

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



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Afghanistan – The Third Most Corrupt Country

It is not only terrorism and instability that have been influencing Afghan society; endemic corruption is also one of the menaces that have been eating the society like termites. As, there has not been decisive victory against terrorism, in similar fashion, the fight against corruption has also been unsuccessful and this evil persists and haunts all the fields of life.

With the change in government, there were some hopes that the situation would get better as National Unity Government (NUG), in its early days promised to handle corruption with iron fists; however, that does not seem to be happening even after more than a year. Afghanistan still stands among the most corrupt countries in the world.

An annual study of Transparency International has revealed that Afghanistan is ranked the third most corrupt countries among 176 in the world. This is really tragic and shows that no considerable work has been done against corruption though it has been highlighted as a major problem throughout the last decade. And, it has had negative influences as well; particularly in the top governmental institutions. Corruption not only dominated the elections but also haunted the Kabul Bank and brought bad name to the nation and at the same time financial loss; however, it has been left to dominate with vigor and strength.

It has victimized our society more than terrorism and insecurity and today if Afghanistan is not able to stand on its own, it is also because of the corruption. Most of the financial support and the projects that were aimed to bring development and prosperity were devoured by corruption and never reached to the needy people.

Our indifference towards this menace is really unfortunate and would cost us a great deal. Unfortunately, the present government and the relevant authorities do not have comprehensive strategy to deal with it and they fail to understand the urgency of dealing with it. They believe wrongly that they can deal with the issues of insecurity and terrorism without having to deal with the problem of corruption; and in this they are mistaken to a large extent. They basically put the cart before the horse and this would only complicate the situation for them.

Integrity Watch Afghanistan (IWA) has also shown concerns regarding the government's anti-corruption campaign. IWA's Executive Director has said in a statement, "The fight against corruption should be the top priority of the National Unity Government. There should be a political will for this purpose... The NUG has not implemented its promises it has made for overcoming the endemic corruption in the country." Government's reluctance to take concrete measures against corruption is basic reason that Afghanistan has been among the most corrupt countries of the world for some years now.

Today, corruption has penetrated into our social behavior. It is now a part of routine life to be corrupt. From a very minor to the most major matter, we find corruption ruling the roost. One of the most unfortunate facts is that the people do not consider it evil to be a part of corruption in some way or the other. They readily become part of it and do not seem to revolt much against it, because they know that ultimately the corrupt have to be rewarded. One of the major problems in tackling with corruption in our country is that the controlling mechanism itself is involved in it. The government that should be on the forefront to curb this menace, itself has been a major contributor in this regard. There have been many major occasions of corruption when current administration has been blamed for being directly involved in the matter. From the issue of election to the Kabul Bank episode, the government has not been able to extract itself out clean. On most of the occasions the government has blamed the Western supporters to be generating corruption in the country.

Western allies, on the other hand, have kept on insisting that Afghan authorities must carry out serious measures to curb the overgrowing corruption; however, the outcome is yet to be produced in this regard. The Western allies have spent billions of dollars in supporting the Afghan government; they have every right to make sure that the money which is intended to support the Afghan people must be used through a transparent manner. However, they have not been very much careful in this regard. And already much of the money has been misused by corruption. Nevertheless, in the process, the supporters of Afghanistan have lost their trust from the Afghan authorities and are mostly disappointed from what has been achieved after more than a decade of expenditure and hard work. One of the reasons that there is reluctance on the part of the international community to pursue the war in Afghanistan is, no doubt, corruption. Corruption in Afghanistan is now a complex phenomenon that requires extensive efforts from both national and international authorities to be comprehended and resolved. Definitely, the anti-corruption institutions, equipped with authority and facilities can be major contributors in curbing it and Afghan government needs to establish them and nourish them appropriately. However, it is also important to note that the honest efforts on individual level can be helpful to eradicate corruption to a great extent. The realization, on individual level, that a person commits the biggest injustice and violates the right of fellow-being when he does corruption is the crying need of time.

Human Rights and Dignity

By Hujjatullah Zia

Human rights are commonly understood as inalienable fundamental rights "to which a person is inherently entitled simply because she or he is a human being," and which are inherent in all human beings regardless of their nation, location, language, religion, ethnic origin or any other status. They are applicable everywhere and at every time in the sense of being universal, and they are egalitarian in the sense of being the same for everyone. They require empathy and the rule of law and impose an obligation on persons to respect the human rights of others. They should not be taken away except as a result of due process based on specific circumstances, and require freedom from unlawful imprisonment, torture, and execution.

What is special about us is our humanity, our being human. As humans, we can think and articulate thoughts; we also have a sense of right and wrong, which is our conscience and rights and dignity to be protected.

Equality does not mean that we are all the same. Each of us is different in our own special way. But we also have the common qualities that make us all humans. So each of us should be treated with respect and dignity and treat others in the same way.

Moreover, it should be considered that to be born free means that all people have an equal right to freedom. But freedom does not mean that we can do anything we want, nor can freedom for some mean limiting the freedom of others. Though we are born free, we live in a community that functions because there is an understanding among its members; in other words, it has rules and requires responsibilities.

Human dignity is not something that we can bestow or take away from another person. It is intrinsic to our existence. What we can do is enter into relationships that respect our mutual human dignity. When respect for human dignity forms the basis of our relationships. We have to nurture human characteristics to value one's rights and dignity. Imagine the suffering of a human being you've met recently. And imagine that you are the one going through that suffering. Reflect on how much you would like that suffer to end. Reflect on how happy you would be if another human being desired your suffering to end, and acted upon it. Open your heart to that human being and if you feel even a little that you'd want their suffering to end, reflect on that feeling. That's the feeling that you want to develop. With constant practice, that feeling can be grown and nurtured.

Albert Einstein has stated, "A human being is a part of the whole called by us universe, a part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts and

feeling as something separated from the rest, a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest to us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty."

Ill-fatedly, men's dignity and rights are transgressed widely across the globe. One's blood is spilt for his particular color, race or beliefs and one falls the victim of rape for her sex or just for pleasure. Torturing or abusing the individuals physically - which flagrantly insults their dignity - is changed to normal practice.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights has uncovered the reason behind violence and violation of men's rights and dignity and also suggests the prescription for healing the men's chronic wounds as it states, "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...."

History shows that mankind has fought to protect his rights and dignity. A myriad of people sacrificed their life to break the chains of slavery and to gain freedom. Rivers of blood streamed to maintain liberty and dignity. Violating man's natural and inalienable rights, has constantly outraged man's conscience and led to catastrophic wars. People preferred death to subjugation and humiliation. Ultimately, Human Rights' law was established to curb the life-threatening challenges and mortal battles and claimed to bring universal peace.

Afghanistan has committed to observe the UDHR, as it is said in the preamble of Afghanistan Constitution, "We the people of Afghanistan Observing the United Nations Charter as well as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights...." Moreover, men and women are entitled to equal rights in the Constitution as it declares in article 22, "Any kind of discrimination and distinction between citizens of Afghanistan shall be forbidden. The citizens of Afghanistan, man and woman, have equal rights and duties before the law."

Hence, we must respect the human rights of all people regardless of their social and family backgrounds.

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Homegrown Energy Security for Europe

By Anders Fogh Rasmussen

The European Union is highly dependent on foreign oil. For every 100 liters consumed within the EU, 90 are imported. Meanwhile, domestic oil production is plummeting, down more than 50% over the last decade. Unless the EU changes course and increases its production of alternative energy - including biofuels, an option the EU has long neglected - some 95% of its oil will come from foreign sources by 2030, according to the International Energy Agency.

The current state of affairs remains the EU's Achilles' heel, because it implies dependence on imports from unstable, authoritarian regimes. In 2014, EU member states spent a staggering €271 billion on foreign crude oil - more than the combined GDP of Bulgaria, Hungary, Slovakia, and Slovenia. Roughly half of this money went to Russia, the Middle East, and North Africa.

Thus, not only is the EU exposed to global supply disruptions; it is also helping to prop up authoritarian governments and empower hostile regimes, which limits its own ability to provide effective, coordinated responses to threats and provocations. The EU's struggle to devise coherent political and economic strategies to confront the challenges posed by Russian aggression in Ukraine and the inferno in the Middle East is a case in point.

The United Kingdom's recent decision to boost defense spending highlights the growing recognition that strong military capabilities will be needed to uphold Europe's security and sovereignty. But as long as its dependence on foreign oil persists, the EU will remain far weaker than it needs to be. The proposed Nord Stream II pipeline - which would funnel even more gas from Russia to Germany - is only likely to aggravate the situation.

Europe's energy security is likely to gain salience in the coming months, as 2016 shapes up to be another turbulent year in international politics. This year is also likely to see the completion of the EU's Energy Union, established to ensure secure supplies of affordable, climate-friendly energy. Unfortunately, Europe's dependence on foreign oil has been left out of the discussion. The European Commission must provide clear direction if EU member states are to develop alternative sources of energy.

Renewable energy from wind and sun can certainly play a role in decreasing the EU's energy vulnerability. Such sources are already helping to reduce dependence on coal and gas for electricity production. However, when it comes to energy production from oil - most notably fuel for cars - it is likely to be years before wind or solar energy can provide viable alternatives.

The EU should follow the example set across the Atlantic, where countries have worked to reduce their reliance on foreign oil. The United States, for example, has created incentives for investment in alternative fuels. Indeed, the US is the world's largest producer of bioethanol, which - along with the production of shale gas - has helped reduce foreign oil imports by at least 25%, while lowering carbon dioxide emissions and creating local jobs.

Brazil, too, provides a compelling example, having worked since the oil crises of the 1970s to reduce its reliance on imported energy. Today, Brazil is a net oil exporter and the world's second-largest producer of bioethanol, which has replaced more than one-quarter of the gasoline once used in the country.

Unfortunately, much of the policy discussion surrounding biofuels in the EU is dominated by outdated arguments linking them with rising food prices. Food should not be used to fuel cars, opponents insist. Today, however, advanced biofuels are not based on food, but on waste from industry, agriculture, and private households. In the words of José Graziano da Silva, Director-General of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, biofuels "can be an effective means to increase food security." Done right, their development would mean "more fuel, more food, and greater prosperity for all."

Biofuel technology kills four birds with one stone: It improves energy security, recycles waste, reduces greenhouse-gas emissions, and produces jobs (often in rural areas). That is why replacing imported oil with homegrown energy is one of the most important and far-reaching legacies today's Europeans could leave to the Europe of tomorrow. (Courtesy Project Syndicate)

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