

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



July 23, 2016

Participation of Women in Peace Process

Afghan society has been patriarchal; therefore, most of the institutions in the society are led by men. In almost all forms of institutions, the involvement of women is inadequate and there is a great necessity that they should be made a part of these institutions so that they can have their say for their rights. The participation of women in the different institutions and their ability to participate in decision making processes that are of vital importance can play a key role in safeguarding their rights and securing them from violence and discrimination.

At present in Afghan political scenario the peace process is believed to be of paramount importance. Though the process, so far, has not been able to play a decisive role in guaranteeing peace, it may have some impact on future developments regarding peace and tranquility. For a reliable and lasting peace process, Afghan authorities have to make sure that it should be inclusive and must include all stakeholders. In unison, it is really significant the women should be made an integral part of the peace process so as to make it operative.

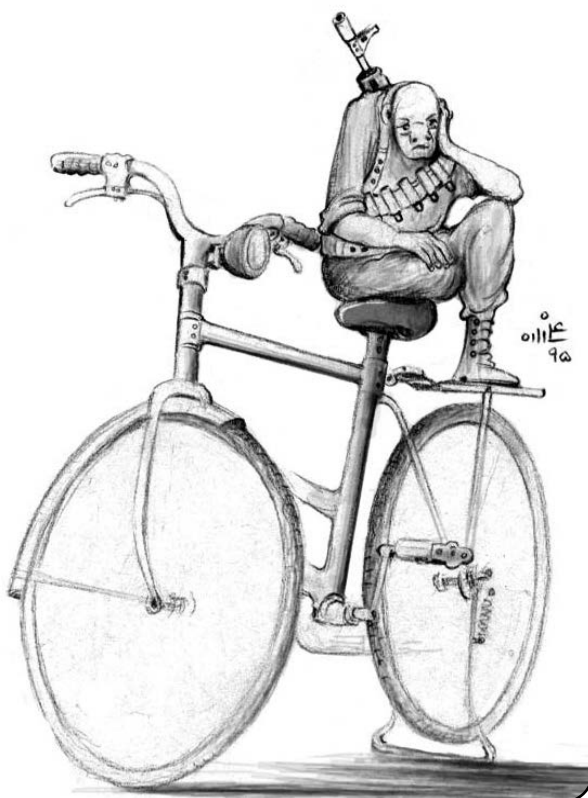
Keeping in view the lack of participation of women in peace process, Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director of UN Women, on Thursday advocated for broader involvement by Afghan women in the peace talks process between government and insurgent groups, saying a peace process without the participation of women was not acceptable to the organization. UN Women criticized the absence of Afghan women through several rounds of peace talks and called on the Afghan government to address the concerns of the world body in this respect. She said in a statement, "UN women does not have the capacity to fight the Taliban, that is a security issue, so we would like to encourage the government to use its power with the security, what we are concerned about is the protection of the women." Many analysts believe that in order to reach to a conclusion regarding peace process with Taliban, Afghan government may sacrifice some of the developments achieved so far; one of them could be the rights of women. Women themselves fear that the current developments may lead to the loss of gains achieved so far regarding the emancipation of women.

The participation of women in peace process will definitely give an opportunity to Afghan women to express their concerns and negotiate them with Taliban. Though government says it would set conditions for peace talks including respect of rights of women by Taliban, it is important that women should lead in this regard. It needs to take practical measures to give women better and more important role in peace process, i.e. they should have a say regarding their rights and a guarantee that any peace deal will not sabotage the efforts to heighten the role and position of women in Afghan society.

Added to this issue, there are many other issues regarding the rights of women that remain neglected. Women, in Afghanistan, are even denied their most basic rights. Their lives are not secure and they become the victims of violence and discrimination every now and then by their family members. Even the cruelest violence against women gets only temporary attention while the real issue is never resolved. The cases involving violence and discrimination against women are not pursued with honest intentions and thus the culprits are further encouraged to continue their atrocities.

Mlambo-Ngcuka also called for government to step up efforts to address the ongoing challenges facing women such as the rise in domestic violence, open trials of women by the Taliban and child marriages. Member of Parliament Fawzia Kofi, in this regard, said, "Unfortunately, evasion from the law and impunity is still rising; the level of violence and cases such as Farkhunda and Rukhshana, who were inhumanly murdered, have not been finalized and perpetrators involved in violence have not been served justice. In the peace sphere, we want women to be authorized to make decisions."

It is of immense significance that women should be given their due rights, they should have enough role and responsibility in important institutions and decision-making processes; particularly, in the peace process with Taliban. Moreover, any sort of violence and discrimination against them must be dealt with strict measures. The law and justice system must never let the culprits get away unpunished. In addition, the socio-political and socio-economic circumstances must be amended in such a way that women should have their deserving role and rights. Even Islam does not prohibit the participation of women in social and political lives and ensures that they get their deserving position. According to the statement by the religious scholar, Niamatullah Abid, "There are people who have the wrong idea about the role of women in society, but the Islamic viewpoint is that women are allowed to participate in the political and social processes."



Afghanistan Turning to Good Market for Indian Products

By Mohammad Zahir Akbari

Afghanistan markets are largely occupied with low quality products of neighboring countries some of which are extremely poor and harmful. These poor quality products are widely available in Afghan markets which excessively contributed to health issues in the country. They do not merely jeopardize the health of thousands of men, women and children but also hit a financial loss onto Afghan suffering people. Unfortunately, there is no successful measure to control the low quality products from importing to the Afghan market while thousands of people lose their lives due to the mentioned reason. On the other hand, some Afghan traders have also role in ordering and bringing low quality products with the purpose of gaining more profits. Recently, a Chinese businessman expressed in the Facebook that some traders deny eating in Non-Muslim restaurant while they recommend poor quality product and fake labels. Afghanistan as a consuming country is considered a good market for foreign products. There is a big competition between many countries of the region to attract consumers in Afghan market, but the evidences show that Indian and some Iranian products have good reputation in Afghan markets and exceptionally surpassing other products. India is also a country that is perceived among Afghans as a peace-loving and peace-supporting country, and Afghans believe that India pursues prosperity, welfare, development and peace in Afghanistan and has made major economic contributions to support development in Afghanistan. Some experts believe that given the economies of scale Indian products have; they can offer standard ISO quality at low cost. Moreover, Indian companies can also support the local distribution system to become more channelized for organized retailing. In addition, India invested around \$300 million dollar to build Chabahar Port and is building the railway line costing another \$400 million to connect Afghanistan, a landlocked country, to the sea. India also, invested around \$300 million for building Salma Dam recently inaugurated by Prime Minister of India, Narendra Modi in western Afghanistan. India also built the most beautiful building in the region for Afghan Parliament last year. India for pursuing a peaceful policy toward Afghanistan and not being involved in any of the violence in Afghanistan over the past several decades, has a good reputation among Afghan people. After surveying Afghan markets, one will find many Indian products which include but not limited to rice, wheat, electronic equipments, clothing, shoes, medicines and medical equipments. Some of Afghan traders who frequently do business with Indians say that products which Afghan consumers need to buy on regular basis and for long term usages both can be

very nicely handed by ISO (International organizations for standardization) from Indian side at price. Plus for industrial level products big machineries and plants can also come with high functionalities at reasonable cost. Indian companies can also be easily approached for creating assembly hubs in Afghanistan for various Indian products which will increase job opportunity and support the GDP. Proper tanning machineries and raw materials can make - leather industry modernize, weaving technology to upgrade high quality and durable plus dependable carpet production and newer farming technologies can convert small scale industries like honey production into a big scale export oriented global industry apart from doing the same for other agriculture product. The opportunities are endless for comprehensive holistic development. Another issue is that most Afghans follow the policy of buying & throwing away of household items due to none availability of proper service centers. According to an Indian economic expert and business developer improving business with regional countries will help to establish "standard after sale services centers" including repairing services. Some Indian products and brands are very famous in Afghanistan. TATA is a famous Indian brand in Kabul. Hundreds of TATA made buses are transporting Afghan citizens in Kabul from one side to another on a daily basis. According to a number of Afghans interviewed, Afghans prefer to buy Indian products rather than the products of other countries of the region for good quality and for the India's generosity and good will toward the people and government of Afghanistan. Thousands of Afghans visit India for medical purposes on the daily basis.

According to Afghan experts and Afghan common believes all Indian products including medication is of high quality. Commonly, Afghan people believe that India has good will toward Afghanistan and will never think of selling poor quality products.

It seems that after the construction of Chabahar Port, trading activities between Afghanistan and India has intensively boosted and Afghan markets are more ready to welcome many Indian products. If the Afghan government encourage Indian traders and businessmen to have joint ventures that will be a bigger boost. The Afghan Government should pave way for Indian investment in Afghanistan for more trade between two friendly countries. Finally, all indicators show that Afghan markets are more optimistic to Indian products as Afghans happily purchase Indian products and unquestionably deal with them.

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The Death of World Heritage Sites

By Martin Wagner and Noni Austin

Climate change has claimed another victim. Almost one-quarter of the coral in Australia's Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area - one of the world's richest and most complex ecosystems - has died this year, in the worst mass coral bleaching in recorded history. Even in the far northern reaches of the Reef, long at a sufficient distance from human pressures like coastal development to preserve, to a large extent, coral health, a staggering 50% of the coral has died.

The above-average sea temperatures that triggered this bleaching were made 175 times more likely by climate change. As the ocean continues to absorb heat from the atmosphere, large-scale coral bleaching like that which has decimated the Great Barrier Reef - not to mention other destructive phenomena spurred by rising temperatures - is likely to become even more frequent and devastating.

The future of priceless World Heritage sites - and, indeed, our planet - depends on the immediate reduction of climate-change-inducing greenhouse-gas emissions. Yet many of the governments responsible for protecting these sites within their borders are not only failing to take strong climate action; they are actively pursuing dirty energy projects like coal mines and coal-fired power plants.

Even as the Great Barrier Reef dies before our eyes, Australia continues to increase its exploitation of dirty fossil fuels. In the past year, the Australian government has approved both the massive Carmichael coalmine and the Abbot Point terminal, located near the Reef, to facilitate the global export of output from the Carmichael mine. The emissions attributable to the Carmichael mine will be some of the highest resulting from a single project anywhere in the world.

And the problem isn't limited to Australia. In low-lying Bangladesh, one of the countries most vulnerable to climate change, the government supports a proposal to build two huge coal-fired power plants adjacent to the Sundarbans World Heritage site. India, too, supports the proposal.

Not only will these power plants emit large quantities of greenhouse gases; they will also devastate the Sundarbans, where the Ganges and other rivers meet the Bay of Bengal in a spectacular delta of mangrove islands that is home to endangered Bengal tigers and river dolphins. The power plants will pollute the waters with toxic coal ash, bring constant coal-barge traffic, and require the dredging of riverbeds. Mercur-

ry from the smokestacks will accumulate in the marine life, permanently contaminating the food supply of hundreds of thousands of people and vulnerable wildlife.

It is true that Bangladesh is energy poor, a problem that must be addressed if it is to continue to develop economically. But there are alternatives. The country has significant potential for renewable-energy production, and it is already a world leader in rooftop solar energy.

Of course, the responsibility to avert dangerous anthropogenic climate change does not fall only on countries that are home to World Heritage sites. But, knowing what we know today, initiating such damaging dirty energy projects is indefensible.

With governments failing to protect our natural heritage, the World Heritage Committee must step up, in order to help bring an end to the relentless exploitation of fossil fuels. Specifically, the WHC should make recommendations to governments for reducing fossil-fuel-related threats, identify sites that are in particular danger from such threats, and carry out monitoring missions.

The objective should be, first and foremost, to encourage governments with the capacity to reduce fossil-fuel-related threats to designated sites to take action. Such action from the WHC would also help to educate and empower civil society, while placing pressure on financial institutions to withhold the funding required for massive development projects.

The WHC's annual meetings, such as that which just ended in Istanbul, are the ideal forum for such an effort. Already, dozens of organizations and more than 60,000 individuals have called on the committee to urge India and Bangladesh to cancel the proposed coal plants and invest in renewable energy instead. Similarly, dozens of renowned scientists, NGOs, and international and Australian lawyers have demanded that the WHC counsel Australia not to continue supporting developments that will exacerbate the impact of climate change on the Great Barrier Reef. As the threat of climate change grows increasingly menacing, influential institutions like the WHC must take a stand against the toxic and insidious legacy of dependence on coal and other fossil fuels. If the committee remains silent on this crucial issue, World Heritage sites around the world will suffer. (Courtesy World Project Syndicate)

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