

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



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## Our Role in Nourishing Democracy

One of the harsh realities of our society is that we have not been able to give a particular structure to our society. Though we claim our country to be democratic, we lack all the qualities that are required to nourish a democratic country in true sense. In fact, it is not just the rulers who form democracy; rather a democratic system is always developed by the society as whole.

Democracy is not like monarchy, where a single person took all the decisions of the nation. The subjects were bound to follow what the kings used to order them. Though in certain cases some of the individuals or groups could question the orders of the kings, on most of the occasions they would be accepted unchallenged. And, the system used to largely depend on the wills of the kings. If the king used to be somewhat merciful, the system would be lenient comparatively and people would have some sort of blessings, otherwise, mostly the kings were authoritarian, despotic and tyrant.

A democratic system on the other hand, largely depends on the nature of the people as a whole. As the system is people centered, the role of the people as a whole stands paramount in a democratic system. There are certain qualities that should be possessed by the people within a democratic country; otherwise, the experience of democracy would never produce the desired results.

Our struggle with the democratic system is largely nullified by the attitude of our people. As the experience of the system is new for most of the people, they are not sure of their roles and responsibilities. They still believe that the rulers have all the duty and they must change the circumstances. In this way they can also put most of the blames of the drawbacks in the system on the rulers and, themselves, avoid responsibilities.

However, it is really imperative to comprehend that such an attitude would never help us in bringing any change within our system. Though, 13 years can be considered very little as far as the experience of democracy is concerned, we have not been able to learn as much as we should have learnt by now or as much as we could have learnt, considering the opportunities and assistance that were available for us. For us it is not necessary to go through a lengthy evolutionary process of democracy like the other nations of the world; as we have the examples of others before us and we can easily learn from them. Today's great democracies in the world had to go through the lengthy processes because they did not have the examples of others before them.

For the nourishment of democracy it is vital that all the members of the society must play their roles; there is no other option. Along with the political efforts, we would require amending our conscience and our inner selves, as well. The departure or distance from democracy would only spoil us to a further extend. Now that we have decided to welcome it with open arms we require changing ourselves. As an individual, first of all, we need to change our behavior. A democratic behavior is largely based on the art of proper speaking and the patience to listen carefully. Democracy supports the freedom of expression and allows everyone to say what he wants to say. In democracy we basically accept the sort of environment wherein we can be opposed openly. Those people who support democracy fundamentally want that the issues should be solved through dialogue and reasoning not through violence. They want that the opposite reasons should be listened to sufficiently and the claims should always be reconsidered.

We have dishonesty in our intentions and extremism in our actions. The difference in opinion and thoughts are dealt through intolerance and even violence. Our statements have taken the shape of threats. The true spirit of democracy can only be found in the theories and promises; therefore, the people do not see the true practice of it and are ambiguous about it. This is really unfortunate that at this instance of hope and great expectations we are suffering from these problems; yet, we do not have to be disheartened.

If we really like democracy and democratic values, we would require making its prerequisites possible. We would need to feel our responsibility in order to lead our country towards true democracy; otherwise, the dream of democracy may shatter and we will not be able to recreate it. Though the roles of individuals are paramount, some of the responsibilities go to those leaders and religious scholars who have great influence in forming the opinion and the attitude of the people. They need to understand that instead of sowing the seeds of hatred and intolerance in the minds and hearts of the people, they can spread love and tolerance and they can really participate in forming an environment that is suitable for democracy. As Barack Obama had said in one of his press conferences, "The strongest democracies flourish from frequent and lively debate, but they endure when people of every background and belief find a way to set aside smaller differences in service of a greater purpose."

## Women's Rights are Not Honored

By Hujjatullah Zia

Afghan women suffer greatly and their rights and dignity are violated in one way or another. Despite the fall of Taliban's regime, women are still threatened and traditional mindsets hold sway in many parts of the country. Their role is restricted within the four walls in Taliban dominated areas. The armed insurgents and tribal groups curtail women's freedoms on a large scale and desert court is still practiced once in a while in tribal belts.

A report released by Amnesty International (AI) says that civilian casualties and violence against women have increased to a large extent in 2015. Although safeguarding women's rights was a top priority on the National Unity Government (NUG), Afghan women still live in misery. "The government said this is going to be a good year for women. On the contrary, it was a bad one, because a large number of women were victims of violence," a member of the Afghan Women's Network Sonia Aslami is cited as saying. According to her, the government has done nothing so far to punish violators of women's rights. Thousands of cases of violence against women have been reportedly registered over the past year.

There also lie many cultural barriers for women in our society. An Afghan woman will have an honorable life when she lives without complaining about injustice at the hands of her husband. Often women are made to marry persons against their inner choices.

A woman who keeps silent, despite hearing biting words, foul languages, mental and physical tortures, etc. is a woman of life in ideal Afghan culture.

The erosion of religious values, absence of humanity and decline of moral standards are the great tragedies in our social and individual life. We are deep in cruelty and vice. The current violence taking place against women demonstrates our real characters. Can you ever imagine shedding the blood of one with whom you lived for a long time?

Honor killings are a common form of violence against women across our country.

Women are killed for reasons such as refusing to enter an arranged marriage, being in a relationship that is disapproved by their relatives, attempting to leave a marriage, becoming the victim of rape, dressing in ways which are deemed inappropriate, etc.

Violence against women can occur in both public and private spheres of life and at any time of their life span. Many women are terrified by these threats of violence and this essentially has an impact on their lives that they are impeded to exercise their human rights, for instance, the fear for contribution to the development of their communities socially, economically and politically.

What a mother suffers from, a daughter tends to repeat while upbringing her children, leaving the girls from one generation after the next, deprived of their rights - particularly the rights to getting education. Such circumstances are mainly a consequence of parental dysfunction and inequality and social restrictions. A number of hapless girls take their dreams to the grave with them - the same as their mothers did. In a home, where parents reap off the struggles and sacrifices of their children who are barely adults, girls are entangled in the fear of letting their families down. Female children are not only deprived of their rights, circumstances also force them to mature very early. An entire childhood is lost.

Although with the fall of the Taliban in 2001, Afghan women have made advances in rights, with millions of girls attending schools and women holding government posts. But with the steady withdrawal of foreign forces and the Taliban's intensified militancy, there are growing fears that the achievements will be lost. Moreover, the emergence of self-styled Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) in Afghanistan, has posed further threat to the rights and freedoms of women. Since this group practices strict ideology, it will impose more restriction on them in case of gaining firm foothold in the country.

On the other hand, women's role is not considered in peace negotiation, which is supposed to take place between the government and the Taliban outfits. Perhaps, the Taliban will not change their minds concerning women and set restrictive preconditions about their rights in the society. So, women's role must not be disregarded in this case either. Based on the Constitution of Afghanistan and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), in which Afghanistan is committed, one is not supposed to be discriminated on the grounds of their race, sex or color.

Therefore, men and women are endowed with equal rights and dignity. Similarly, they have a set of natural and inalienable rights for being human and no one, including the government, can take away these rights but on the basis of certain law.

We must end violence committed against women and girls in private and public spheres.

The government is highly responsible to implement the law which supports the women's rights. Constitutionally, the government will have to "establish an order based on the peoples' will and democracy; form a civil society void of oppression, atrocity, discrimination as well as violence, based on rule of law, social justice, protecting integrity and human rights, and attaining peoples' freedoms and fundamental rights." Thus, violators of women's rights must be prosecuted and judicial system should practice transparency and impartiality in this regard.

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## Ever Closer Union or Common Market?

By Joschka Fischer

A stake in the United Kingdom's upcoming referendum on whether to remain a member of the European Union is the nature of the EU itself. The UK wants a different kind of Europe than the one that the EU currently represents. Its preference is a Europe that essentially consists solely of a common market. Even though Britain has long been able to opt out of the euro and much else (and thus is not forced in any way to participate in the process of deepening Europe's political union), this is the ideological essence of the controversy.

It is a question that transcends the UK's "Brexit" debate. The growing strength of euroskeptical forces in many EU member states has raised the same issue on the continent, where many believe that the goal of a political union might overburden member states' citizens and should be abandoned.

Like the British, many Continental Europeans are asking whether transnational regulation by Brussels-based institutions and a political union are actually necessary. Wouldn't a loose association of sovereign nation-states, sharing the hard economic core of a continental common market - the British model - be enough? Why bother with all that complicated integration involving the Schengen Agreement, a monetary union, and EU regulations, which in the end don't work properly and only weaken the member states' global competitiveness?

Looking at European postwar history, it becomes clear that this debate has been with us almost from the very beginning. The UK's focus in the 1950's and 1960's was still mainly on the Commonwealth. The European integration process - aimed at overcoming Franco-German enmity and reconciling West Germany's industrial potential with European stability (and thus, under the US and NATO security umbrella, excluding the recurrence of war in Europe) - was marginal to its concerns.

After the Treaty of Rome in 1957 established the European Economic Community (EEC), the European Free Trade Association was established under British leadership a few years later. EFTA's aims were a straightforward customs union and a common market, and it was designed from the outset to compete with the EEC, particularly in northern Europe and among the neutral countries. But it never

caught on.

The reason EFTA failed to take hold is instructive: It was based only on economic interests and pursued no further idea. EFTA had no soul, and that absence rendered it unable to compete with the incipient EU.

Of course, economic interests have been paramount in sustaining the EU's progress; but the idea of uniting Europe clearly transcended mere economic unification. It was and still is about overcoming European fragmentation via an integration process beginning with the economy and ending in political integration. Winston Churchill knew that, as can be seen in his 1946 Zurich speech - well worth reading today - in which he called for a "United States of Europe." The EU is Europe's main historical project. It has attempted, so far successfully, to learn from centuries of seemingly unending wars, by building a new pan-European system of states that is no longer based on a balance of power alone, but also on overcoming national rivalries by institutionalizing common interests and shared values. The EU has achieved great things, and this should not be forgotten amid its current crises.

The British error is to assume that one goal, a common market for Europe, can be had without the other, greater political integration, over the long term. In order to function, a common market requires a substantial delegation of sovereignty and extensive European regulation. In fact, the EU can ignore neither the nation-states nor the common institutions and policies without putting itself at risk. Both are its cornerstones.

The EU was characterized by this duality from the very beginning: a confederation with strong integrated federal elements and institutions. Whoever questions this duality calls the entire system into question, all the more so given that the EU's current status quo is anything but conducive to enduring stability. The EU will achieve that only when it has taken the critical step toward a genuine federation. This is why the majority of EU member states must never abandon the aim of an "ever closer union." The UK doesn't share this aim, and it doesn't have to share it. But the future of the EU hinges on pursuing it. Everything else is a question of pragmatic compromises, for which a good deal of leeway exists. (Courtesy Project Syndicate)

Joschka Fischer, Germany's foreign minister and vice chancellor from 1998 to 2005, was a leader of the German Green Party for almost 20 years.



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