

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



August 10, 2015

## Let's Fight Ignorance

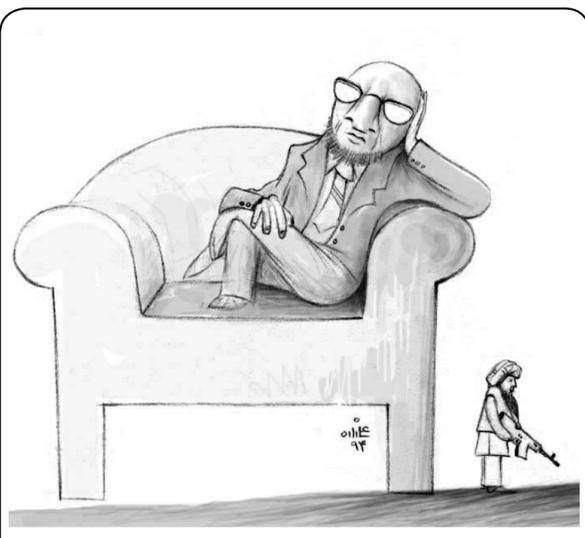
One of the basic problems in Afghanistan is ignorance. And this problem is generating and invigorating many other problems as well. There are many problems that can be solved with little effort and consideration; however, because of ignorance they have become unsolvable. When the people of a country are not able to understand what they want and what they don't, it is really difficult to solve their problems. In most of the remote areas of our country there are still many people who consider getting education as a crime. On the other hand, there are the residents of the cities who are convinced that education is inferior to wealth as they witness the failures of the educated men and the success of the ignorant rich people. In this way the value of education is getting lower and the higher values of life are facing great loss.

The main reason of this scenario is our social setup, wherein, education is considered useless and the ways to success and prosperity are on the opposite direction to that of education. In fact, our people have not yet learnt how to live like the developed and free countries of the world. Therefore, they as a nation are not able to choose a better life style and social practices for themselves. As a matter of fact, such a quality can only be attained when they know the true meaning of free thinking and true knowledge. They, without a tinge of doubt, do not know what their real requirements or demands are and what factors can lead them to success. There have been many occasions when they have neglected the welcomes of modernity and development. Whenever, there have been efforts even from the government to pursue modern education and better social and political decisions, they have tried to oppose them and push the country towards conservatism.

Because of the prevailing ignorance most of the people in the country cannot even think about a prosperous society, wherein all the citizens have their due rights. They even do not know that there are certain countries in the world that have most of the facilities of life and they have developed so much that now they have reached to skies to discover them. However, the situation in our country is so that if a clergy announces that man is mortal and he can never reach to the skies and the claims of the developed countries of the world are nothing than white lies, they will definitely believe him with respect and complete obedience. However, the fact is what Richard P. Feynman says, "It is in the admission of ignorance and the admission of uncertainty that there is a hope for the continuous motion of human beings in some direction that doesn't get confined, permanently blocked, as it has so many times before in various periods in the history of man".

Our people are alien to the industrial and scientific developments and on most of the cases they treat them with hypocrisy. There are many among us who basically take advantage of the scientific inventions and discoveries almost on daily basis but never hesitate to declare them incorrect and false. If they had the potential they would definitely take our society back to the Dark Ages. Unfortunately, there are many so-called intellectuals in our society as well who spend their time and energy in favoring the conservative and fundamentalist ideas and strive to prove them right.

Because of the issues and people mentioned above our society has become confused. One of the most dominating characters of our society is that it has made the people conservative and they have started praising their past more than their present. They have started hating each other instead of disseminating the golden feelings of love and brotherhood. As noted by Maya Angelou, "We allow our ignorance to prevail upon us and make us think we can survive alone, alone in patches, alone in groups, alone in races, even alone in genders". However, they need to understand that they have to be vigilant and understand that they are being fooled. Their thoughts are being confined and their emotions are being betrayed. They are being utilized in the name of religion and history. Now, they have to realize that their responsibilities are to declare clearly that they are no more ready to be fooled and to be utilized by others. Their rights are to announce their hatred for ignorance, poverty, conservative ideas, slavish thinking and growing hypocrisy. They need to fight against the prevailing injustice and all the efforts that try to keep them away from education and knowledge. They should say no to the darkness and try to follow the light as it is the only way that they can live their life with prosperity and dignity; because as Frederick Douglass said, "Where justice is denied, where poverty is enforced, where ignorance prevails, and where any one class is made to feel that society is an organized conspiracy to oppress, rob and degrade them, neither persons nor property will be safe".



# The Persistent Rise of Civilian Casualties

By Abdul Ahad Bahrami

In a recent report, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) has said that civilian casualties in Afghanistan have had an "unprecedented increase" this year. The report, which covers the first six months of 2015, states that the conflict in Afghanistan is responsible for the increase in civilian deaths, and the civilian casualties has been "equal or more" than the same period last year. The report states that in the course of the first six months of this year, 1592 civilians had been killed and 3329 wounded, which shows 1% increase compared to that period last year. The report says that 90 percent of civilian casualties are attributed to ground fighting, bombings, suicide attacks and target killings. The UN mission in Afghanistan emphasizes that the increase in civilian casualties indicates the urgency of the fact that the killing of civilians should be ended as soon as possible and the parties involved should resolve the conflict through negotiations.

The unprecedented suffering of Afghan civilians from prolonged war against the insurgent groups indicates that the situation has reached to an explosive point for the civilian population in Afghanistan. Many Afghan families lose their loved ones in explosions and battles among insurgent groups and Afghan National Security Forces. Even in relatively safe cities like Kabul, the citizens no more feel secure as the militants continue to hit areas populated by civilians. The prospect of the ongoing war in the country seems dismal, leaving ordinary Afghans in a difficult situation and diminishing their hopes for improved lives. The direct impacts of the high casualties of the wars are deaths, suffering and poverty for Afghan families as they lose their loved ones and breadwinners in the conflict. The day-to-day misery stemmed from insecurity and wars lead many Afghans to leave their country and live abroad as refugees while others choose to stay with the hopes of an end to the conflict.

There are concerns that the prolonged insurgency in the country could mean persistent increase in civilian casualties for indefinite time. Afghan civilians have long suffered from the devastating war, and the unabated trend is quite worrisome. The UNAMA report suggests a continued increase in civilian tolls while the insurgents are continuing to wage a deadly war against the government of Afghanistan. The insurgent groups care the least for civilian lives as they use civilian populated areas as ground of wars against the government of Afghanistan. This year, many of northern and eastern provinces such as Kunduz, Faryab, Nangarhar and other provinces were scenes of intense fighting between insurgent groups and government forces. As like in the past, the UN report blames the insurgent groups for most of the civilian casualties while there have been a visible increase in government forces' share of the casualties of Afghan civilians.

The government needs to be accountable regarding the share of the government forces of the civilian casualties particularly in circumstances

that the deaths are preventable. The government should take specific strategies for further minimizing the percentage of civilian casualties that are attributed to the Afghan security forces. Given the insurgents' share of the casualties, the question is what is the purpose of killing civilians? What the militants achieve by taking lives of dozens of women, children and other ordinary citizens who buy groceries and manage their daily affairs of life? Why the militants are not caring for the lives of the civilians by their own standards and carry out bomb attacks, suicide, and indiscriminate attacks which claim lives of civilians on daily basis.

The Taliban and other insurgent groups who officially proclaim their respect for civilian lives should be committed to the laws of wars and conflicts and avoid war strategies leading to civilian casualties. The United Nations is the international body that has the best credibility and reputation for negotiating with parties involved in conflicts. The United Nations can play a crucial role in convincing all parties involved in the Afghan conflict to respect civilian lives. The UN mission in Afghanistan should do all efforts it is capable of to pressurize the government and the insurgent groups for minimizing the civilian casualties. One of key responsibilities of the UN is to protect civilians in the conflicts. The UN has negotiated with the Taliban in the past and it should do so in the future to protect civilians in Afghanistan and convince the insurgents to care for the civilian lives.

The UN representative in Afghanistan has emphasized in the report that until a peace deal is reached in Afghanistan, the parties to the conflict must respect international humanitarian laws so to minimize effects of war on civilians. The UN appeal is coming at a time when the peace efforts of the Afghan government have stalled for an unforeseeable time due to the announcement of death of Taliban leader Mullah Muhammad Omar. The Taliban has dismissed the peace process for the time being, meaning there is no clear prospect for resumption of a potential peace negotiations with the insurgent groups. The dismissal of the peace process by new Taliban leader Mullah Akhtar Mansoor may mean further prolongation of the conflict in the country. This, in turn, would mean continuation of civilian suffering for the coming years. Therefore, Taliban's continued war efforts may further increase civilian casualties in Afghanistan.

The government has a responsibility to protect the lives of people. Therefore, it needs to redouble its efforts to improve security and provide better protection for the civilian population. The government needs to try hard for resuming the peace talks with the Taliban. The peace talk with the insurgent groups is an opportunity for the government to negotiate for Taliban's commitment to protecting civilians. The government should condition any peace talks with the insurgent groups to an immediate ceasefire and the militants' respect to civilian lives. As mentioned in the report, a share of civilian deaths is attributed to NATO and Afghan government forces. These forces also should commit themselves to combat the enemies in a way to avoid harms to civilians.

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## The Curse of Poverty

By: Hujjatullah Zia

One will be taken aback by seeing the vagrant and homeless, sleeping at nights in open space of Pole Sokhta in Kabul City. They live in social isolation, without homes or shelter. Extreme poverty is their share of life. Pole Sokhta is the place for Afghan drug addicts. It is a bitter fact to be admitted that these vagrants are all on drugs. Most of them are of the younger generation who took refuge in neighboring countries due to Afghanistan's economic problems and during our three decades of war. Upon returning to the country soon after the fall of Taliban's regime and the establishment of a democratic government in Afghanistan, they did not have the national support-base to re-settle and prosper. Presently, they live in poor conditions bereft of very basic facilities of life.

Poverty is at its peak and has affected a large number of people across the country. There are large groups of beggars, of both genders, in Kabul City. Many other folk too, can hardly make ends meet in spite of laboring all day. There are some breadwinners who are hawking minor objects such as plastic bags, socks, sweaters, bracelets, cigarettes, phone cards, etc. from dawn to dusk just to earn a morsel of bread for their families. Meanwhile, there are gangs of workmen who collect early morning with their working tools, waiting to be engaged on a daily-wage. This work force is much larger than is the demand for their labor. Hence, it is beyond doubt that there is a direct connection between poverty and unemployment.

Regarding poverty, some are of the opinion that it is a result of man's laziness. Other sociologists believe that poverty is a structural defect in society. Perhaps there is a bit of truth in both points of view. In some cases, one's poverty originates in the fact that one chooses to live in a deprived and secluded areas where job opportunities do not exist. Thus, such a lifestyle will certainly have a negative impact on person's economic prospects. Generally, the chances of obtaining a job, is more promising if one is better educated. Skills are in demand. So the have-nots are deprived of education, skills and work-opportunities.

Lewis (1961), a famous sociologist, argues that the culture of poverty exists amongst many poor people. According to him, poverty is not the result of one's disqualification or inability rather it is the result of social and cultural atmosphere in which the poor children get socialized. This passes to the next generation and they will come their expectations of a better life is a dream. Ultimately, they will succumb to poverty and a low morale.

Charles Murray (1984), an American sociologist, extends the hypothesis of culture of poverty. According to him, the case of those who are involved in poverty due to adverse circumstances, such as widows, orphan children or the disabled falls in one category. He talks of a 'dependency culture' among the poor who rely on

government's charity rather than going out to work. Murray argues that the affluence of welfare-oriented governments has created a subculture which subdues ambitions and the push towards self-help. Such welfare policies has uprooted the interest in work-ethics from some people. Whether this theory is acceptable or not is for the readers to judge. I am not going to pass judgment on this matter.

Let us examine the condition of some of our youths who suffer badly in Kabul City. The odorous smell of Pole Sokhta disturbs passersby. It is nauseating. These vagrants have spoiled the environment and this is the filthiest part of the city. It is a safe haven for addicts and peddlers of drugs; a breeding place for crime. As a result, at night the vagrants, who are also addicted, wander the city searching for something to eat and it doesn't matter for them how and where it is obtained. Mostly, they try to steal from the stores or hotels, implore people for money or pick their pockets.

To our chagrin, the government does not take any steps in this civic matter. I do not deny that every right is linked to a responsibility. It is the responsibility of the government to help the citizens and do its best to decrease the poverty. In addition, the task of sanitation and cleanliness of cities also belong to government officials and they will have to prevent the citizens in any possible way from polluting the city. Otherwise if this trend further continues, it will certainly threaten people's lives.

One of the serious challenges in the country which has also turned into an international challenge is the issue of drug. It is said that one million people die per year around the world due to Afghanistan's drug production and smuggling. Meanwhile, it also draws our people towards addiction. Drug addiction leads to further poverty. There are rumors that Taliban militants are also fed through the income which is earned by drug smuggling and that is why they never take action in this matter. Narcotic drugs are forbidden in Islam. Hence, presently taking action against poppy cultivation is the urgent need of the country. It is a menace not only to our country but also to all neighboring countries. In other words, drugs threaten the life of our youths, cause poverty, energize terrorist and lead to the death of millions of people on one way or another. This issue is getting more serious than the issue of terrorism. It is a bitter pill for government officials to swallow. Our government officials always rely on words rather than action and focus on their pockets rather than the nation's challenges. As a result, Afghanistan is always on the top of list of most corrupt administration. This system has always been rampant in Afghanistan that the poor get poorer and the rich get richer. Considering the lack of concern of our government officials in this matter, I am sure that this trend will continue for many years and people will not get rid of the triangle of tragedies which are drugs, terrorism and poverty.

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