

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

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Children Highly Vulnerable in Afghanistan

The circumstance in Afghanistan have not been very kind to the weaker strata; particularly the children. Therefore, it can be observed that children have to go through myriads of problems in the society. They definitely have the potential to be the guardians of future of the country and play constructive role in the society, unfortunately, they are not provided enough opportunities to do so. The societies that have intentions to change their future, pay special attention to the children; Afghan society that needs to do something extraordinary regarding its future has almost neglected the children, which has resulted in their pathetic conditions and will ultimately influence the future of the society as a whole.

Children face different sorts of problems in different parts of country and the country lacks any functional mechanism to defend the rights of children. Recently, United Nations Special Representative for Children in Armed Conflict, Leila Zerrougui, said that Afghanistan is not addressing children's problems adequately and raised concerns over the lack of institutions addressing children's problems. She also said that the closure of schools in insecure parts of Afghanistan is a worry, "We have schools that are closed because they are under threat, we have girls that are threatened because they would like to go to school."

Deprived of basic education, the children fail to get any opportunity of changing their fate. They get caught in the vicious circle of child labor. Child labors are exposed to crimes and maltreatment to a risky extent, especially the ones who are employed by shop-owners, mechanics and small firms. They are even put to violent treatment by their employers on pity matters. Further, another concerning factor regarding the plight of the children in Afghanistan is the growing number of child beggars. Families, stricken with intense poverty, do not hesitate even to send their children for begging. Apart from that, there are professional beggars who utilize the helpless children for the begging purposes. The children are even abducted for the same purpose. The phenomenon of violence against children is multifaceted. It involves recruitment of children by armed forces and armed groups.

Taliban have never lost any opportunity of recruiting children among their ranks. They use them because they are easy to recruit and exploit. They are conditioned easily and then used for different purposes, among which suicide bombing is the most notable one.

Afghan security forces, in the past, had recruited children among their ranks because of the lack of human resource. Now, that has been controlled to a large extent and there are hopes that the practice will be abolished completely.

Recruitment of the children by Taliban militants basically result in violence against children and their abuse. The attitude of a trained militant clearly depicts the fact that the training sessions in their training camps do involve severe kind of violence and maltreatment. Another type of violence includes the killing and maiming of the children because of the conflict-related violence.

This also includes accidental killings or injuries by the national and international security forces, which, though relatively are much lower than the ones committed by the terrorists. Unfortunately, most of the deaths or injuries in this regard have been the result of the violent attacks of the terrorists on schools and hospitals. Such attacks do not only take precious lives but tend to inflict fear among parents and children regarding attending schools.

Apart from insecurity and terrorism, there are certain other issues of violence against children that are carried out by the society as a whole and for that the habitual inconsideration and sick mentality of the common men are responsible.

Many children, because of improper birth or because of lack of health facilities and insufficient nutrition either die in the very beginning of their lives or able to drag on their lives with certain physical deformities and serious diseases.

Most of the children of the society are not able to have access to education, either because of the financial problems or the traditional hatred of the parents for modern schooling system. The girls in this regard suffer even to more extreme levels. Moreover, the children who do not get a chance to be admitted in school are left at the mercy of the social evils.

The security of the children against all sort of violence, their proper nourishment and their character development are the most important considerations to contemplate on, if the government is really serious to safeguard the rights of the children. The same children are going to be the builders of future; their proper care should be ascertained through every possible means. Apart from the government members of the society can also play a tremendous role in diminishing violence against the children and uplifting their morale.



Civilians - The Victim of Terror

By Hujjatullah Zia

According to the UN report, the number of civilian deaths and injuries in 2015 was the highest record since 2009 in Afghanistan, with children suffering on a large scale. There were 11,002 civilian casualties in 2015 including 3,545 deaths, the UN said in its annual report on civilians in armed conflict, a four per cent rise over the previous high in 2014. One in every four casualties was a child, with the report documenting a 14 per cent increase in child casualties over the year. "The harm done to civilians is totally unacceptable," Nicholas Haysom, the UN's special representative for Afghanistan, is cited as saying. "We call on those inflicting this pain on the people of Afghanistan to take concrete action to protect civilians and put a stop to the killing and maiming."

Women also paid a heavy price, with a 37 per cent surge in female casualties. One in every ten casualties recorded was a woman, the report said. The document highlighted an increase in women being targeted for moral crimes, calling the executions and lashings a "disturbing trend", and saying the UN plans to release a separate report on such incidents soon.

Militancy and terrorist attacks in populated areas and major cities were described as the main causes of civilian casualties in 2015, underscoring a push by Taliban militants into urban centers "with a high likelihood of causing civilian harm", the report stated. Including Taliban-claimed attacks, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan assigned responsibility for 62 per cent of total civilian casualties in 2015 to anti-government elements. However, the report also noted a surge in casualties caused by pro-government forces, including the international troops. Seventeen per cent of all casualties in 2015 were caused by such forces - a 28 per cent increase over 2014 - the report said. It was not possible to say which side caused the remaining 21 per cent of casualties.

The report documented a doubling of civilian casualties due to the deliberate targeting by militants of judges, prosecutors and judicial institutions. There were 188 such cases last year, of which 46 involved fatalities.

While ground engagements were the largest cause of civilian casualties, improvised explosive devices came second, the report said, adding that the use of such weaponry was in violation of international law and could constitute war crimes.

It reflects "a disconnect between commitments made and the harsh reality on the ground", said the director of the UN's human rights mission in Afghanistan, Danielle Bell.

Based on this report, the Taliban claimed 95 per cent of such targeted attacks. Indeed, the Taliban made heavy inroads in 2015.

As a result, the Taliban insurgent group continued its "spring offensive" without cessation and captured Kunduz province on late September 2015 - the first time the extremists had managed to capture a major city since 2001. Similarly, they captured Sangin district of Helmand province and killed not only the civilians but also more than hundred of Afghan soldiers.

It is rightly said that "There isn't a single Afghan family that hasn't been affected by the daily acts of brutal and deadly terrorism carried out across our cities, towns, and villages. Our children - girls and boys - are attacked on their way to school and our mosques and public spaces are blown up all in the name of a noble religion, which in reality stands for peace and peaceful coexistence."

Few days back, Zamir Kabulov, the Russian President's special envoy for Afghanistan, said in a recent statement that the situation in Afghanistan remains tense, with "high or extraordinary" security threats present in 27 of the 34 Afghan provinces, as Taliban militants intensify their activities in different parts of the country. He also called the US and NATO mission in Afghanistan a complete failure. According to him, the ongoing "Decisive Support" training mission, which the US and their allies in Afghanistan are currently conducting, has also shown very little result. The Taliban also intend to spread radical ideology across the country more than ever before. It was reported earlier that the Taliban elements seek to spread warped ideology in Afghanistan via founding seminaries. With a new wave of privately run seminaries/madrasahs being opened across the country, there is a growing feeling among women's rights groups that these freedoms are again under threat. Reportedly, there are now 1,300 unregistered madrasahs in Afghanistan, where children are given only religious teaching. This is increasing fears among those involved in mainstream education. Arguably the most controversial of these madrasahs is Ashraf-ul Madares in Kunduz, founded by two local senior clerics, where 6,000 girls study full time.

Moreover, Barack Obama has said: "...instability will continue for decades in many parts of the world - in the Middle East, in Afghanistan, parts of Pakistan, in parts of Central America, in Africa, and Asia. Some of these places may become safe havens for new terrorist networks. Others will just fall victim to ethnic conflict, or famine, feeding the next wave of refugees."

Considering the Obama's negative prediction and pessimistic statements over the security situation in Afghanistan, such casualties are not the last tragedy. To the people's unmitigated chagrin, the Taliban's militancy will continue and more people will lose their lives or succumb to injury. It is the government to tackle the issue and prevent from further casualties by hook or by crook - through negotiation or military action.

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What Beats Corruption?

By Lucy P. Marcus

Corruption is a global scourge, sometimes becoming so deeply ingrained in countries that combating it seems impossible. In January, Transparency International released its annual Corruption Perceptions Index, noting that the problem "remains a blight around the world."

The International Monetary Fund, for example, has just warned Ukraine that its \$40 billion financial bailout could be cut off, owing to fears that corrupt officials will steal or squander the funds. And, during his recent visit to Mexico, Pope Francis called on the country's leaders - several of whom (including the president and his wife) are embroiled in conflict-of-interest scandals - to fight endemic corruption. But change is possible, as we have seen in the world of corporate governance in the last couple of years. Not even a decade ago, companies were run from "black box" rooms controlled by a few people whose authority seemed untouchable. Shareholder activists who thought otherwise were regarded as a nuisance - so many dreamy dogooders who would never change anything. The only thing that would ever matter, "realists" argued, was return on investment, regardless of the cost to people, the planet, or economies. The realists were wrong. Since the beginning of the year, Berkshire Hathaway's Warren Buffett and JPMorgan Chase CEO Jamie Dimon have been holding meetings with other business leaders to discuss possible improvements in corporate governance. On February 1, Laurence Fink, the chief executive of investment firm BlackRock, wrote a letter to some of the world's largest companies in which he issued a stern warning against short-termism and demanded that companies lay out clear strategic plans.

The following day, the corporate lawyer Martin Lipton, a long-standing critic of shareholder activists, released a memo entitled "The New Paradigm for Corporate Governance." Lipton recognized that long-term active investors are here to stay and that companies need to adhere to higher environmental, social, and governance standards and place greater emphasis on corporate social responsibility.

Similarly, Norway's sovereign wealth fund recently announced that it will hold companies in its portfolio accountable for their human rights records. And women, once told that gender parity in the boardroom might be achieved within a generation, will benefit from quota legislation adopted in the past year in Italy, Germany, and France.

None of this happened overnight. Change is coming faster now, but only as the result of momentum that has built over time. Whistle blowers would not be silenced, reporters investigated bad corporate actors, and investors were held accountable for their choices (leading them to act like Norway's wealth fund). The cumulative, mutually reinforcing effect of these and other factors has brought about change that only recently seemed unimaginable.

Clearly, there is still a long way to go; no one is hanging up a

"mission accomplished" banner. But the process of change provides a roadmap for the battle against corruption.

There was a time when only a few NGOs voiced concerns about corruption, and every once in a while a couple of brave journalists managed to write about what they, and others, observed. Fighting corruption seemed like a Sisyphean task, with little to show for hard, lonely work.

But those voices have multiplied and strengthened, becoming a more powerful chorus.

Governments are passing stricter legislation, like the UK Bribery Act 2010, and broad oversight mechanisms such as the United Nations Convention against Corruption encourage further legislation and enforcement. Companies are under genuine pressure to adhere to anti-corruption rules, and plenty of high-profile cases - from Walmart's corruption scandal in Mexico (involving violations of the US Foreign Corrupt Practices Act) to those in the crosshairs of law enforcement now, such as Petrobras, Rolls-Royce, TeliaSonora, and FIFA - should boost deterrence.

And public officials are being prosecuted as well. Guatemala's former president, Otto Pérez Molina, was forced to resign and was subsequently jailed for corruption. Indonesia's House Speaker Setya Novanto was also forced to resign, after he was caught attempting to extort money from a subsidiary of the mining company Freeport-McMoRan. And Indonesia's Special Court for Corruption Crimes has just sentenced the country's former minister of energy and mineral resources, Jero Wacik, to four years in prison.

Journalism has played a larger role as well. Reporters have gained more knowledge and more outlets to share their stories, including social media. And they are covering people who, in the face of blatant corruption, are no longer willing to be silent. For example, in Moldova, Europe's poorest country, a billion-dollar banking scandal has spurred a wave of public protests calling for fresh elections.

This is the kind of momentum that signals real change. Indeed, many government officials are taking principled stands. In Ukraine, Aivaras Abromavičius, resigned as Minister of Economic Development and Trade, citing high-level obstruction of anti-corruption measures.

And crackdowns on official corruption do make a difference. Luxury-goods sellers around the world, such as Prada and LVMH, cite China's curbs on bribery as a reason for weaker sales. Earlier in the year President Xi Jinping said he wants China to be a country where "nobody dares to be corrupt." (Of course, China's policy on corruption is not without worrying political overtones in itself.)

Corruption thrives wherever power, secrecy, and repression combine. It is undone by civic mobilization, sunlight, and vigilant enforcement. Those who view it as intractable should take note of the similar process that has begun to transform corporate governance. (Courtesy Project Syndicate)

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