, as the result, the failure to appoint key officials to the top security posts. Many of the setbacks against the Taliban have been, rightly or wrong, attributed to the lack of the military leadership and the NUG's failure to fill the vacant security posts. The recent attack in Kabul will put further pressures on the national unity government to fix the faults in the leadership of the security agencies. The deterioration of security and in particular the Tuesday bombing in Kabul will further lower public confidence to the government efforts to maintain security and contain the Taliban's seasonal fighting.

There have long been criticisms even from high-ranking officials hold-

ing key government posts that the government is not serious enough to fight the Taliban. Many accused some within the government to be as Taliban sympathizers and not having the resolve and determination to seriously fight the militant groups. Many accused the government of having lenient policies towards the Taliban and avoiding labeling the group as terrorists. President Ghani is quoted as saying to the Taliban that "we didn't have the resolve to kill you, but you are forcing us". Does the statement suggest the government is going to take tougher stance in the fight against the Taliban? The time will prove it. However, what is clear is that the government has no way but to use all the possible military means to first win the war on the battleground and then go to the table of peace negotiations.

Many expect that such large-scale militant attacks would have immediate harmful impacts for the relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan, as the core facilitator of the Afghan peace talks. However, the indications are otherwise. Despite some security officials suggesting the attacks as being planned on Pakistan's soil, the government of Afghanistan this time avoided to directly blame or accuse Pakistan over the Taliban insurgency and the Tuesday bombing in Kabul. The national unity government has been credited for pursuing the four-nation peace strategy that established a mechanism for cooperation between Afghanistan, Pakistan, China and the US, and the four-way initiative is still the best hope of the government to pursue peace talks with the Taliban while Pakistan plays a facilitating role in the process.

Unlike the major explosion in Shah-e Shahid area of Kabul last year which propelled Ashraf Ghani to take a tougher stance against Pakistan, the reaction this year from the Afghan government has been calm. The Shah shahid explosion resulted to quick deterioration of relations between Kabul and Islamabad with Afghanistan accusing Pakistan of harboring. This is while almost all major security incidents in Afghanistan in the past used to affect the bilateral relations between Kabul and Islamabad. A presidential spokesman in Kabul said the government would continue cooperation with Pakistan in seeking peace through the four-nation initiative. The Afghan government has called on Pakistan to take action as it has promised against the militants refusing to enter peace talks with the Afghan governments. But there are little signs of Pakistan taking any concrete action against Taliban leadership. However, Pakistan is said to have warned the Taliban to take part in the talks or face serious consequences, a call the Taliban have ignored so far. Pakistan's recent warnings to the Taliban also explain the Afghan leaders avoiding to blame Pakistan for the recent wave of security incidents. However, despite the apparent efforts of the Afghan government to avoid deterioration of relations which will harm the four-way peace initiative, the government in Kabul did not shy to send a signal of protest to Pakistan. After the attack in Kabul, Afghanistan's CEO Abdullah Abdullah has cancelled a planned visit in early May to Islamabad. The attack in Kabul has once again highlighted Pakistan's policy on the ongoing Afghan conflict and the country's willingness to pressurize the Taliban leadership.

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