

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

# Daily Outlook

## AFGHANISTAN

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### “NUG Must Do More for Human Rights”

Though emphasized and highlighted to a large extent, the issue of human rights violations remain persistent in Afghanistan. Since, the downfall of Taliban, though there have been many claims, the situation of human rights has not improved to a satisfactory level and most of the finances and the energies that were directed towards solving this issue have ended up in smoke. Researches and statistics by reputable and reliable institutions show that Afghanistan is one of the countries with most human rights violations and the government and other responsible organizations have not been able to perform their responsibilities sufficiently.

The change in government in the last elections could prove to be a ray of hope but only temporarily; as the National Unity Government (NUG) got involved in the tussles related to the power sharing formula. All the promises that were made before the elections regarding protecting the human rights and particularly the women rights were forgotten. Even after the elections the NUG leaders made commitments that they would take tangible measures to deal with the issues of human rights violation but unfortunately, those measures are not being pursued with true determination.

A recent report by Human Rights Watch (HRW) has disclosed that NUG has failed to make significant gains in achieving human rights reforms in 2015 and little progress has been made in reining in abusive militias, reducing corruption, promoting women's rights, and reforming the courts. However, it is important to note that the government had the opportunity to take bold initiatives and initiate a clear strategy in this regard but it was reluctant to do so. Even it could gather the required support and assistance as well from the international community.

There is no doubt in the fact that NUG did not inherit a satisfactory policy initiative and mechanism from the previous government and it had to start so many things from the scraps but the situation was not so that it could not do anything worthwhile. The fact of the matter is that it did not pay enough attention to the issue. Over burdening itself with other issues, the government had little time to concentrate on this matter. And, the result is clearly evident from the report given by HRW.

HRW senior researcher, Patricia Gossman, rightly observes, “Afghanistan's national unity government squandered important opportunities to tackle serious human rights problems... As reforms have slipped, so have essential human rights protections for detainees, women, and the media. Donors will need to work more closely with the Afghan government to ensure that the fragile gains of the past 14 years aren't lost.”

It is imperative that the gains that have been made after years of sacrifices and aids of millions of dollars should not be lost. NUG has to shoulder the responsibility in a true sense. It is not only about gaining aid and support from the international community but it is also vital for the betterment of Afghan society as a whole that the basic human rights must be preserved.

The government must also be careful that it does not make concessions and compromises regarding the basic human rights in the deal with Taliban. Taliban insist for their version of Shariah law and they may set conditions wherein they can ask for the changes in Afghan constitution and government policies regarding the rights of women, children and minorities. Such conditions should never be accepted and the gains should not be sacrificed for the political purposes.

For the policy makers in Afghanistan it is necessary that the policies should meet the international concept of human rights that is developed on the basis of the United Nations Charter and the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). Article 1 of the UDHR says, “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.” Its preamble also emphasizes on the 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.

The objective for Afghan government to play a tremendous role can be what is set forth in Article 55 of United Nations Charter which suggests for ‘(a) higher standards of living, full employment, and conditions of economic and social progress and development; b) solutions of international economic, social, health, and related problems; c) international cultural and educational cooperation; d) universal respect for, and observance of, human rights and fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion’.

To be very much realistic about Afghanistan, one can say that guidelines are many; the only missing factor is practical measure. There is a wide gap between the guidelines/commitments and actions, and this gap becomes wider once the intentions and honesty are doubted; and in case of Afghanistan this gap is really wide.



# Future of Afghan Women!

By Abdul Ahad Bahrami

After the two major transition processes – the NATO withdrawal and presidential elections – in the country, there are increasing concerns on the future of women's rights in Afghanistan. While reports indicate a considerable improvement on decreasing the gap between genders in most of countries across the world, Afghanistan is still far from the global efforts for improvement of women's conditions and rights. Yet in Afghanistan, there are concerns of a possible reverse in women's rights even after 14 years since the collapse of the Taliban regime.

Amidst the uncertainty and as the violence against women are growing, the policy makers in Afghanistan and the international community must act to ensure the conditions of Afghan women would not deteriorate.

The causes of violence against women are mostly driven by the dominant conservative culture and the decades-long conflict. However, the most dominant reason behind the widespread violence against women is the fact that the Afghan society is deeply conservative. The widespread domestic violence and/or violent behaviors against women are closely related to the conservative attitude of the male members of the families to the women, seeking superiority in form of guardianship over them. Inevitably, efforts from the male family members in seeking superiority result to conflicts in the families and consequently violence against women. The major reason behind the attitude of violent domination of male members over the females in the families is low rate of literacy.

The women have been deprived of their basic rights and freedoms as they have been treated as an inferior class in the society. For instance, for a typical Afghan girl, particularly in rural areas, it has been less likely to have the permission of her family to go to school, university or workplace, virtually leading to her deprivation from opportunities critical for a better life. In more conservative areas, during decision-making about marriage, a girl used to have no say about her preference or endorsement while the male members of the family have the final authority in making decisions.

The decades of war and violence have played a major role in violation of women's rights and limitation of their freedoms. In fact, the women have been direct victims of war and instability and the most affected segment of the society during the past decades of wars. They have suffered from being killed in the wars, murders, tortures and displacements. The militant groups still target the women activists as well as those who are going to school or working outside. The insurgents continue to target women activists and school girls to discourage them from their social activities and attending public schools. Despite extensive pro-women campaign during past fourteen years, each month there are many cases of violence against them in the society and family levels. Time and again, there are reports of violence against women, such as honor killings, rapes and tortures.

Despite all progresses made during past years, there are still concerns for probable setbacks, as the international community has already withdrawn most of their security forces, and the public anxiety is growing. Afghans are concerned about their future and par-

ticularly how it would affect the status of women and on the hard-gained achievements. Despite the substantial gains in the rights and status of Afghan women, there are still potential dangers threatening the minimum hard-gained achievements and reversal of the achievements regarding the lives and conditions of the women.

However, the fact is that Afghanistan has changed and the status of Afghan women has considerably improved since the fall of the Taliban in 2001. The programs aimed at improving the life conditions of women, have worked and helped in shaping the opinions of people towards the women to some extent. The policies and strategies of the Afghan government towards promoting the rights of the women have been effective – though inefficient. It has supported the media, human rights organizations, women activists and other groups. The collective efforts of Afghanistan and the international community have helped to encourage other parties in the society to step up campaigns for the cause of women's rights. Human rights organizations and women activists bear the brunt of the campaign against extremists and in the conservative society.

Public awareness campaign for promoting women's rights is one of the most major driver of change and the achievements made so far. But it has not been carried out with potent momentum which could all parts of the society. Public awareness gradually changes the conservative mood of the society and makes it ready for embracing the new way of life and accepting a new set of rights for the women. In order to carry out such public awareness, general education is the key. By generalizing education to the far-reach corners of the country, and to all parts of society, Afghans will be able to fight conservatism. In addition to that, the women now have direct and active involvement in the campaign, giving them a voice and the energy to make their voice heard.

As a result of the efforts, the conservative Afghan society is opening up for embracing new status and rights for the women in post-Taliban Afghanistan. In recent years, the situation has much improved as the collective move towards the goal of a violence-free society for women impacts the society. While there were almost a-zero percent of girls in school during the Taliban era, there are now millions of girls going to schools and universities, which virtually would change their life as well as the attitude of the society and that of families. During the Taliban regime, the Afghan women were fully banned from working outside and in public services and were forced to stay indoors. They were forced to be accompanied by a male relative when going out, visiting relatives or shopping. But now, they are memories of the past.

Today, there are women singing, teaching and lawmakers in the parliament.

The fact that millions of girls are going to universities is indicating that the country is changing, though not at a fast pace, but is moving in the right direction. However, there should be concrete measure both from the Afghan government and the international community to sustain these achievements and ensure that the women's rights would be protected and preserved in future.

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## The Coming Wave of Oil Refugees

By Michael Meyer

The idea that oil wealth can be a curse is an old one – and it should need no explaining. Every few decades, energy prices rise to the heavens, kicking off a scramble for new sources of oil. Then supply eventually outpaces demand, and prices suddenly crash to Earth. The harder and more abrupt the fall, the greater the social and geopolitical impact.

The last great oil bust occurred in the 1980s – and it changed the world. As a young man working in the Texas oil patch in the spring of 1980, I watched prices for the US benchmark crude rise as high as \$45 a barrel – \$138 in today's dollars. By 1988, oil was selling for less than \$9 a barrel, having lost half its value in 1986 alone.

Drivers benefited as gasoline prices plummeted. Elsewhere, however, the effects were catastrophic – nowhere more so than in the Soviet Union, whose economy was heavily dependent on petroleum exports. The country's growth rate fell to a third of its level in the 1970s. As the Soviet Union weakened, social unrest grew, culminating in the 1989 fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of communism throughout Central and Eastern Europe. Two years later, the Soviet Union itself was no more.

Similarly, today's plunging oil prices will benefit a few. Motorists, once again, will be happy; but the pain will be earth-shaking for many others. Never mind the inevitable turmoil in global financial markets or the collapse of shale-oil production in the United States and what it implies for energy independence. The real risk lies in countries that are heavily dependent on oil. As in the old Soviet Union, the prospects for social disintegration are huge. Sub-Saharan Africa will certainly be one epicenter of the oil crunch. Nigeria, its largest economy, could be knocked to its knees. Oil production is stalling, and unemployment is expected to skyrocket. Already, investors are rethinking billions of dollars in financial commitments. President Muhammadu Buhari, elected in March 2015, has promised to stamp out corruption, rein in the free-spending elite, and expand public services to the very poor, a massive proportion of the country's population. That now looks impossible.

As recently as a year ago, Angola, Africa's second largest oil producer, was the darling of global investors. The expatriate workers staffing Luanda's office towers and occupying its fancy residential neighborhoods complained that it was the most expensive city in the world. Today, Angola's economy is grinding

to a halt. Construction companies cannot pay their workers. The cash-strapped government is slashing the subsidies that large numbers of Angolans depend on, fueling popular anger and a sense that the petro-boom enriched only the elite, leaving everyone else worse off. As young people call for political change from a president who has been in power since 1979, the government has launched a crackdown on dissent.

On the other side of the continent, Kenya and Uganda are watching their hopes of becoming oil exporters evaporate. As long as prices remain low, new discoveries will stay in the ground. And yet the money borrowed for infrastructure investment still must be repaid – even if the oil revenues earmarked for that purpose never materialize. Funding for social programs in both countries is already stretched. Ordinary people are already angry at a kleptocratic elite that siphons off public money. What will happen when, in a few years, a huge and growing chunk of the national budget must be dedicated to paying foreign debt instead of funding education or health care?

The view from North Africa is equally bleak. Two years ago, Egypt believed that major discoveries of offshore natural gas would defuse its dangerous youth bomb, the powder keg that fueled the Arab Spring in 2011. No longer. And to make matters worse, Saudi Arabia, which for years has funneled money to the Egyptian government, is facing its own economic jitters. Today, the Kingdom is contemplating what was once unthinkable: cutting Egypt off.

Meanwhile, next door, Libya is primed to explode. A half-decade of civil war has left an impoverished population fighting over the country's dwindling oil revenues. Food and medicine are in short supply as warlords struggle for the remnants of Libya's national wealth.

These countries are not only dependent on oil exports; they also rely heavily on imports. As revenues dry up and exchange rates plunge, the cost of living will skyrocket, exacerbating social and political tensions. Europe is already struggling to accommodate refugees from the Middle East and Afghanistan. Nigeria, Egypt, Angola, and Kenya are among Africa's most populated countries. Imagine what would happen if they imploded and their disenfranchised, angry, and impoverished residents all started moving north. (Courtesy Project Syndicate)

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