

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



June 09, 2018

Can the Ceasefire with Taliban succeed?

Afghan government has taken many initiatives to provide an opportunity to the Taliban insurgents to join to the peace negotiation table and stop the war in Afghanistan. Afghan President Ashraf Ghani in a latest move on Thursday announced the first time an unconditional ceasefire with the Taliban, but excluding other militant groups, such as ISIS and HN. This decision was mainly made based on the Islamic cleric's fatwa that was declared this week. This is for the first time that the Afghan President announces an unconditional ceasefire since he was elected in 2014. President Ghani stated that, "This ceasefire is an opportunity for Taliban to put an end to their violent campaign against the Afghan government that it is not winning them hearts and minds". What people and the NUG expect from the Taliban insurgent is that their guns to fallen silent over the areas they are fighting. However, the Taliban insurgents have proven that they neither care about the Afghan government initiatives and nor to the international ones. This initiative is one of the latest in a string of failed attempts to wind down a war that has killed thousands of the civilians and have left several thousand injured. As the background of the failed ceasefires in Afghanistan show, previous ceasefires have collapsed within weeks. One of the main reasons behind, failed ceasefires in Afghanistan is neglecting the effective variables on the ceasefire: For example, when a ceasefire is announced and the neighboring countries that finance and support the insurgent groups are neglected and have not been included in the process, either directly or indirectly, we should not expect a positive outcome of such a ceasefire.

Impact of the Ceasefires on the Conflict in Afghanistan

There are two conflicting views about the nature of ceasefires. We would elaborate a little bit both of them in the following lines.

Firs, ISIS is not included in this ceasefire. As the recent waves of attacks on different institutions and people show, ISIS has taken the responsibility of such attacks. While, ISIS has the potentials and networks in different parts of the country, even in the once peaceful areas in the North of Afghanistan, how one can expect a truce with the Taliban insurgents would benefit the nation in a large extent? However, as President Ghani has stated this ceasefire can be a big opportunity for the Taliban to show their good will to the people of Afghanistan. If the Taliban insurgents respect the ceasefire, they would be able to show the Afghan nation that they are not merely the puppets of the neighboring and other countries and they can make decisions by themselves.

Second, though, many Afghans may not consider this initiative effective, but if we analyze it from the political perspective, even if this cease-fire in Afghanistan quickly collapses – as most analysts expect it to – it could have an immense impact on the conflict in the country. Political and social science research show that cease-fires change more than just conditions on the ground: They change how a war's participants weigh the benefits of fighting versus talking in a given context.

Based on the socio-political studies findings, cease-fires can create something like a virtuous cycle, making future parties more likely. Each one has a better chance of lasting longer, discouraging violations, isolating bad actors and building trust among adversaries. Based on these studies, this cycle is not always as visible or politically urgent as the question of who is fighting where on a particular day. But, over time, it can shift the participants' calculus in ways that build conditions for peace.

Decades of war and conflict has made the people suspicious about any positive impacts or outcomes of ceasefires in the country. There have been numerous failed attempts by the Afghan governments during the four last decades to bring the insurgents groups to the negotiations table, but they have always failed to come to a lasting peace in the country. If this ceasefire holds where others have failed, then deeper co-operation between the NUG and the Taliban insurgents can be expected. If this happens, the ceasefire will save lives. But it may also kill the rebels' dreams of overthrowing the Afghan government supported by the Afghan citizens and its international allies.



Climate Justice is Integral to Development Justice

By Shobha Shukla

Climate justice is integral to development justice, as it is essential for building a brave feminist future sans power and wealth inequalities. This is the dream of feminists in the Asia Pacific region, including Misun Woo, who recently took over charge as the Regional Coordinator for APWLD (Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development). A law graduate from New York University School of Law, Misun Woo, is deeply committed to a feminist movement building to dismantle the current patriarchal structures and systems that are violating women's human rights, deepening inequalities and fuelling conflicts.

Misun was in conversation with CNS (Citizen News Service) on the sidelines of APFSD (Asia Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development) 2018, which was held in Bangkok, Thailand. Here are some of her insights on environmental and climate justice that is integral to ending resource and wealth inequalities between men and women, between rich and poor and between countries.

RIGHT TO A HEALTHY AND SAFE ENVIRONMENT

Misun Woo: The right to a safe and healthy environment is increasingly being recognised as one of the core human rights. Climate change is a result of very deliberate political and economic decisions made by governments together with large corporations. Any form of climate change and/or environmental disaster manifests itself in intersecting forms of oppression impacting the lives and livelihood of women in different locations, of different religions and also those with different identities, in various ways.

Climate change and environment is a feminist issue and we have many evidences that women are affected more by climate change and natural disasters, with little recourse to remedies that can enable them to be resilient to their impacts. There are documented findings that after a natural disaster (like Typhoon Yolanda that struck Philippines a few years back), hits a community, women are forced to either migrate or are trafficked to become sex workers and also face different forms of gender based violence. Also in the event of an environmental crisis, women are more likely to die than men do as they have less access to remedies and justice.

ON WOMEN ENVIRONMENTAL DEFENDERS

Misun Woo: As climate/environment issues are feminist issues and hence the core part of women's human rights, there is an intrinsic overlap between women human rights defenders and environmental defenders. Both would have a very specific target because of their identity as women. So while women human rights defenders are also environmental defenders, and vice versa, there should be a different approach to support their work and protect them.

Women in the Asia Pacific region are fighting for climate justice and working to defend their land and natural resources to be able to control and manage them. A large number of these women subsist as farmers and live in rural areas, where their lives are very deeply connected to how the land and natural resources are managed. This is also true of indigenous women. While governments are expected to protect people's human rights, they are actually violating them, especially their development rights, by taking their businesses away from them. That in itself reveals the current global power structure. Governments are taking the land away from people and giving it to large multinational corporations, and also to the military for use in times of conflict. Nowadays there are more coordinated efforts/ interlinkages of governments

and corporations to follow a neoliberal agenda and use of force to just make the power to stay in a few hands.

It is natural that, in the absence of any other support, people are forced to organise themselves as movements to defend their rights. Governments feel challenged by the activism and work of women human rights and environmental defenders, because they are at the core of addressing the structural systems that prevent development justice, which has environmental justice as one of its five pillars. While both men and women human rights defenders are being targeted, women are exposed to various types of threats. One of the tactics used by the governments is to attack the women members, especially their children. Moreover, women are more exposed to gender based violence.

ON SUSTAINABLE AND RESILIENT SOCIETIES

Misun Woo: There is a growing uncomfortable feeling amongst women constituencies around the word 'resilience' - a word that has been manipulated and exploited by governments to force people to actually endure their hardships and find solutions themselves, without highlighting the role and obligations of the state as a duty bearer. We refuse to be resilient and absorb all the shocks - economic shocks, climate shocks, political shocks. The people who cause those problems should take responsibility. For me, resilient societies are those where people are able to articulate their demands and their vision for a dignified life, and where there are clear mechanisms/frameworks in place that when those collective visions are violated then who should be held accountable.

A sustainable society is where the power, wealth and resources are distributed in a very equitable and sustainable way. To tackle the root causes of existing inequalities between and within countries and people. Women have always played a very integral role in society. One of the key values that women have brought in is the power of movements that women have organised themselves - by collectively shaping the visions and demands of people from different backgrounds, driven by people's rights and human rights based principles. Women can chart out the kind of future we want.

ON THE IMPORTANCE OF REGIONAL UN PROCESSES

Misun Woo: Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are important as they universally apply to all the member states, and also because global development policies seem to generate more political interest (although implementation wise we are not very sure) than human rights treaties. But there is a clear disconnect between the SDGs commitments and the existing human rights obligations - especially around women's human, economic, social and cultural rights. So I think that (i) when we are engaging with our governments at the national, regional or global level, we have to remind them that the SDGs are the lowest common denominator and they attest to other human rights mechanisms, and (ii) we, as civil society organisations, have to ensure that there is a clearer link between regional and global processes, also that civil society's participation as equal partners is institutionalised.

Note: APFSD 2108, was held in Bangkok in March 2018, where over 100 CSOs gathered under the umbrella of AP-RCM (Asia Pacific Regional CSO Engagement Mechanism), to review the cluster of SDGs to be discussed later in July 2018 at the high-level political forum (HLPF) in New York.

Shobha Shukla is the Managing Editor, CNS (Citizen News Service) and has written extensively for gender justice, health and human rights over the decades. Follow her on Twitter @Shobha1Shukla, @CNS_health or visit www.citizen-news.org

Role of Women in Social Development Process of Afghanistan

By Murtaza Haidary

Social development simply means improvements in the living conditions of human in a society. According to Bilance (1997), "Social Development is the promotion of a sustainable society that is worthy of human dignity by empowering marginalized groups, women and men, to undertake their own development, to improve their social and economic position and to acquire their rightful place in society." There are many factors which lead to social development in a country such as enhancement in education, health, economic, employment and etc. Despite all the challenges associated with being a female in a male dominant country like Afghanistan, Afghan women have been playing a major role in social development process of our country from 2001 onwards.

To begin with, there are many female scholars who teach in different schools and universities just like their male counterparts, despite all odds. Through providing quality education, they aim at brining positive changes in the life of Afghan pupils. With the beginning of the transitional government, many children, especially girls, could attend school for the first time after many years. Girls' schools were reconstructed and reopened; girls continued going to school without fear of being insulted and molested. According to UNAMA, in the education sector, more than 40 % of school students are girls and 30 % of school-teachers are women, while at the university level, 21 % of students are women and 15 % of their instructors are women. Female have been playing a crucial role in strengthening the education system, working in different leading position, of Afghanistan. Dr. Farida Mohmand, the ex-Minister of higher education and university professor is a compelling example of this. Under her leadership, the Kankor (public entrance exam) process, become more transparent than before.

Likewise, Afghan women's contribution in agriculture and ultimately in economic growth of the country has been priceless. In fact, the role of Agriculture in economic and social development is beyond compare. It doesn't only increase the employment rate, but also supplies all our basic necessities. Agriculture has been the primary occupation of rural people, particularly for women. Afghan women have been involved in agricultural activities alongside males in rural areas besides doing domestic coheres. Major agricultural activities such as seeding, irrigation, harvesting are mostly done by females. In addition, a large portion of women, living in the rural areas, are involved in animal husbandry and producing dairy products such as milk, yoghurt, cheese and many other forms of dairy products, which is a source of income for the women and people who are involved in the selling process. Eventually, their crops and products are being exported to different

national and international markets, which lead to economic growth of the country.

Furthermore, they are promoting the health and well-being of their society and people. During Taliban women were kept behind closed doors and were treated discriminately. Women were forbidden to visit any male doctors; there was no female doctor to treat female patients at all. When they fell ill, a male member used to bring her medications in most cases. Conversely, after collapse of Taliban regime, they were no more treated coldly; instead, they were provided with the right to get education and contribute to the well-being of their people. Now, unlike past, they work as prominent specialist, doctors, nurses and midwives in different hospitals and health clinics throughout the country. They provide health services to the patients, particularly pregnant women, in the most marginalized and extremely conservative villages, where male don't want women to be treated by a male doctor.

Fourthly, female entrepreneurs are playing an important in economic development of their country. Women's economic empowerment plays a crucial role in a family's survival, increases her decision-making power, and improves her shared responsibilities with her spouse. Women in general, specifically in Afghanistan, have taken part in this arena by becoming employees or business owners. Speaking bluntly, despite the challenges women entrepreneurs face in the country, they have been operating several types of business that can be run or operated only by woman whereas the man cannot initiate or is not interested to run those businesses. To further illustrate the point, business like handy craft, clothing, or fashion does not seem to be interesting for men and this gives the women a better opportunity to contribute in social development of their country as traders. Fouzia Hariri, the president of Hasty Trading Co, can be the shining example of the Afghan female entrepreneurs contributing to economy of Afghanistan and social development as a whole. "I am working, and I want to be a positive role model for women. For each new project I do, I want to find a job for women," Said Fouzia Hariri. Her company presents different product such as dried fruits, nuts, saffron, carpets and marble to both national and international markets. Recently, in 2016, she had been able to sign a \$4 million project for women in an exhibition on July 19-20, 2016, in New Delhi, India. In brief, entrepreneurship has a direct impact on the social development of Afghanistan and the women.

To put it in a nutshell, considering the fact that social development is more concerned with human welfare, it can be concluded that Afghan women have been playing a critical role in social development process of their country as a teacher, leader, doctor and merchant.

Murtaza Haidary is Research Associate of BRAC Afghanistan

Chairman / Editor-in-Chief: Moh. Reza Huwaida
Vice Chairman/ Senior Editor: Moh. Sakhi Rezaie
Email: outlookafghanistan@gmail.com
Phone: 0093 (799) 005019/777-005019
www.outlookafghanistan.net



The views and opinions expressed in the articles are those of the authors and do not reflect the views or opinions of the Daily Outlook Afghanistan.