

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



January 18, 2016

## Ulema Should Play Role in Promoting Peace

With the extremist militant groups raging war and violence across the country, a government initiative organized by the Ministry of Hajj and Religious Affairs is seeking the religious scholars' help for tackling extremism in Afghanistan. The ministry has organized a three-day conference in Kabul on the phenomenon of extremism in the country, with about 400 religious scholars and clerics participating from across the country. Speaking at the conference, the minister of Hajj and Religious Affairs, Faiz Mohammad Osmani, said that extremism is expanding in the country and the efforts for curbing the problem have yielded no tangible results. The minister called on religious scholars to provide information to the public through mosques over extremism and the consequences of extreme activities. The religious scholars declared the Taliban insurgency and atrocities of the Islamic State militants against Islamic principles and human rights.

It is for many years that the government is pursuing efforts to encourage religious scholars to fight the very root causes of extremism and the thinking and ideas promoted by extremist groups in Afghanistan. However, the initiative has had no fruitful results. President Hamid Karzai started the initiative by convening conferences of Ulema from Islamic countries to get help from the religious scholars in the efforts against the militant groups in the country and to discourage the mainstream form being inclined towards extreme beliefs. In their meetings in Afghanistan, Pakistan and elsewhere over violence in Afghanistan, the religious scholars from many Islamic countries called the deeds of the extremist groups such as the Taliban and the Islamic State as non-Islamic. The Afghan government has been determined to promote the trend as a sustainable campaign against the way of thinking of extremist groups to prevent Afghan youths from being recruited by the insurgent groups.

However, the efforts has failed to encourage the religious scholars' community to do more to fight extreme beliefs in Afghanistan so to prevent the youths from joining the Taliban and other terrorist groups. The fact is that even the religious scholars themselves have conflicting positions over the trend of extremism and terrorism in the country. There are thousands of mosques and religious schools across the country, some of which are centers of promoting violence and extremism. There are thousands of clerics across the country engaged in activities related to religious affairs.

This is while there is no control from the government over activities going on in those centers and mosques.

In the past, the some preachers played an undeniable role in promoting extremism and terrorism in the country. Due to negligence and poor performance from the authorities, there are still mosques across the country being used by preachers to promote extremism and tacitly approve the actions of the extremist groups such as the Taliban. Despite the importance of oversight of the activities of preachers in the mosques, there is a lack of concerted efforts from the government to monitor activities of preachers promoting violence and hatred. Alongside, the efforts to convene meetings of religious scholars to get their support in the efforts against extremism and insurgency in the country, the government need to tighten control where pro-Taliban groups promote extreme ideas and conduct anti-government activities.

There are many reasons for the failure of the efforts to encourage the religious scholars' community to fight against extreme ideas of the terrorist groups. In addition to the lackluster performance from the government to promote and sustain a cohesive approach over the issue, the religious scholars have also been unwilling to take a bolder stance against the militant groups.

The Ulema community in the country has been under heavy criticisms at times for not taking a clear stance against the bloodshed of the Taliban and other militant groups. Many from the public, the activists and some politicians have been criticizing the religious scholars including the Ulema Council for not condemning bombings and suicide attacks. However, there are conflicting views over the activities of the extremist groups such as the Taliban among the religious scholars. While many of well-known clerics and religious scholars have been vocal in their opposition to the Taliban and actions of the terrorist groups, there are many others tacitly support the Taliban and are in line with the extreme ideas of the extremist groups. In general, the religious scholars have been largely unwilling to take an apparent stance over the deeds of the extremist groups in the country due to fears from the militants. The recent efforts by government or conducted spontaneously by the religious scholars and the Ulema council is a step forward in the efforts to fight the ideas and the way of thinking of the extremist groups.

The government needs to promote the efforts further and help pro-peace and pro-government religious circles to step up the spiritual fight against the militant groups. The government needs to devise comprehensive plans for overseeing religious centers. The government religious bodies should redouble efforts to encourage the religious scholars to promote peace in Afghanistan.

## Let's Give Peace a Chance!

By Muhammad Rasool Shah

As the Quadrilateral Coordination Group (QCG) including Afghanistan, Pakistan, the United States and China is going to have its meeting in Kabul, it is hoped that way for the fruitful negotiations between Taliban and Afghan government would be paved and soon both the parties would be on the table to settle down the conflict that has inflicted incalculable harm to Afghans and the region as a whole.

The first meeting of this group was held in Islamabad on January 11, 2016 where all the stakeholder agreed to settle down peacefully the conflict in Afghanistan. The delegations were led by Afghan Deputy Foreign Minister Hikmat Khalil Karzai, Pakistan's Foreign Secretary Aizaz Ahmad Chaudhry, US Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan Ambassador Richard Olson and China's Special Envoy for Afghanistan Ambassador Deng Xijun.

In the meeting to be held in Kabul, the group would devise a roadmap to hold these talks between Taliban and Afghan government.

The importance of these talks is of prime importance as it is brokered by two important powers of the world, the United States and China. Both the countries have played important role in the affairs of Afghanistan in the last 15 years of democracy. Both the countries have great influence not only internationally but also on the regional powers associated with the long-standing Afghan problem. No talks or deal would be valid and feasible if it does not include or enjoy the support of these two regional powers. Similarly, the United States' role in Afghanistan is very important as it is present in the country militarily at a number of military bases and extends aerial support for the Afghan military. Similarly, American government is the prime donor of Afghanistan to meet its expenses.

In the last few years, the role of china has also increased as it made efforts to hold meetings and conferences about Afghanistan to bring peace and stability in Afghanistan and to invite more active participation by the international community in developing the country. The Istanbul Process on Afghanistan was held in Beijing in 2014 and after that, a number of meetings have been held in China regarding Afghanistan. Behind the scene, it is also mentioned that China is stressing both Afghanistan and Pakistan to hold meetings with Taliban, as China is also the close friendly country of Pakistan.

However, these meetings were not much successful in past. In July last year, when the peace talks were in progress in Pakistan, the announcement by the Afghan government about the death of Mullah Omar disrupted the whole process and the talks were immediately rolled up. This resulted in a wave of severe bomb explosions and attacks in Afghanistan, especially in Kabul that left hundreds dead and injured.

However, all the stakeholders felt that the situation in Afghanistan would never improve militarily and it is necessary that both the Afghan government and Taliban should resume talks and settle down on the peaceful agreement.

This need is much felt after the increasing insecurity in different parts of

the country and the struggle of Afghan government and forces to contain the increasing activities of Taliban and Daesh in the country. After the talks failed in July, there came a wave of bomb explosions that left the country crippled and deprived Afghans of the hope about the future of the country. Due to this reason, thousands of Afghans started leaving the country, investment and economic activities started shrinking and general conditions of the country badly deteriorated. With all these, the activities of Taliban increased to an unprecedented level. Kunduz fell to Taliban and Taliban were able to capture a number of districts in many other provinces like Faryab, Badakhshan, Helmand, Herat, Nangarhar. In such circumstances, it was badly felt that country might fall into the hands of Taliban and the overall system of democratic government might collapse. However, Afghan forces were able to regain the control of Kunduz but it remains a fact that Taliban are exerting their full pressure to regain the control of the country.

At present, Taliban are busy in fighting Afghan security forces in number of places throughout country. The present scenario shows that, it would be very difficult to weed out Taliban from the country and it will inflict great harm on Afghans.

It is necessary that a round of talks should be initiated so that the loss of lives and property of Afghans should be halted and economic activities should be resumed in the country.

The first and foremost gain of these talks will be the ceasefire between Taliban and Afghan security forces. 2015 was one of the bloodiest years in the history of our democratic establishment when thousands of Taliban, security forces and common Afghans lost their lives or sustained injuries. At the same time, the worsening security conditions badly hurt the morale of common Afghans. According to a survey conducted by independent sources, the morale and hope of Afghans about the future of their country plummeted comparing to the previous years and it reached to the lowest in all these years. If the talks are initiated and ceasefire is achieved, it would not only provide suitable environment for the business activities but it will also help in reviving the morale of common Afghans about the future of their country and we can hope a better future in such circumstances. In the meantime, we can hope for a solution acceptable for all the stakeholders in this war.

Usually, the general behavior of Afghans is against any talks with Taliban and especially Pakistan.

These peace talks will also give both Afghanistan and Pakistan an opportunity to sit on table, discuss the health of these accusations, and try to come with a mutually agreed-upon resolution. In the same way, the status of Afghan refugees in Pakistan is still unclear and good relations between the two countries would help to better address this problem as well.

We have witnessed that nations have successfully settled the long-standing conflicts with negotiations and so we need to support any process that can bring peace and security in Afghanistan.

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## Shaping the Fourth Industrial Revolution

By Klaus Schwab

Of the myriad challenges the world faces today, perhaps the most overwhelming is how to shape the Fourth Industrial Revolution that began at the turn of the century. New technologies and approaches are merging the physical, digital, and biological worlds in ways that will fundamentally transform humankind. The extent to which that transformation is positive will depend on how we navigate the risks and opportunities that arise along the way.

The Fourth Industrial Revolution builds on the Third Industrial Revolution, also known as the Digital Revolution, which entailed the proliferation of computers and the automation of record keeping; but the new wave of transformation differs from its predecessors in a few key ways. First, innovations can be developed and diffused faster than ever. Second, falling marginal production costs and the rise of platforms that aggregate and concentrate activity in multiple sectors augment returns to scale. Third, this global revolution will affect - and be shaped by - all countries, and have a systems-level impact in many areas.

The Fourth Industrial Revolution has the potential to empower individuals and communities, as it creates new opportunities for economic, social, and personal development. But it also could lead to the marginalization of some groups, exacerbate inequality, create new security risks, and undermine human relationships.

If we are to seize the opportunities, and avoid the pitfalls, of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, we must consider carefully the questions that it raises. We must rethink our ideas about economic and social development, value creation, privacy and ownership, and even individual identity.

We must address, individually and collectively, moral and ethical issues raised by cutting-edge research in artificial intelligence and biotechnology, which will enable significant life extension, designer babies, and memory extraction. And we must adapt to new approaches to meeting people and nurturing relationships.

The scale of the challenge should not be underestimated. The Fourth Industrial Revolution could lead to forms of human augmentation that cause us to question the very nature of human existence - and even sooner than one might imagine.

Consider the impact that mobile technology has already made on our lives and relationships. As the novelty of wearable tech gives way to necessity - and, later, as wearable tech becomes embedded tech - will we be deprived of the chance to pause, reflect, and engage in meaningful, substantive conversations? How will our inner lives and ties to those around us change? These are weighty questions, about which debate will probably

intensify in the coming years.

Of course, technology is not an exogenous force over which humans have no control. We are not constrained by a binary choice between acceptance and rejection. Rather, the decisions we make every day as citizens, consumers, and investors guide technological progress.

The more we think about those decisions, the more we examine ourselves and the social models on which we depend, the better our chances are of shaping the revolution in a way that advances our common objectives and upholds our values.

In this effort, new forms of collaboration and governance, accompanied by a positive shared narrative, will be essential. To this end, three key steps are needed.

First, we must continue to raise awareness and understanding of the issues at stake.

Decision-making cannot occur in isolation. We need an inclusive approach that brings together top minds from all over the world, from both the public and private sectors.

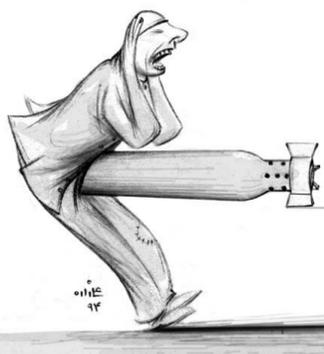
Second, we must develop comprehensive, constructive narratives about how the Fourth Industrial Revolution should develop. For example, we should ensure that values and ethics are at the heart of our individual and collective behaviors, including in capital and financial markets. We must move beyond tolerance and respect to genuine care and compassion, with empowerment and inclusiveness becoming guiding principles of our actions. Third, we must move to restructure our economic, social, and political systems.

It is clear that our current governance structures and dominant models of wealth creation are not equipped to meet current or, more important, future needs. What is needed now is not small-scale adjustments or marginal reforms, but comprehensive and innovative systemic transformation.

How the Fourth Industrial Revolution progresses will come down to people, culture, and values. New technologies, however remarkable they might seem, are fundamentally just tools made by people for people. We must keep this in mind, and ensure that innovation and technology continue to put people first, propelling us toward sustainable and inclusive development. Once we get there, we can go even further. I firmly believe that the new technology age, if shaped in a responsive and responsible way, could catalyze a new cultural renaissance that will create the sense that we are part of something much larger than ourselves - a true global civilization.

The Fourth Industrial Revolution can compromise humanity's traditional sources of meaning - work, community, family, and identity - or it can lift humanity into a new collective and moral consciousness based on a sense of shared destiny. The choice is ours. (Courtesy Project Syndicate)

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