

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



January 24, 2017

Zohra Wins Freemuse Award 2017

Afghanistan's women orchestra - Zohra; also the first and the only female orchestra in Afghanistan has been entitled with the famous Freemuse Award 2017. Freemuse - the world forum on music and censorship is an independent international membership organization that has been working to advocate and defend freedom of expression for musicians and composers around the world. It has a Special Consultative Status with the United Nation's Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) since 2012. Each year it gives different sorts of awards to individuals and groups that make remarkable achievements in the field of music. And, this year its highest awards has been given to Zohra, which is a matter of pride for Afghan people as a whole.

Zohra is basically managed by Afghanistan's National Institute of Music (ANIM). The institute has really made some remarkable endeavors to revive Afghan music and bring about modern trends within it as well. It runs formal classes on music and also festivals and programs where students and musicians from around the country could be trained in preparation for concerts. The Institute recently sent female musicians to Europe where they played traditional music of Afghanistan. Zohra also performed at Davos 2017 session in Switzerland.

It is also vital to observe that ANIM, in a manner, is developing Afghanistan's human resource. Music is an art and also a skill. It can support those who are involved in it financially as well. They can make their living by playing different instruments and by singing. Thus, those who have interest in music can satiate their thirst for music and at the same time make a reputable earning for themselves. Rahil Mohammad Formuli, deputy head of vocational studies at Ministry of Education recently revealed that National Music Institute has a good criterion and at least 50 percent of its students are street children.

Zohra on the other hand is an indication of what Afghan women are capable of. In fact, they have even proved themselves in the fields that are not thought to be for women in Afghan society. They have proved themselves in different sports events. They take part in politics and some among them are heading different organizations within the country. And, they have shown their talents in music as well, which is even considered inappropriate for Afghan men to listen to or to take part in. There are many Afghan female singers who have proved to the country and even internationally that they have extra-ordinary talent.

Afghan women who are in music are thought to be 'characterless' and most of the society members machinate both intentionally and unintentionally that they should be discouraged as much as possible. There are different rumors and fake stories about different Afghan female singers who are famous nowadays. Unfortunately, most of the people never try to investigate about such stories and play a part in further promulgating them. Apart from singing, even if a girl or woman tries to use or play any musical instrument, there are many who start doubting her character and consider her awkward and sinful. Even her own family members stand against her and suggest or even threaten her to leave the 'sinful' task. However, Zohra has proved that Afghan women are standing strong against all such baseless opposition and they are determined to show their capabilities and skills to the world and even impress them.

Negin Khpalwak, a 19 year old Afghan girl from south-east Afghanistan, the leader of Zohra, is a very interesting case in this regard. She had to face different sorts of threats to reach to this position. She had started playing music during the reign of Taliban when there was a complete ban over such activities. She, however, continued her work secretly, even from her family members. Finally, she decided to reveal her secret to her father, who, astonishingly, favored her and supported her to continue her skill. The other family members and relatives, however, were not impressed by her passion and stood against her intentions. So, she decided to leave her village and travel to Kabul. She, now, leaves in an orphanage in Kabul but enthusiastically follows her passion for music. Even now she feels insecure in many ways. She cannot visit her village because recently when she did so, she was threatened to be killed because he had appeared in a television show, wherein she had led the orchestra.

Nevertheless, she is determined and recently said in an interview, "I will never accept defeat... I will continue to play music. I do not feel safe, but when people see me and say, 'That is Negin Khpalwak', that gives me energy." The achievement of Zohra is really huge, considering the status of women in the Afghanistan and the behavior of society towards them and towards music. Nevertheless, it remains a fact that Afghanistan, like any other country, has many talented women who can play their role in earning a respectable name for the country and introducing the necessary positive changes within the society. It is really important that government takes tangible measures against the discriminatory ideas and behavior against women. Government can prove to be a hope for the women. If it itself encourages the intentions that may undermine the rights of women, it would be very difficult to expect the same from common people.



ISIL - A Global Challenge

By Muhammad Zahir Akbari

The self-proclaimed Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) is a serious challenge and seeks to destabilize the world through spilling the blood of people on the grounds of their racial and religious backgrounds. This group, which spreads fear and hatred, is sowing the seeds of sectarianism around the globe. Their warped mind increases the pains and sufferings of mankind. The flagrant violation of human rights, as a result of terrorism and militancy, is a great tragedy. Surviving war and violence that originates from the parochial mindsets and radical ideology is considered luck, mainly in war-torn countries.

Donald J Trump claimed in his inaugural speech on Friday to "unite the civilized world against radical Islamic terrorism, which we will eradicate completely from the face of the earth."

In order to "defeat and destroy" ISIL and similar groups, the new administration said it "will pursue aggressive joint and coalition military operations when necessary," work to cut off funding for terrorist groups, expand intelligence sharing, and use "cyber warfare" to disrupt propaganda and recruitment efforts.

The highly destructive role of the ISIL group in Syria is an unmistakable fact. In addition to killing men, women and children in cold blood, the group destroys historical monuments. Of late, the ISIL fighters have reportedly demolished the facade of a second-century Roman amphitheater and another ancient monument in the historic city of Palmyra, Syria.

The smashing of the ancient structures was a further attempt by the group to impose its will by destroying monuments or artifacts that it says do not conform to its strict interpretation of religious tenets. Celebrated as the "Pearl of the Desert," Palmyra, about 150 miles northeast of Damascus, was once a refuge for travelers on the Silk Road, the ancient trade route. Temples have stood in Palmyra for thousands of years. The group's demolition of historic sites in Iraq, Libya, Syria, and elsewhere has drawn international opprobrium; UNESCO has branded the actions "cultural cleansing."

No wonder, the US is strongly involved in Syria's issue and it is a great challenge ahead of Trump's administration. Seemingly, the US increases its combat mission in Syria. Pentagon said, on Friday, that an Air Force B-52 bomber carried out a punishing airstrike against a training camp of Al Qaeda west of Aleppo which killed more than 100 fighters. It was the second major strike carried out by American warplanes in Mr. Obama's waning hours in the White House.

The airstrike was condemned by the Syrian opposition group Jabhat Fateh al-Sham, which complained that the camp for new recruits was one of theirs and that the practical effect would be to eliminate fighters who are confronting Bashar al-Assad, the Syrian leader.

Jabhat Fateh al-Sham, formerly known as the Nusra Front, claims to have broken with Al Qaeda, but American officials say they are still a Qaeda affiliate. "America chose to confront the Syrian people and their mujahedeen," the group said in a statement.

On Thursday, the Pentagon disclosed that it had carried out an airstrike on Tuesday in Idlib Province that killed Mohammad Habib Boussadoun al-Tunisi, whom it described a Qaeda leader linked to plots against Western targets. A bona fide intention for eradicating the terrorist groups is highly appreciable. It should be noted that the ISIL seeks "revenge" through any possible means and gross violation of human rights.

And the issue is very complicated in Syria. That is to say, the militant fighters are supported by a mysterious hand since it shows backlash for losing the ground in Mosul and Aleppo. The recapture of Mosul is likely to end the group's self-styled caliphate in it areas seized in 2014; however ISIL would still be capable of fighting a guerrilla-style insurgency in Iraq.

Although ISIL fighters are hugely outnumbered in Mosul, they have spread themselves among the city's residents, hindering government forces who are attempting to avoid civilian casualties.

After all, the group is widely involved in humanitarian law and kills non-combatants in the worst possible way. In a nutshell, the terrorist elements have crossed the red line and pay no heed to humanity, religious tenets or international law.

Additionally, they destroy cultural monuments, which have nothing to do with wars. To safeguard human rights, the world will have to broker and support peace talks between the Syrian's government and opposition group. Hundreds of thousands were killed and more than half of the country's population has been displaced as a result of Syria's conflict erupted on March, 2011 with protests against Assad's regime.

The ISIL has capitalized on the turbulence and seeks to muddy the water as long as possible. Syria's Prime Minister Imad Khamis said that his government was serious about the Syrian talks in Astana, noting that Damascus welcomes any initiative to restore peace.

The talks in Astana are the result of a Russian-Turkish understanding, which started with a ceasefire in the country, which excluded terror-designated groups such as the al-Qaeda-linked Nusra Front and the ISIL group. The germ of idea for holding talks for Syria's conflict is a wise decision and hope the world supports it so as to strengthen peace and stability and put an end to the deadly conflict of Syria.

Secondly, excluding the ISIL and al-Qaeda is wiser one and they have to be countered and eradicated. Let us see how Mr. Trump will play his role as US president.

Mohammad Zahir Akbari is the permanent writer of the Daily Outlook Afghanistan. He can be reached at mohammadzahirakbari@gmail.com

Breaking the WHO's Glass Ceiling

By Peter A. Singer and Jill W. Sheffield

This year, the World Health Organization will elect a new Director-General. Last September, WHO member states nominated six candidates for the position: Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Flavia Bustreo, Philippe Douste-Blazy, David Nabarro, Sania Nishtar, and Miklós Szócska.

On January 25, the WHO Executive Board will shortlist three candidates; and in May, the World Health Assembly will elect one of those candidates to succeed Margaret Chan.

All of the candidates have presented a vision for how they would lead the organization, and we personally know and admire several of them.

But, ultimately, we believe that Ghebreyesus is the most qualified person for the job. Our endorsement is based on three considerations that are important in any hiring process, and especially for a position such as this: the candidate's past achievements, leadership style, and the diversity that he or she brings to the table.

With respect to the first consideration, Ghebreyesus has a proven track record of success.

As Ethiopia's health minister from 2005 to 2012, he championed the interests of all of the country's citizens, and strengthened primary-care services.

He created 3,500 health centers and 16,000 health posts, and dramatically expanded the health-care workforce by building more medical schools and deploying more 38,000 community-based health extension workers.

Ghebreyesus's efforts now serve as a model that other countries seek to emulate as they try to achieve universal health coverage for their citizens.

He is the only candidate who has achieved such results at a national level.

Ghebreyesus is also a longtime champion and advocate of gender equality and the rights of women and girls. In fact, his efforts to strengthen Ethiopia's health system played a crucial role in more than doubling the percentage of Ethiopian women with access to contraception, and in reducing maternal mortality by 75%.

When Ghebreyesus was Ethiopia's foreign minister from 2012 to 2016, he gained extensive diplomatic experience, not least by leading negotiations for the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, the international community's plan to finance the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

This same knack for diplomacy is now needed to bring WHO member states together for cooperative action on collective health challenges.

Ghebreyesus's leadership style is also perfectly suited for this role: he speaks last, and encourages others to share their views.

He also knows how to spot and nurture talent, and how to bring the best out of the people around him. He would undoubtedly boost organizational morale and motivate the staff to deliver maximum value and efficiency - to the benefit of all member states and their citizens. And while he is a receptive listener, he is also decisive, which is an attribute for the leader of the world's foremost health institution, especially during global public-health emergencies.

Then there is Ghebreyesus's extensive leadership experience within global health institutions. As Board Chair of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria between 2009 and 2011, and as Chair of the Roll Back Malaria Partnership between 2007 and 2009, Ghebreyesus pushed through sweeping changes that dramatically improved both organizations' operations.

What's more, he helped them raise record-breaking financial commitments from donors: \$11.7 billion for the Global Fund, and \$3 billion for Roll Back Malaria.

This is precisely the kind experience and expertise that the WHO needs in today's global health environment, and it explains why the African Union has officially endorsed Ghebreyesus's candidacy. Amazingly, in its almost 70-year history, the WHO has never had a Director-General from Africa.

This fact alone is not a reason to pick a candidate; but in Ghebreyesus's case, his direct experience working in developing countries makes him uniquely qualified to tackle our toughest global health problems, which tend to hit developing countries the hardest.

It is time to break the WHO's African-leadership glass ceiling. Sustainable development is truly achievable only when leaders of global institutions are from the communities most affected by those institutions' work. Ghebreyesus's candidacy presents the WHO with an historic opportunity, which its Executive Board should seize on January 25. (Courtesy Project Syndicate)

Peter A. Singer is Chief Executive Officer of Grand Challenges Canada. Jill W. Sheffield is an independent consultant and longtime advocate for women's health and rights.



Chairman / Editor-in-Chief: Dr. Hussain Yasa

Vice-Chairman: Kazim Ali Gulzari

Email: outlookafghanistan@gmail.com

Phone: 0093 (799) 005019/777-005019

www.outlookafghanistan.net



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