

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



January 22, 2015

Afghanistan, Iran Reaffirm Resolve to Strengthen Mutual Ties

Afghanistan and Iran enjoy cordial, historic, cultural, ethno-lingual and neighborly ties. Both the countries share common strategic, historical, cultural and economic reasons to have vital interests. In fact, Afghanistan and Iran should further cooperation both bilateral and at the regional level within the framework of the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO), on the lines of the EU to reap out maximum benefits of regional cooperation. Afghanistan, therefore, is expected to have normal friendly relations with Iran and engage it in mutually beneficial cooperation in various fields.

Iran played a decisive role and proved a hospitable neighbor keeping large number of Afghan emigrants on its land at the time when Afghans were hapless. Till date numerous Afghans choose to work in Iran, finding close cultural bonds with their people. Nevertheless, the uncivilized treatment of Afghans, denial of their right to education and basic health are primary problems pleading immediate attention.

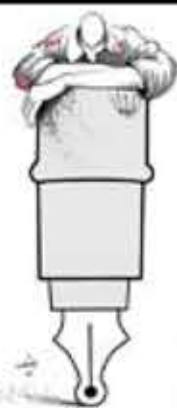
There are multiple problems Iran share with Afghanistan; one being the comprehensive treaty on the Helmand River Water Rights dating to 1973, when there are tensions about the lack of verification and enforcement of the flow of water into Iran. Unchecked poppy cultivation and opium smuggling was another major regional issue, dwindling between the two neighbors. Iran is not only a transit point for the Afghan narcotics business, but also a major consumer market for opiates. The United Nations estimates that the Islamic Republic has 1.2 million drug addicts but others think there could be millions more. Iranian forces crack down on the drug trade by fighting heavily armed traffickers and patrolling the border. Tehran claims to spend \$1 billion annually on its war on drugs. Iranian leaders critique the Afghan government and its Western allies for failing to cease the cultivation and production of narcotics. Formerly, Iranian foreign minister Jawad Zarif called on Afghan President and CEO, in one-on-one meeting to talk on several issues of common interest and strengthening bilateral relationship. At a meeting President Ashraf Ghani stressed cooperation on issues of counter-terrorism, drugs, refugees, economic links and transit trade. The premier promised a long-term strategic cooperation pact could be signed soon with neighboring country. The President Ghani appreciated Iran's role in bolstering regional cooperation. He said Afghanistan viewed Iran as a long-term partner and desired friendly bilateral relations. The signing of cooperation agreement was also talked to be duly finalized.

The CEO also pointed to the growing smuggling of narcotics and activities of the Islamic State (IS) in the region. He said the unity government was interested in further cementing ties with Iran. Access to Iranian railway lines and enhancement of trade ties through the Chabahar port would help boost Afghanistan's economy. On the other hand the Iranian foreign minister, Zarif called terrorism a shared concern, saying the whole region was threatened by extremist elements. Iran was prepared to organize a joint force with regional countries to contain extremism, he said. He stoutly supported the Afghan-led peace process. Nonetheless, he expressed grief over prolonged presence of foreigners in Afghanistan devoid of inflicting an impact over improvement of the regional situation whilst showing reservation. He said Iran and Afghanistan should work together on the issue of refugees, their legal status and travel.

The persistent state of insecurity and unemployment is forcing large number of Afghans to move foreign countries in the search for better livelihood. Iran is one of such of countries that are hosting large number of Afghans. Iran of course renders great humanitarian service by allowing Afghans seek refuge in its land. Nevertheless the mass violation of human rights must be deemed inhuman if not immoral. Reportedly Afghans are suffering ill-treatment in the said country. The issues have been raised on diplomatic level. Conversely the Afghan government with exception of receiving corps has done nothing satisfactory.

This is one of such cases that surfaced on the media; there are several cases that go unreported. Admittedly the Afghan government might have raised the issue with Iranian counterpart on diplomatic or political level but is never given a priority. On this very ground the political leadership is accusable for doing nothing satisfactory to rescue Afghan citizens on the death row in Iran. Like many other political and economic issues that seek mutual resolution the Afghanistan and Iran should sign prisoners exchange treaty, granting reimbursement to criminals involved in minor crimes.

Trade between the two nations has increased dramatically since the overthrow of the Taliban government in late 2001. Iran and Afghanistan planned on building a new rail line connecting Mashhad to Herat. In 2009, Iran was one of the largest investors in Afghanistan, which is mainly in the construction of roads and bridges as well as agriculture and health care that subsided gradually. According to the chairman of Afghanistan Chamber of Commerce and Industries, Iran's exports to Afghanistan in 2008 stood at \$800 million. Iran keeps a good market for variant products like fresh and dried fruits, minerals, precious stones, and spices. Significantly, the Iranian oil products, cement, construction material, carpets, home appliances, and detergents can be imported at a cheaper price provided the Iran and US deal lead to progression. Iran can too import nuts, carpets, agricultural products as well as handicrafts from Afghanistan. The demonstration of a firm resolve straightening the areas of common interest from the two sides, will help Afghanistan improve its trade with Iran and earn lots of revenue in return.



cultural situation

War Criminals should be Prosecuted

By: Hujjatullah Zia

Human rights violation and war crime are done with impunity before the eye of international community. Syrians and Palestinians are burning amidst violence and bloodshed; however it seems that the conscience of the international onlookers is not outraged at all. In other words, the poignant tragedy of the war victims will move one into tears but no reaction is taken by the international community, albeit it is stated in the permeable of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, "Whereas 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, whereas disregard and contempt for human rights have resulted in barbarous acts which have outraged the conscience of mankind, and the advent of a world in which human beings shall enjoy freedom of speech and belief and freedom from fear and want has been proclaimed as the highest aspiration of the common people, whereas it is essential, if man is not to be compelled to have recourse, as a last resort, to rebellion against tyranny and oppression, that human rights should be protected by the rule of law...."

The International Tribunal has to prosecute the war criminals the same as it brought the Bosnia-Herzegovina war criminals into justice - especially the leaders as Dusan Tadic. The Bosnian, a country fractured by a violent civil war when it split from the former Yugoslavia in 1992, civil war pitted three ethnic groups against one another - Serbs, Croats, and Muslims. Each side charged the other with atrocities and war crimes. Much attention, however, focused on the side winning the civil war - the Bosnian Serbs.

To carve out a separate state for themselves, Bosnian Serbs adopted a policy of "ethnic cleansing." As Serb fighters moved into a Bosnian Muslim area, they raped and terrorized civilians to force them to flee from their homes. Serbs rounded up military-age Muslim men and boys and held them in detention camps. In 1992, the international press exposed starvation and other mistreatment of these prisoners. Suddenly, many in the world saw the image of concentration camps in Europe once again.

To know more about the history of Bosnian war, during this war in the early 1990s ethnic cleansing, genocide and other serious crimes were committed on all sides. Stung by press criticism, the Bosnian Serbs dismantled many of their prison camps. But in July 1995, when the Bosnian Serb army captured the city of Srebrenica, about 8,000 Muslim men and boys disappeared. Witnesses say that they were all shot and buried in mass graves. In May, 1993, the UN Security Council established the International Criminal Tribunal for Yugoslavia (ICTY) to try those responsible for violations of international humanitarian law in the territory of the former Yugoslavia since 1991.

The purpose of the tribunal was to bring justice to the victims of the conflict and deter future leaders from committing similar atrocities. The ICTY had also taken on cases from the Kosovo crisis of the late 1990s.

The ICTY was the UN's first special tribunal and came under intense scrutiny. It has been criticized for being politicized, biased, unfair and very costly. Lengthy trials and controversial decisions had led to a growing loss of faith in the tribunal, and critics question the tribunal's ability to ease tensions and promote reconciliation in the Balkans. Despite its shortfalls, the tribunal had however been instrumental in the creation of the first permanent international criminal court, the International Criminal Court (ICC), providing a number of 'lessons learned.'

According to witnesses, Dusan Tadic, a Bosnian Serb war criminal and former SDS leader in Kozarac, raped at least one woman, beat more than a dozen people to death, and made his victims drink mud and motor oil. If this were a typical criminal case, Tadic would be charged with rape, murder, mayhem, and assault and battery. But Tadic's case was not a typical criminal trial. The victims were prisoners of war. The alleged incidents took place in a concentration camp in Bosnia. Tadic's trial took place in The Hague, Netherlands, before a special international tribunal established by the United Nations. Dusan Tadic was the first individual prosecuted before an international court since the famous Nuremberg and Tokyo war crimes trials following World War II.

By international agreement, war crimes generally involve the intentional killing or mistreatment of prisoners of war and other noncombatants during wartime. One of the purposes of the Nuremberg and Tokyo trials was to warn those who might commit such acts in the future that they would be held accountable and punished by international law. Yet Tadic was the first person to be prosecuted by an international court in almost 50 years. Why haven't there been other war crimes trials? Do we need a permanent international criminal court?

"Violence breeds violence. In 1993, emboldened by Milosevic's campaign of terror against the Muslims and the Western powers' consistent denial that genocide had taken place, the Croats entered the war against their former Muslim allies, using many of the same methods as the Serbs - terror, deportations, concentration camps, indiscriminate bombardments of civilians, massacres, the blocking of humanitarian aid, destruction of religious shrines, and appropriation of property." The International Tribunal carried out a humanitarian and fair act. It is urged to break the silence and pay special attention on the war victims and bring the war criminals into justice as soon as possible. In short,

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"Asia-Pacific can lead the world to end the AIDS epidemic"

By Shamsah

This century opened with the AIDS epidemic at its peak. Now, 15 years later, new HIV infections are down significantly worldwide, while access to treatment has cut the number of AIDS-related deaths by more than a third. These achievements are no accident. In 2000, Governments committed to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) which addressed the greatest challenges of our time, including halting and beginning to reverse the spread of HIV. The progress we have seen since then fulfills a promise and proves, that strong leadership and sustained engagement deliver results.

Still, much more remains to be done. This year, the international community will need to, once more, show bold action in charting a path forward on HIV. In September, as the deadline for achieving the MDGs comes to an end, governments will decide on a new set of sustainable development goals for the period after 2015. To help define the future of the HIV response in this new era, Governments across Asia-Pacific together with civil society and other partners are gathering in Bangkok this week at a major regional meeting convened by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), in partnership with the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and other organizations. Since HIV first emerged, the Asia-Pacific region has been a leader in demonstrating political commitment and investing resources to address the epidemic. Initiatives like Thailand's programme to promote safer sex have been widely replicated. However, if the region is to continue to be a pioneer, Governments must urgently confront several challenges head-on.

Perhaps the biggest challenge is ensuring sustainable financing for HIV programmes. More than US\$ 2 billion has been mobilized for Asia and the Pacific, but international donors account for nearly 40 per cent of the funding. This is not sustainable. While external donors have played a critical role in providing seed money for HIV programmes, countries cannot forever rely on international funding. Clearly there is scope for greater domestic spending given the region's economic dynamism. China is an example of what is possible. Between 2006 and 2013 the country increased spending on HIV programming seven times. Now, due to its committed leadership, China has made the transition to full self-reliance, even in the face of one of the most serious AIDS epidemics in the region. While some low-income countries will continue to need support from international donors, Governments must share responsibility and invest significantly. Otherwise, they risk losing the gains they have worked so hard to secure. They must pay now, or pay forever. While larger domestic investments are needed, it is equally important to get more value for money. As ESCAP member states have recognized in past resolutions, the populations most affected by the HIV epidemic include sex workers, men who have sex with

men, transgender people, and people who inject drugs. Yet, despite this knowledge, many countries are underfunding precisely those programmes which would make the most impact. Only an estimated 8 per cent of overall AIDS spending is for HIV prevention among key populations at higher risk of HIV exposure. To get results, health authorities must work with civil society to promote community-based HIV services for the people who need them most. Two-thirds of key populations don't know their HIV status. It is important to scale up HIV testing by offering simple but highly effective tests in communities.

However, ensuring a full return on investments doesn't only depend on funding. Stigma and discrimination prevent people living with HIV and key population groups from accessing essential services. Almost every country in the region has laws, policies or practices that hinder the AIDS response. For example, 42 countries criminalize some aspect of sex work and 21 countries prohibit same-sex sexual relations. Such laws and policies are unjust, prevent social development and increase risky health behaviour. They must be reversed. 1.5 million people living with HIV in Asia-Pacific are accessing life-saving treatment. While this is a big success, it poses a challenge for the sustainable funding of the AIDS response. To compound the problem, millions more people still need to receive treatment. Governments will, therefore, need to meet the demand for more treatment in the coming years, including new and more expensive anti-retroviral treatments (ARTs).

The Asia-Pacific region has the potential to meet this challenge. It is a hub of entrepreneurial and scientific innovation, which manufactures affordable HIV treatment and other commodities on a large scale. Indian manufacturers, for example, already provide the bulk of the generic ARTs used in low-and-middle income countries, helping to drive down the cost of HIV treatment across the globe. Going forward, we will need to continue this trend towards reducing the price of ARTs, discovering new and more powerful treatments, and hopefully one day finding a cure.

Ending the AIDS epidemic in Asia and the Pacific is possible, as long as countries have the courage and wisdom to take the right kinds of action. Governments must invest significantly more in the AIDS response. They must increase the impact of their investments by refocusing their efforts on the people at higher risk of HIV infection. Finally, they must promote scientific innovation and affordable access to life-saving medicine. Such bold actions will not only accelerate the progress made in Asia and the Pacific in responding to HIV in the new millennium; they will also help propel the world to end the AIDS epidemic, once and for all.

(Shamsah Akhtar is Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations and Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific; and Michel Sidibé is Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations and Executive Director of the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS)

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