

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



June 20, 2016

World Refugee Day

June 20th is celebrated as the World Refugee Day around the world. The Day was adopted in December 2000, when United Nations (UN) General Assembly passed resolution 55/76, wherein it was emphasized that the rights of the Refugees must be protected. This year the Day is being celebrated with great commitment as the number of refugees worldwide has increased to a large extent and many of them are not even sure of their futures. Today, UN Refugee Agency is launching its #WithRefugees petition that is going to be delivered to UN headquarters in New York ahead of the UN High Level Meeting on Refugees and Migrants, scheduled for the 19th September. The petition asks governments to: 1. Ensure every refugee child gets an education; 2. Ensure every refugee family has somewhere safe to live; and 3. Ensure every refugee can work or learn new skills to make a positive contribution to their community.

It is important to note that a considerable number of refugees belongs to Afghanistan. Migration has always been an issue for Afghanistan. Different eras of instability have forced millions of people to leave their homeland and move to the neighboring countries and other countries, mostly Europe, USA, Canada and Australia. After the downfall of Taliban and installation of a so-called democratic government, there were some opportunities that the situation could improve and the conditions in the country could get better and people would ultimately return to their country. Regrettably, with an intensification in insecurity people do not appear to be very much confident about the future and many people who have already migrated waver to come back and many of those who are in the country are planning to leave for better future.

Those who decide to migrate are caught in different sorts of problems; nevertheless, they are ready to take the risks and leave their homes. The have to undergo different problems on the way to their destinations as most of the times they have to follow illegal means. They have to face human smugglers, cross borders illegally, face different weather conditions and travel across mountains, rivers and even sea. There have been different incidents when the migrants have lost their lives on these routes. On many occasions, Afghan migrants lost their lives in the waters of Greece on their route to Europe or in Indonesian and Australian waters.

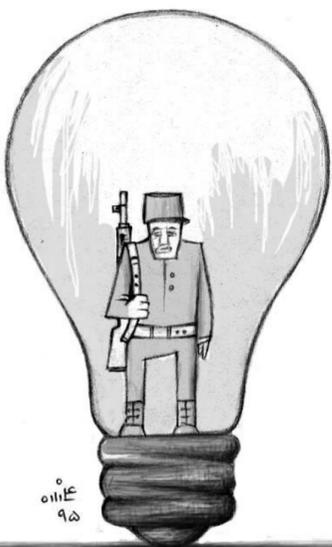
This clearly depicts that people do not take decisions to migrate because of economic conditions, alone; rather, they do so mostly because of the security conditions. Lately, the migrants include many individuals from media and different offices, who having observed the situation in the country closely and then they have opted to flee. Therefore, it is no more the issue of ignorance or tough economic conditions as the decisions are taken by well-educated individuals who are educated and even have jobs. Unfortunately, the ones who reach other countries after myriads of problems are not guaranteed secure future. As the issue of refugees has become very serious many countries are not sure about allowing refugees in their countries. Particularly, European countries, after facing a flux of refugees are planning to deport many Afghan refugees. Germany that initially welcomed refugees is now desperately trying to deport many of Afghan refugees to their country. Same is the case with other European countries.

The Afghan government on the other hand seems worried about the deportation of the Afghan refugees. The Afghan Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation had said earlier that Afghanistan would not accept the deported asylum seekers as it would not be in a situation to compensate for their living.

Moreover, the policies and procedures regarding the cases of different refugee in European countries have also changed to a great extent. There are many Afghan refugees in European countries who have been waiting for the final decision about their cases and in the meanwhile are not in a condition to move freely, earn livelihood and travel to different places and or meet their family members.

Even in the neighboring countries, Afghan refugees have not always been welcomed with warm hugs; every now and then they have been the victims of discrimination and ill-treatment. Most of the Afghan refugees in the neighboring countries, have suffered the consequences of fluctuations in the way they are treated. Definitely, it has been generous of both the countries to compensate the Afghan refugees, who because of wars and instability left their dear homeland, but on certain occasions they have also displayed the attitude that have violated the rights of the refugees to a great extent. Definitely, these countries have their own problems; they are developing countries and they have their own economic issues to face; however, they have been supported by international community and United Nations to assist the refugees and guarantee their rights under international law.

Both the European and neighboring countries at this crucial juncture must make sure that they design a clear strategy regarding the fate of Afghan refugees. Definitely, there are political and diplomatic concerns for all the governments of the world to consider, but the issue of refugees is more important than such concerns, as it involves the precious human lives and the lives of human beings stand more sacred than any other concern.



Suffering the Bitterest Days of Modern History

By Mohammad Zahir Akbari

These days Afghanistan is facing enormous challenges unprecedented in contemporary history of this country. Insecurity, joblessness, poverty, health issues and bad governance are the major frustrating concern. Social insecurity such as Robbery, kidnapping and explosions in all parts of the country including the capital has become a common practice.

Insecurity is a major and growing concern. Insurgent activity and military operations have undermined reconstruction efforts and restricted humanitarian interventions. In first years after the invasion of US-led international forces in 2001, there was a major inflow of refugees returning to their homes. The flow has gradually dwindled because of increasing insecurity, limited economic opportunities and limited access to basic social services. In 2015 with sixty-eight thousand refugees Afghanistan got the third place in the world!

Environmental degradation, especially in cities, is also a severe problem. Pollutions, uncontrolled grazing, pastureland encroachment, illegal logging and the loss of forest and grass cover have worsened drought conditions and reduced agricultural productivity.

The Average life expectancy estimated around 55 years, adult literacy stands around 28 percent, and millions of people are leaving the country due to joblessness and hopelessness. Thus millions are living in severe poverty with a crumbling infrastructure and a landscape that is suffering from environmental damage as well as pollution. Due to situating in a landlocked and strategic location it remains one of the poorest countries in the world, with more than half the population living below the poverty line. Most of them critically faced food-insecurity, which means they cannot get enough nutritious food to support an active, healthy lifestyle. Now the country suffers from one of the highest infant and maternal mortality rates in the world. Over half of children under 5 years are chronically malnourished (stunted) and about one-fourth of Afghan women of child-bearing age are underweight.

According to the findings, the National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment, 7.6 million people, roughly one-third of the population, are food-insecure, and a further 14 percent are considered to be borderline food-insecure. And owing to lack of awareness and ruling traditions, the households tend to be large. They include numerous children and several generations that share the same dwelling. Agriculture is traditionally the major activity for a large portion of the population, but the sector has suffered from nearly 30 years of conflict, low investments and natural disasters. The average size of landholding is small, and as a result agriculture is rarely the main source of food or income. About two thirds of rural households own some livestock, and farmers also sell their labor. The incidence of poverty is more severe in rural areas. Approximately, seventy percent central Afghanistan are poor and discriminated. The poorest rural people include small-scale farmers and herders, landless people, de-

feless whom every year violated by Nomad, and women who is heads of households. There are an estimated more than 1 million Afghan widows. Their average age is 30 and 90 per cent of them have an average of four or more children. Without the protection of a husband, widows suffer from social exclusion in Afghanistan's patriarchal society. Many widows have no choice but to become beggars or hard labor. Children aged five or under are the most vulnerable segment of Afghan society, and as many as 50 per cent of them suffer from chronic malnutrition.

When we talk about Afghanistan or hear about it in the news, it can be very easy to forget that the insurgents are people and that a huge portion of them is suffering through extreme poverty. For the average Afghan, life can be very difficult and stricken with economic struggle, food insecurity, and a lack of resources to improve their lives. Here are a few facts that may come as a surprise about those living in poverty in Afghanistan.

Only 28.1% of the entire population over the age of 15 is literate, meaning that 71.9% of adults are incapable of even basic reading and writing skills. On average, those who are capable of going to school only complete about 8 years, with females generally completing 4 years less than their male counterparts.

An estimate of the percentage of children aged 5-14 suggests that at least 25% were involved in child labor. UNICEF made an estimate that the number had risen to at least 30%. In either case, around 1/4 or more of all young kids in the country were being forced to work, therefore missing out on childhood and, most importantly, a proper education.

36% of the population, or about 9 million people, lives in absolute, extreme poverty and another 37% lives just above the determined poverty line. In fact, the number one killer in Afghanistan is not armed conflict but poverty.

Half of the population still lives without access to improved water sources, these accounts for both men and women living in rural and urban areas.

For every 100,000 births, 460 mothers die and for every 1,000 births, 119 infants die. This leaves Afghanistan with the second highest maternal mortality rate in the world and the third highest infant mortality rate. Many of these deaths would be preventable with trained doctors and expedient, affordable care. But, with less than 1 doctor per every 1000 people, 0.21 of a doctor to be precise, proper care is difficult to come by.

These challenges indicate that Afghanistan has begun returning to the past and losing the values and political achievements obtained with support of international community. What it needs to be notified that an insecure Afghanistan is not only threat to Afghan but also a proper bed for growing international terrorism.

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Toward a More Reflective Planet

By David Keith and Gernot Wagner

The last time the atmosphere held as much carbon dioxide as it does today was about three million years ago – a time when sea levels were 10-30 meters higher than they are now. Climate models have long struggled to duplicate those large fluctuations in sea levels – until now. Indeed, for the first time, a high-quality model of Antarctic ice and climate has been able to simulate these large swings. That is smart science, but it brings devastating news.

The new model shows that melting in Antarctica alone could increase global sea levels by as much as one meter (3.2 feet) by the end of this century – well above prior estimates. Worse, it suggests that even extraordinary success at cutting emissions would not save the West Antarctic Ice Sheet, locking in eventual sea-level increases of more than five meters. As little as one meter could put at risk entire cities, from Miami to Mumbai, and cause enormous economic disruption.

We need to turn down the heat – and fast. To this end, albedo modification – a kind of geoengineering intended to cool the planet by increasing the reflectivity of the earth's atmosphere – holds tremendous promise.

Injecting synthetic aerosols that reflect sunlight into the stratosphere, for example, could help counter the warming caused by greenhouse gases. The mechanism is similar to wearing a white shirt in the summer: white reflects sunlight and cools what is underneath, whereas darker colors absorb sunlight and heat.

To be sure, even in the best-case scenario, solar geoengineering alone could not stabilize the world's climate. For that, we must both stop pumping carbon pollution into the atmosphere and learn how to remove what is already there. That is why emissions cuts should receive the lion's share of resources devoted to combating climate change.

But, as the recent study shows, emissions cuts alone cannot save the West Antarctic Ice Sheet and prevent a drastic sea-level rise. If they are pursued in conjunction with moderate albedo modification, however, there is a chance of halting rising temperatures, helping to keep the world under 1.5° Celsius above pre-industrial levels, the more ambitious target agreed at the Paris climate talks last December. (It should be noted that, given carbon-cycle feedbacks, such as the thawing of permafrost, there is a chance that the world would face a 1.5°C rise, even if emissions were eliminated today.)

Most of the world's state-of-the-art climate models have explored albedo modification, and each of them has found that the process does have the potential to mitigate climate change. Beyond limiting total warming, it can help to check the rise in peak temperatures, decreasing the risk of destructive heat waves. And it seems to be particularly effective at reducing extreme rainfall, which holds profound implications for minimizing flood damage.

Albedo modification remains uncertain and risky, owing partly to a dearth of organized research into the subject. And, in fact, albedo modification would undoubtedly make some things worse. But

there is not a single climate model run that shows that a moderate intervention would make any region worse off overall. Moreover, the large potential upside, measured in trillions of dollars, contrasts with low direct costs – in the single-digit billions for full-scale deployment. In fact, albedo modification is so cheap that direct costs will not be the deciding issue. Instead, it is a risk-risk trade-off – one that will require more research to assess.

Given the lack of knowledge, no sensible person would push for deploying albedo modification today. But it would make no sense to ignore its potential. After all, no one would argue that we should abandon research on a promising cancer drug because it is unproven. The US National Academy of Sciences first called attention to what it then described as “climate modification” in a 1983 report. It recommended careful research in 1992 and again in 2015. Major environmental groups such as the Environmental Defense Fund and the Natural Resources Defense Council support careful, small-scale research. Yet no such program exists.

One reason for this is concern about the diversion of resources from other approaches. And, of course, there are tradeoffs. But the US, for example, has an annual climate science budget of around \$3 billion. An exploratory solar geoengineering program, costing only a few tens of millions of dollars per year, is entirely feasible.

A larger obstacle to progress is fear that more attention to geoengineering solutions would sap motivation to cut emissions. Maybe so, but it would be barking mad to take up smoking simply because an experimental cancer treatment showed some promise on a lab rat. And, in fact, it is conceivable that a concerted effort to advance research on albedo modification could spur action to cut emissions, much like a graphic look at the side effects of chemotherapy prompts some to stop smoking.

Whichever reaction prevails, the moral imperative to explore a technology that can protect the poorest and most vulnerable this century would seem to trump amorphous concerns that doing so could weaken the incentive to pursue solutions that would largely benefit future generations. China has initiated a limited research program on albedo modification. The US has not. Given that albedo modification is the kind of technology that necessitates an open, transparent, and international research effort – precisely the kind of effort in which the US excels – this is a serious failing.

The US government should take the lead now in researching albedo modification. Even if the result was that albedo modification does not work, the dividends of such research would be enormous, owing to the added pressure to cut emissions. And if it turned out to be successful, the social, environmental, and economic returns would be tremendous. (Courtesy Project Syndicate)

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