

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

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## Art as a Strong Tool for Peace Building

There are different aspects of life and existence. Human beings need to satisfy all those aspects of life to live a stable life. These are not only linked to physical reality but also to the aesthetic, emotional and spiritual realities. In order to satisfy the latter realities, it is imperative that human beings must adopt the art as a tool. It is through art and artistic endeavors that they are able to satisfy these aspects of their reality and their existence.

Though in the modern world, the importance of science and technology has culminated, it has not been able to overshadow the importance of art and culture. Even modern art uses scientific and technological tools for its creativity and productivity. Moreover, art also has an imperative role in the development and preservation of culture and traditions.

It is also imperative to realize that art searches beauty, finds it and brings it to human life. It is through art that human beings have found the real meaning of beauty and they are able to make it a reality in their lives as well. This has also gifted human beings the love for nature, for each other and for the entire humanity. It has also given them the opportunity to achieve beauty in their social life and existence and thus transform the world in a better place to live.

It is also through art that human beings get the opportunity to express themselves. Art is like a door towards the outer world. Through this door the human feelings, emotions and thoughts flow outwards. And it is not just any sort of flow that qualifies to be called as art but the skilled and the fine-looking ones that reach to the level of true art. Thus, art functions as exhaust for human's true nature, which, if closed, can cause human's true self suffocate in a solitary confinement.

The true artists are the ones who pursue true art and thus pursue beauty and refined skills. They are always innovative and creative and long for a world that is filled with love and affection. They, at certain times and in certain societies, may be considered as evils and destructive but that may be because of the standard or the criteria through which they are judged. They may be highlighting the shortcomings and the defects within the society and the societies that do not have the capacity to absorb such criticism tend to discourage the artists and the art as a whole.

Artists are a very important stratum of society and they should be encouraged to continue their work in every possible manner. They may prove to be the guides of human emotions and their aesthetic sense. They may lead human soul towards satisfaction and contentment. Human beings, in today's busy world have become very much mechanical. Their lives are mostly influenced by the routines and they are the victims of monotony. They require change and novelty and artists can support them achieve such novelty and change. Therefore, it imperative that artists must be supported so that they are able to support the society in the best possible manner.

Artists dare to dream, dare to think differently and dare to change and all these can support human beings towards a different life – a life that may be quite better than the one they are living. Therefore, the societies must respect their artists, value their work and realize their worth; otherwise, they may not be able to live life fully.

The societies that are liberal and democratic have a very favorable environment for their artists. The artists in such societies are free to pursue their skills and grow as artists and, thus, become a positive part of society and become the agents of change and progress.

On the other hand, the conservative societies that are dominated by rigid rules and extremist religious sentiments tend to undermine the artists and art. They do not have any sort of tolerance for them, neglect them and make their lives miserable.

Afghanistan is also one of the societies where the artists are not given their due rights and they do not have the role and the position they deserve. In fact, the country has been caught in so many other problems that the issues pertaining to artists and art have never been pondered upon. Now that country is moving towards a relatively peaceful era, it is important that the artists should be valued. They should be supported both by the government and the people.

Moreover, the institutions that support and promote art must be strengthened. Music, painting, acting, dance, singing and all forms of art must be given proper chance to grow and to evolve. Afghan people require them not only for erasing the memories of war and instability but also for maintaining peace and tranquility and providing satisfaction and contentment to their souls.

Artists can also provide support in embellishing the country with the color and sounds of peace and creativity, instead of bloodshed and war. They have the capacity to engage youth in constructive endeavors, instead of violence and terrorism. They can, without any doubt, put the society on the track towards sensitiveness, beauty and attraction.



## The complexities of Afghan peace talks: Is peace worth Fighting for?

By: Neela Hassan

The beginning of peace negotiation process in Afghanistan has awakened hope of better days in Afghans' hearts: days in which no mother will be worried whether her kids will return home safely, and families will not mourn the loss of their loved ones. For a common Afghan, who spent most of the years of their life in conflict, peace means a life without suicide-attacks, explosions and gunfire. While every Afghan is fond of a peaceful Afghanistan, there are two stance points related to current peace talks: there are those who want the peace negotiation to be successful and those who think peace with the group that had been violating human rights for decades is itself a human rights violation. It is an undeniable fact that Taliban, during the five years of the Islamic Emirate and after being overthrown by the American-led invasion of Afghanistan in 2001, until now had been violating human rights. But, looking into the history of conflict resolution in other countries, it can be claimed that there is no other way to stop war. For more than four decades, Afghans' rights as human beings had been violated by all the actors involved in the conflict: from international actors, such as Russia, the United States and Afghanistan's neighbor countries, to national warlords who not only took thousands of lives but also facilitate foreign interventions in the country. Millions of Afghans were forced to flee their homes due to war, violence and persecution. The majority of the population, especially women, were deprived of education. The U.S intervention and the formation of new Afghan government in 2001 could not end the conflict in the country; it was the inception of another tough battle for Afghans. This battle made both sides of the conflict tired enough to agree on the negotiation.

The unprecedented gathering of some high-ranking Afghan politicians and Taliban in Moscow, as well as demands of Taliban delegation as their conditions for peace, has concerned human rights advocates, who believe peace process should not be at the cost of human rights. Although human rights practitioners and peace building advocates have different strategies regarding conflict resolution, in the short run, both seek to end violence and minimize suffering of people. In the long run, however, both set of practitioners have different ways for achieving their goals, making sure that violence does not recur and that every individual right is being respected regardless of the person's race, gender, religion and ideology. Whereas all instances of peace building illustrate some levels of tensions between human rights and peace building practitioners, both concepts complement each other historically and politically.

The aim of conflict resolution is to attain a negotiated settlement for peace with minimum loss of lives, in itself an attempt to end human rights violations. On the other hand, human rights advocates practicing human rights law are ensuring a peaceful society

for people. Both concepts share long-term and short-term dilemma: as conflicts resolvers seek to end the conflict and ensure a peaceful future, they ignore the aspects of transparency and accountability in the process, while human rights advocates, focusing on short-term goals that are prosecution of human rights violators, pay less attention to long-term solutions. That is the reason many conflict-affected countries chose the long-term solution, which is making peace with the opposition. Colombian peace process is an example of recent conflict resolution in the world. The country reached a peace agreement with FARC guerrilla movement in 2016, after six years of continuous negotiations. Colombia ended a conflict that lasted five decades and killed 267,000 people, 82% of whom were civilians.

It is an indisputable fact that the Afghans will not forget the suffering they endured due to the war they never wanted to be part of, nor is the blood of millions of innocent people forgivable. But, if these peace talks can reach an agreement that would stop the war and save thousands of lives, then why not? Last two decades of fighting of Afghan government with Taliban is pointing to the fact that our political institution is not strong enough to eradicate Taliban from the country, as Taliban is not only a group but an ideology as well. Moreover, relying on American troops to fight the battle for us is also not a rational expectation. First, while fighting Taliban, the foreign troops not only failed but also caused thousands of civilians to lose their lives. Second, the U.S government is not interested in investing more in Afghanistan's war. It is worth mentioning that, looking from human rights perspective, Afghanistan could not prosecute other actors involved in the war; many of those warlords who violated human rights are living a respectable life of luxury in the country without even apologizing for their actions. This does not imply that because other warlords have not been prosecuted, Taliban leaders are also entitled to amnesty. Ultimately, Afghan government and the international community overlooking past actions of warlords allowed them to be part of the Afghan government in order to prevent chaos and to ensure peace in the country.

Nonetheless, reaching a consensual agreement in peace negotiations requires time, patience, flexibility and honest effort from both sides. In the case of Afghanistan, it is even more complicated since there is no agreement about who should be leading the peace talks on behalf of Afghan government. Last but not least, common people play a crucial role in this process, as their commitment and enthusiasm toward peace have the ability to push both sides of the negotiation to reach an agreement that would grant a peaceful tomorrow for Afghans.

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## Afghanistan public health: Achievements and challenges

By: Mohammad Zahir Akbari

The decades of war and turbulence have taken a heavy toll on life in Afghanistan. It has also severely affected the capacity of concerned agencies to respond to critical public healthcare challenges. Hereof, Afghanistan used to be called as one of the most dangerous place in the world to live a healthy life. However, it seems that public healthcare system is one of the unique sectors which relatively have better achievements with providing the widest health services throughout the country. Recently, Ferozuddin Feroz, Minister of Public Health received "Best Minister Award" at the World Government Summit in Dubai on Feb. 10, 2019. According to him, the decrease in maternal and child mortality rates and an increased access to health services are among the achievements made in the ministry. The mortality rate in Afghanistan for under five-year-olds reduced by 44 percent and on increasing life expectancy at birth by seven years.

To know more about his award, Dr. Feroz was nominated as the Minister of Public Health in early February 2015 by the leadership of the National Unity Government, after receiving the highest number of votes of confidence of all ministers from the Afghan Parliament. A total of 20 ministers were nominated for the Best Minister Award through a world survey that included several world governments, in addition to public nominations through social media. However, Dr. Feroz has been picked as The Best Minister among eight ministers who had been shortlisted after global due diligence conducted by Price-water-house Coopers (PWC). On taking up his position as Minister, Dr. Feroz set some priorities and initiated a number of reforms and changes, with the aim of achieving sustainable and better quality services to improve the health of the people of Afghanistan.

Afghan people differently reacted to the award given to the public health minister. Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah said the award has been given to Mr. Feroz "because of his hard work and his achievements in the health sector". "The United Arab Emirates annually recognizes a minister in the world based on his achievements and this year they have chosen him (Feroz). It is a highly reputed organization and there is no way for bribe and anything else in selecting the minister," said Abdullah. Hamid Poya, father of a child who suffers from cardiac disease, shared the photo of his daughter and wrote that the treatment of his child was not possible inside the country despite that he visited all hospitals. "The public hospitals do not have any equipment, even the private hospitals did not have the equipment needed for her treatment," Poya claimed. A number of face-book users shared the picture of a Bamyani boy who lost his leg due ethnic discrimination in emergency hospital of kabul, and so was taken to India for treatment.

These cases show that there are still challenges need to be improved; one of the most highlighted issues is why millions of money outflow due to lack of advanced treatment inside the country. The other major issue in the sector is availability of low quality medicine. There have been many cases when the quality of different medicine in the country has found to be of ordinary standard and in certain cases they have even found to be expired. Unfortunately, there is no data to show how many lives it has cost due to this. Though the Ministry of Public Health (MoPH) has promised on various occasions that there would be extra attention given to the sector and it would be ensured that all the required medicine for the public health and security sectors would be purchased from authentic national and international companies, while there are still concerns that in reality the practices are quite different from the promises.

As aforementioned, People mostly choose to go the neighboring countries for serious health problems. There are many people who visit Pakistan and India every year for better medical facilities. This may be convenient for the ones who are financially strong and they can afford, but the ones who cannot afford going other countries remain untreated and mostly neglected. It is really tragic for them as their own country cannot provide them even their basic rights. It can be said that from each five resident of Kabul at least one had travelled outside Afghanistan to seek the healthcare service they required.

Moreover, It is said that up to 80/90 percent of medicine consumed in Afghanistan are imported from Pakistan, Iran, China, Turkey, India, the United Arab Emirates and some European countries. It is also estimated that the combined value of both illegal and legal pharmaceuticals in Afghanistan is USD 700-880 million. A large amount of these medicines enter Afghanistan illegally and through smuggling. In brief, poor quality medicine and high prices in the market have created considerable challenges toward healthcare services in Afghanistan. Unfortunately, there is no applicable rule to control the cost of medicines. Some of clinics or private hospitals write the prescriptions in a way that no one be able to read that and this way compel the patients to buy the medicine from their own medical shop with very high price. From one hand, they provide poor quality medicine and on the other hand, inflict losses on economy of people. So, there is a serious need to limit the volume of low quality pharmaceutical products entering Afghanistan through a range of reforms to controlling of poor quality medicine and also regulate the retail medicine price.

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