

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



August 22, 2019

Role of Afghan Women Vital in Intra-Afghan Talks

Afghan women have largely been excluded from political decision making in the course of the history. Thus, women were largely excluded from the Bonn process. Since then, they have made significant gains in rights and political participation. However, despite Afghanistan adopting in 2015 a National Action Plan on United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, opportunities for women remain limited.

U.S. peace envoy Zalmay Khalilzad headed to Qatari capital to start the 9th round of talks with Taliban negotiators. He then will travel to Kabul to meet with Afghan leaders how to initiate Intra Afghan talks after a deal could be reached to end the near 18-year war in Afghanistan.

There are many concerns about the Taliban return to the power; women rights, is one of the major concerns. Considering that under Taliban rule prior to 2001, even basic freedoms were denied to women such as going to school, speaking publicly, leaving the house without a male chaperone, among others women are more curious to know about what final decisions would be taken about the basic human rights and women rights in the future.

Islam has granted women with all fundamental rights such as doing business, holding a possession, right to inheritance, education, work, choosing a life partner, security, health and life. As a result, Afghan women want rights that Islam has given them. Islam does not stop women from getting education or work, so women should have their presence in all parts and they urge this issue should be clearly talked in peace negotiations.

However, Afghan women don't want a peace that will make the situation worse for women's rights compared to now. With this background in mind, the absence of Afghan women in the talks means more than a failure of political correctness. It means that women in the country do not know what is going to happen in their lives in the future; the days of Taliban oppression of women could return if they do not guarantee that women's rights, enshrined in the constitution, will be upheld in any future power-sharing arrangement. This reaffirms the notion that the aim of a peace process should not only be to end violent conflict but also to build a lasting peace. The absence of women and their voices in the process casts doubt on the type of peace that these talks would bring to the country.

However, women must raise their voices louder than any other time so they are not forgotten and Afghan citizens including women must clearly convey this message to the negotiators that without women it will be a broken peace. Different studies including a research done in part by Anna Tonelli, show that the exclusion of women from peace negotiations is a predictor of failure for peace negotiations. As a result, Afghanistan would never have a stable peace unless women were given a wider role in peace talks. Therefore, as discussions in the Afghan peace process move away from issues of hard security and the use of violence, it is now more crucial than ever to think about the quality of peace and strategies to sustain the peace. This is where a more inclusive process and effective implementations of the gender-related provisions of any future peace agreements gain more importance in the Afghan context. For a way forward, however, different actors' support and commitment would be essential.

In a nutshell, the Afghan government and the US chief negotiator Zalmay Khalilzad must assure women in practice that their rights will not be affected negatively after a peace deal with the Taliban. Now, it is time to fully involve women in the coming talks with the Taliban to clearly define and ensure their place in future. Afghanistan has come a long way to achieve the rights women have now and they must be safeguarded not to lose them after a peace deal.



Honor Killing – A Practice against Law

By: Hujjatullah Zia

"Honor killing", which has been deeply embedded in Afghanistan's traditional culture, and violence against women is a common practice in Afghanistan, mainly in tribal belts. The Taliban's regime (1996 - 2001) consolidated the traditionally established culture and patriarchal system in the country and sidelined women in social, cultural, and political spheres.

A large number of Afghans, particularly Pashtuns in tribal areas, adhere to the established traditions - be it against Constitutional law or Islamic tenets. Although there are many constitutional and religious ifs and buts in punishing an individual, honor killing is a traditional practice, which is based neither on religious tenets nor on Afghan law.

Rod Nordland, a correspondent for the New York Times, stated in his book "The Lovers" - which is about two Afghan lovers a Tajik girl Zakia and a Hazara boy Muhammad Ali who defied the country's tradition and escaped an honor killing - that another girl Safoora also resided with Zakia in the Bamiyan Women's Shelter. He said, "Safoora's case was particularly distressing. Brought to court in a dispute between two families over the terms of her engagement at fourteen years of age, she was taken into a back room at the courthouse and gang-raped by court employees. She complained, but the judges blocked any prosecution of the rapists, and so Safoora was in the shelter fleeing their retribution and fearing her own family's wrath against her." He added, "It is commonplace for Afghan families to murder a daughter who has had the poor judgment or bad luck to be raped; the rapist is often treated with shocking leniency. They call it 'honor killing.'"

Honor killings are prevalent in Afghan tribal areas, where tribal code of conduct holds strong sway. Flexibility will be hardly shown to the boys and girls who elope, especially when the two belong to different ethnic or sectarian groups. Now it is feared that with the return of the Taliban, honor killing practices and violence against women will increase. In other words, the Taliban will support tribal code of conduct and patriarchal system since the bulk of the Taliban militants are believed to come from tribal areas with parochial mindset.

It is believed that a large number of tribal belt residents are potential hardliners, who support honor killings and offensive approach towards women. If the Taliban reinforce tra-

ditional practices, when they return after the likely peace agreement with the Afghan government, women will be prone to further violence and misogynistic approach.

In the peace agreement, if signed, it should be stipulated that the Taliban must not touch Afghan constitution or university syllabi and have to support the rule of law. Anyone who resorts to honor killings, which is against law, should be prosecuted. In short, the Taliban's return have not to jeopardize constitutional law or democratic principles.

To mitigate violence against women, the government has to establish more universities in all provinces and tribal areas with moderate lecturers to spread awareness about law and the rights and freedoms of women. When peace emerges, no single district is supposed to be left behind in terms of having access to schools and universities.

I believe that schooling plays a highly crucial role in decreasing violence against women. If people are educated, they will hardly fall for the bogus claims of religious hardliners. Meanwhile, traditional culture will be replaced by the rule of law and people will be more rational.

Moreover, there must be a strict control on seminaries by the government and the content of the lessons is to be approved by the ministry of education. In short, the horizon of all individuals should be broadened by government's extensive educational programs so that there remains no potential for radicalism.

Simultaneously, the rule of law should be enforced and no one is supposed to be deemed beyond law. As mentioned above in the case of Safoora, law-enforcers violated law through raping her and blocking the prosecution.

In some cases, women who complain against someone in the court is viewed negatively. It indicates that a number of individuals still prefer family cases or violence against women be resolved through tribal councils rather than judicial systems.

All in all, honor killing is a flagrant violation of law and stems from tribal code of conduct and traditional culture. The government should prevent this issue through extending educational programs and enforcing the rule of law. No one should perpetrate this crime with impunity. Meanwhile, the people of virtue should be appointed in judicial systems so that they enforce the law honestly.

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In the Blink of an Eye ...

By: Arlene J. Schar and Dr. David Leffler

Another deadly attack, this time in Eastern Afghanistan. The target: a wedding party. The toll: 63 dead and almost 200 injured. Ironically, the invitations to the Kabul wedding read "... we celebrate ... with a world of hope and desire ..." And, in the blink of any eye, their hopes and desires were laid to ruin. There are no words to express the insanity of such a cowardly act. Saturday's blast was the second major attack in the capital this month and, in the words of the groom who survived: "I know that this won't be the last suffering for Afghans; the suffering will continue." In the aftermath of such a despicable act, people become disheartened and lose all hope for the future, feeling the futility of even having hopes and desires which in the blink of an eye can be so utterly destroyed. Does this mean that there no hope for Afghanistan's future?

Fortunately, no. There is a powerful tool for change available to everyone who is tired of living in a world of unpredictable violence; a tool which anyone can access. This tool, a ground-breaking and effective means for ending conflict and violence, is Invincible Defense Technology (IDT): a proven method for defusing terrorism before it arises.

Invincible Defense Technology: A Non-Religious, Humane and Beneficial Approach

The practical components of IDT are the non-religious Transcendental Meditation (TM) and the more advanced TM-Sidhi programs. When large groups of experts practice these programs together, a powerful field effect of coherence and peace is generated that spills over into the surrounding population, thereby raising the collective consciousness to come up with more humane solutions to social problems.

Extensive peer-reviewed scientific research repeatedly confirms measurable decreases in war deaths, terrorism, and crime when IDT is utilized. A recent study published in May 2019 in Studies in Asian Social Science, 6(2), 1-45, found that IDT implementation by students was associated with a 96.2% decline in sociopolitical violence in the war-torn country of Cambodia as compared to violence in the preceding three years.

Due to the extensive research, the non-profit organization Global Union of Scientists for Peace (GUSP) advocates IDT

as a simple and cost-effective approach for reducing the societal stresses thought to be the underlying cause of such social problems.

Invincible Defense Technology is Cost-Effective

Any military is capable of training and maintaining groups of experts in the advanced IDT strategy. This Prevention Wing of the Military would practice IDT programs twice a day in large groups, defusing social tensions. The collective consciousness of all populations would rise through the influences of greater harmony and peace. Those who have engaged in violence will no longer do so. Studies have shown repeatedly that this method works - and will continue to work as long as the peace-creating groups are maintained.

Implementation

IDT is not restricted to the military. Any large group of experts trained in the advanced IDT techniques can accomplish the same goals of alleviating terror and violence by practicing this approach in groups twice a day. These groups could be comprised of congregations at places of worship, prisoners, the elderly in retirement homes, even students such as documented in Studies in Asian Social Science. The important factor is for the advanced IDT techniques to be performed by trained experts consistently in groups twice a day. Simply by doing this, violence and conflict would be eradicated, according to the numerous peer-reviewed scientific studies summarized on the GUSP website.

Time To Act Now

Currently there are militaries worldwide utilizing IDT training for their personnel, with positive societal results for their countries. Now is the time for Afghanistan to follow suit, especially as foreign support is withdrawn. A minimum of 600 trained experts practicing the IDT strategy twice a day would be enough to alleviate terrorism in Afghanistan once and for all, and restore to its people hope for the future. Afghanistan cannot afford to wait any longer.

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