

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



December 10, 2015

Human Rights Day

December 10th is celebrated as Human Rights Day globally. The day was adopted in 1948 when the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

This year the day is devoted to the launch of a year-long campaign for the 50th anniversary of the two international Covenants on Human Rights: the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which were adopted by UN General Assembly on December 16, 1966. The objective of celebrating the day is to highlight the importance of human rights and motivate different institutions and governments to make measures to safeguard them.

Afghanistan is among one of the countries that need to play a tremendous role in the area of human rights because of the basic reason that there have been evident violations of human rights on Afghan soil and they have even continued after so much emphasis and efforts. Even today there are many example of clear violation of human rights throughout the country and they make the headlines in the national and international media, while there are many that go unrecorded. Looking at the plight of human rights in Afghan society, it is really important that the Afghan government must do something more than promises and commitments.

In the contemporary era when the world has been globalized and the politics has been internationalized, the theories and movements of rights have reached to all the corners of the world to provide the basic rights of the human beings. These endeavors try to facilitate human rights on the face of the barriers of economic and political incapacities and shortcomings of the national governments. These rights are basically monitored by the international bodies and work under the umbrella of United Nations Organizations. Though the international movements and organizations play their roles to make sure that all the human beings are given their rights, at the same time it is necessary for the human beings to have complete awareness about their rights so that they are not violated.

Though there have been both national and international endeavors to protect basic rights of human beings, still there are many human beings who suffer from the deprivation of their basic rights. Many governments in the world, like that of our country Afghanistan, still lack the basic democratic principles and the requirements of welfare state and therefore fail to provide the citizens their due rights. To be very specific about Afghanistan it can be said that a so-called democratic government has been installed, which has taken oath to provide the people their basic rights, yet there are millions who remain unattended.

The international concept of human rights can be best developed on the basis of the United Nations Charter and the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). Article 1 of the UDHR says, "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood." Its preamble also emphasizes on the recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world. When UDHR was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1948, it was a non-binding resolution; however, today it has, to a certain extent, acquired the force of a customary law, which may be called upon by the national and other judiciaries. However, majority of the cases of the violation of human rights still go unattended because of the lack of a coercive and authoritative international body.

The United Nations Charter provides very strong commitments to the preservation of human rights and emphasizes that the member countries must follow them. The preamble of the charter reaffirms faith in fundamental human rights, in the equal rights of men and women, while the Article 1(3) of the charter says that one of the basic purposes of UN is "to achieve international cooperation in solving international problems of an economic, social, cultural or humanitarian character, and in promoting and encouraging respect for human rights and for fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language or religion." Most importantly, Article 56 of the charter says, "All members pledge themselves to take joint and separate action in cooperation with the Organization for the achievement of the purposes set forth in Article 55, which suggests for (a) higher standards of living, full employment, and conditions of economic and social progress and development; b) solutions of international economic, social, health, and related problems; c) international cultural and educational cooperation; d) universal respect for, and observance of, human rights and fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion."

The objective for Afghan government to play a tremendous role can be what is set forth in Article 55 of United Nations Charter. To be very much realistic about Afghanistan, one can say that guidelines are many; the only missing factor is practical measure. There is a wide gap between the guidelines/commitments and actions, and this gap becomes wider once the intentions and honesty are doubted; and in case of Afghanistan the gap is wider.

Managing Multiculturalism

By Dilawar Sherzai

The world of ours is embellished with a variety of thoughts, feelings, perceptions and ideologies. And the same variety, many believe, is the beauty of it. However, maintaining the same variety, the challenge for the current phase of human evolution is to co-exist with harmony and peace.

No reason can stand solid for killing innocent fellow human beings; not even the differences in views and opinions. In real sense they are bound to differ in their thinking, as human beings are born with different perceptions. Every individual is bound to be different in some way or the other from others. That is what forms his/her personality. Differences in thoughts can never harm you unless they are pursued with extremist sentiments and ultimately guided to violence and terror. If others differ from you, it means you exist. They are supporting you in building you identity. There is no need of getting sick of that. And no one can ever give you the right to kill others just because they belong to a different religion, ideology or sect as long as they do not mean to harm you.

The same stands correct for groups and institutions as well, and may even be applied to religions and cultures. But, unfortunately, this concept has been vehemently ignored by the people and the violation of the same concept has led to the killing of millions of people. The differences among the people and the groups of people seem to be getting deeper instead of disappearing. The globalization process that has been expected to bring people together has not been able to maintain a harmonious multi-cultural world. The people still because of their cultural, religious and ethnic differences seem to abhor others and even get ready to launch tyrannical missions against each other.

Definitely, immigration along with the developments in communication and transportation has made it possible for the people of different cultural backgrounds to get closer to each other, which has given rise to the concept of multiculturalism – different cultures co-existing in harmony at least theoretically. Multiculturalism definitely depicts and demands higher human values, but it is difficult to manage. There are various challenges that a multicultural society has to face. Among them acceptability is one of the most important ones. Further, the society wherein multiculturalism has to exist always generates a sort of fear of loss of national identity. This loss of national identity sometimes takes the form of political struggle through political platforms, while at other times it may take the form of violent measures. And on certain occasions it is also possible that the political parties themselves turn violent in the pursuit of their motto. The concept of multiculturalism has not been able to implement itself thoroughly in the world. The multiculturalism has not been able to form a global ethics or a global code of conduct. It has been lost somewhere in cultural relativism. The cultures or the negatives in the cultures are accepted with the claims of cultural relativism. If the same inclination towards cultural relativism is maintained it would be very difficult for today's world to form

common values, laws or systems, which are very necessary to avoid clashes among the cultures and civilizations. Unfortunately, our today's world is moving right towards the same kind of clashes. On the other hand this is going to strengthen the phenomenon of ethnocentrism. Though many sociologists believe that ethnocentrism, to a certain extent, is unavoidable, as every individual of group of individuals have to think from their own cultural and social backgrounds and may have a perspective of others in relation to their own cultural norms and values; however, the intensity and sense of extremism in this regard can prove detrimental for world peace and for the concept of co-existence.

As the concept of ethnocentrism says that it is judging another culture solely by the values and standards of one's own culture, the ethnocentric individual will judge other groups relative to his or her own particular ethnic group or culture, especially with concern to language, behavior, customs, and religion. These ethnic distinctions and subdivisions serve to define each ethnicity's unique cultural identity. Ethnocentrism may be overt or subtle, and while it is considered a natural proclivity of human psychology, it has developed a generally negative connotation.

Anthropological studies reveal that People born into a particular culture that grow up absorbing the values and behaviors of the culture will develop a worldview that considers their culture to be the norm. If people then experience other cultures that have different values and normal behaviors, they will find that the thought patterns appropriate to their birth culture and the meanings their birth culture attaches to behaviors are not appropriate for the new cultures. However, since people are accustomed to their birth culture, it can be difficult for them to see the behaviors of people from a different culture from the viewpoint of that culture rather than from their own.

It is really fine that the different cultures in the world sustain their identity and even be proud of their historical and cultural backgrounds but they are never entitled to subjugate and devalue others cultures and values. Nonetheless, when there is the discussion of a multicultural society, there are some necessary safeguards against ethnocentrism and cultural relativism. In a multicultural society, there is a requirement of common values that do not harass human beings and violate their rights, even if the same is suggested in a particular culture. The developed countries of the world today experience a process of multiculturalism, wherein they are facing the problems generated by extreme ethnocentrism and cultural relativism. However, none should substitute multiculturalism as it is the evolution human beings have made in their social lives. Definitely, it is time consuming and yet there is a long way to go to achieve it. For the time being states marked with multiculturalism have to introduce hard and fast rules and vigilant checks against any sort of attempt to strengthen violation of it. However, the developed nations of the world must never strive to go against it, not because the deprived nations benefit from it but because it is favorable for all the human beings. Further, this will prove them more evolved.

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Being Muslim – a Challenge in U.S. and France

By Hujjatullah Zia

Let there be no doubt: Islam is a part of America. And I believe that America holds within her the truth that regardless of race, religion, or station in life, all of us share common aspirations – to live in peace and prosperity; to get an education and to work with dignity; to love our families, our communities, and our God. These things we share. This is the hope of all humanity." These words were spoken by American President Barack Obama in Cairo on June 4, 2009.

Islam pays due respect to the rights and dignity of mankind. It was long before the Magna Carta and Geneva resolutions came into being that Islam had set human rights in its teachings. Unmindful that the sacred messages will reach every corner of the world, media and false thinkers tried to blur these ever-shining facts of the Islam with the aim of alienating people. Men's rights and dignity are violated to a great extent in every part of the world - in Islamic and non-Islamic communities. The current violence and bloodshed, which target the innocent civilians, outrage the collective conscience and stain religious values and ethical codes.

There is no doubt that men are born with a set of natural rights and dignity – which are bestowed by God – to live a free, peaceful and honorable life. Men's rights to life, liberty and property are considered inalienable and beyond transgression. The state is not supposed to deprive one of their basic rights but on the basis of law. Regarding men's rights to life, the Holy Koran asserts, "Whoever kills a person [unjustly]... it is as though he has killed all mankind. And whoever saves a life, it is as though he had saved all mankind."

However, Islamic tenets – which aim to safeguard men's rights and dignity – have been interpreted and presented against the spirit of this religion – especially when political interests were involved. Historically, a number of rulers imposed themselves on the public under the aegis of caliphate or sultanate – this was a flagrant misuse of religious texts which still holds sway. As a result, the Taliban's high-profile leader Mullah Muhammad Omar led a regime under the name of religion and introduced himself an Islamic caliph – his position and practices had no religious basis at all. Currently, the self-style Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) also claims religious legitimacy under the caliphate of Abu-Bakr al-Baghdadi and perpetrate horrendous crimes. Their violent acts of terror and bloodshed and violation of human rights and humanitarian law are cursed in Islam.

Islam never fought nations but fought only despotic authorities. Islamic war was one of liberation and not of compulsion. Muslims are prohibited from opening hostilities without properly declaring war against the enemy, unless the adversary has already started aggression against them.

Generalizing the practices of religious extremists to all Muslims – which has led to Islamophobia – is really unfair. The U.S. President rightly pointed out in his speech in Cairo as, "Indeed, none

of us should tolerate these extremists. They have killed in many countries. They have killed people of different faiths - more than any other, they have killed Muslims. Their actions are irreconcilable with the rights of human beings, the progress of nations, and with Islam...." In fact, a large number of civilians have lost their lives in terrorist attacks and suicide bombings and still do in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq, Syria, Libya, Somalia, etc. Similarly, scores of men, women and children were tortured and killed in the country during the Taliban's regime in Afghanistan on the grounds of their creed, sex and race.

Ill-fatedly, Muslims suffer in America and France following the Paris attacks and the shooting in California by a couple believed to have turned extremists. Muslim Americans say they are afraid. They talk about women wearing the hijab being spat on, a Muslim taxi driver being shot in the back on Thanksgiving and a pig's head found outside a Philadelphia mosque. Just hours before the Republican frontrunner's call for an end to Muslim immigration, community leaders from New Jersey met prosecutors asking them to take seriously alleged hate crimes against Muslims. The Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), the largest Muslim civil liberties group in that country, says it has documented a wave of abuse, vandalism and acts of discrimination in the last month. "It is reckless and simply un-American. Donald Trump sounds more like a leader of a lynch mob than a great nation like ours," CAIR executive director Nihad Awad is quoted as saying.

Moreover, the fresh horror of November's massacre, which took 130 lives, has darkened the picture further for French Muslims. In the 10 days that followed it, official sources reported 35 attacks, ranging from the stabbing of a woman wearing a hijab in Marseille to the painting of red crosses on a mosque in the Parisian suburb of Creteil. It's an improvement on the 116 attacks on Muslims registered by Dilcra, the government body in charge of collecting data, in the fortnight following Charlie Hebdo.

It is said that Muslims face a triple onslaught of threats – from those who conduct the attacks, from citizens who blame them for the attacks and, now, from the government.

"People are scared of us now. The perpetrators of the attacks have sullied us Muslims. And the public does not know how to differentiate. They generalize," a café runner Mohammed Ben Salem is cited as saying. Reports say that the French government has shut down three mosques and four informal Muslim prayer rooms out of concern that they were contributing to Islamic radicalization. It is hoped that the mistrust will end in both the countries and one's rights and dignity will not be infringed on the grounds of their race, beliefs, etc. Prayerfully, Muslim men and women will be allowed to practice their religious rituals freely in both America and France and their governments will have to protect their rights on the basis of Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR).

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