

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



March 14, 2017

## Cases of Violence against Women Remain Unabated

The issue of violence against women in Afghanistan remains alarming as thousands of women become the victim of some sort of violence each year in the country. The Prosecution Office of Violence against Women announced a couple of days ago that it had registered more than 2,400 cases of violence against females during the outgoing year (Hijri Shamsi calendar). Of these cases 1375 were recorded in Kabul, 125 in Balkh, 250 in Herat, 116 in Nangarhar, 17 in Logar, 80 in Kapisa, 28 in Samangan, 31 in Bamyan, 37 in Jawzjan provinces and the remaining incidents happened in Ghor, Panjsher, Sar-i-Pul, Maidan Wardak, Paktia, Nimroz, Farah, Parwan and Badakhshan provinces.

Though the numbers show a decline in the recorded cases as compared to last year wherein 3,500 cases of violence against women were recorded, they are still very high and alarming. It is also important to note that these numbers do not include all the incidences of violence against women and it is more tragic to know that only few of these cases are referred to the courts for follow-up.

Another major point of concern is the fact that there has not been speedy justice in response to the cases of violence against women. The cases that are brought to the law enforcement agencies are not pursued with proper vigor and determination and the result is that the culprits easily get away with their crimes. If the culprits are caught on time and they are brought to justice this will give a very clear message and will enhance the confidence of the people on the justice system.

This can also be helpful in encouraging those victims who never go the law enforcement agencies to file their complaints against different types of violence that are carried out against them. Nevertheless, their experiences have shown to them that their tribal norms and values and the draconian code of conduct that rule over their society stand more powerful than the hold of the justice that can be provided to them through the police or court of law.

One of the most basic demands of justice is that the people should be provided justice on time. It is believed that a justice delayed is a justice denied; therefore, the government machinery should be reliable and speedy enough to ensure such a justice. Moreover, it is also imperative that it should be easy for the victims to knock at the doors of the institutions that provide justice. If they feel comfortable and they are provided a welcoming attitude, they will rush to such institutions and will also develop a positive attitude towards government and its institutions.

Most of the women have complaints that they are harassed by the authorities who are supposed to provide them justice. If they opt to go the police they have to face a discriminating attitude of the authorities in most of the cases. In many other cases, police does not have the required access and authority in many of the remote areas. Several times it has been observed that the women who want to complain against any sort of violence or discrimination reach to Kabul city to do so. As they know that their voice will not be heard in their own area. This sort of inconvenience plays a major role in discouraging women to turn to police or court of law.

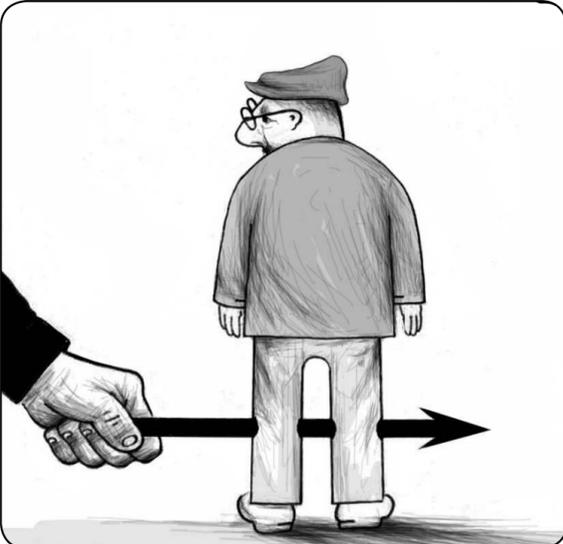
Currently, there was an emphasis that the Elimination of Violence Against Women (EVAW) law has not been implemented because of unfamiliarity of most of the people about it but one of the major aspects of the failure of the law is the absence of institutional mechanism to ensure proper implementation of such law. Police is not present in all parts of country. In so many districts they are present only to overlook security incidents as a whole. Moreover, the presence and role of local police have also hindered the role and performance of formal police.

Same is the case with the role and presence of formal courts. Most of the remote districts have their own courts based on Jirga or Shariat. These sorts of courts do not necessarily follow the EVAW law or do not consider it suitable for their tribal setup. Most of the cases of violence against women that are pursued are because of the media, NGO's and civil society. Thus, it can said without any hesitation that the institutional deficiencies have incapacitated the law to have its desired outcomes. And, this has resulted in continuation of incidents of violence against women.

The incidents of violence against women will keep on occurring unless, the justice system, strengthened by strong and authoritative institutions, take tangible actions against the culprits.

The criminals always take advantage of the justice system that is lethargic and an inefficient justice system would keep on creating more and more criminals.

Therefore, it is important for Afghan authorities to divert attention towards institution building for providence of justice to all the people of country, particularly women who are treated as a weaker stratum. If a justice system is not able to protect the most vulnerable and the weakest, it cannot be believed to be based neither on democracy nor on basic teachings of Islam.



## The Unending Conflict of Syria

By Hujjatullah Zia

The members of the Security Council looked forward to the early resumption of the intra-Syrian negotiations and encouraged the Syrian parties to return to talks in good faith and to engage constructively and without preconditions on the agenda set out by the UN special envoy when talks resume," the 15-nation UN body is cited as saying in a press statement. The fourth round of Syrian peace talks ended on Friday with no breakthrough achieved towards reaching a political solution to end the country's six-year war. They further welcomed the announcement by Special Envoy de Mistura of a clear agenda for future negotiations.

The Syrian conflict, which enters its seventh year this month, has reportedly killed nearly 500,000 people, wounded more than a million, and displaced nearly half the population. This bloody war inflicted indescribable sufferings upon Syrian nations mainly women and children, the rights and dignity of whom were violated in the worst possible way. Syrians bore the brunt of radical ideology of the self-proclaimed Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). The UN seeks to bring the two warring sides to the table of negotiation, except for the ISIL and Jabhat Fateh al-Sham, so as to put an end to the unmitigated violence and bloodshed going on in Syria.

However, the talks have not come to fruition yet and the two warring factions, who are excluded from the peace process, are most likely to act as whistleblowers through intensifying their insurgency and expanding their destructive role. Indeed, all warring parties are in pursuit of a political goal and the factions that are not involved in the talks also want a share in the government in case of peace agreement. Otherwise, they will continue violating human rights and undermining democracy to trigger a sense of mistrust between state and nation and create political turmoil. Afghan nation has been embroiled in the very political problem following the post-Taliban administration.

The Taliban guerrillas inflicted heavy casualties upon Afghan soldiers and civilians and still do so for not having a political share in the government. The government's struggle for peace remained futile and the escalated militancy has created a wide gap between state and nation.

No wonder, the Arab Spring was the cornerstone of Syria's conflict as the mainstream suggested that the Syrian freedom fighter would win. There were two blunders with the start of the game: first, the action of the public, who believed to overthrow the Assad's regime. The teenagers painted anti-regime's slogans on walls and people resorted to arms as a protest against the regime. Second, the reaction of the regime i.e. using violence to suppress the revolt was really a megalomaniac deed. Hence, it is really sad to see that once a nice and developed country with great universities and historical places has been changed into a graveyard where streams of blood are shed every minute. After all, with the firm foothold of the ISIL and many other terrorist groups in Syria's soil, the violation of human rights will continue for years the same as Iraq and Afghanistan.

To pave the way for democracy, the warring sides will have to seek peace through holding bona fide negotiation and do not miss the chance so as to protect their rights of the Syrian nation which is trampled upon by the militant fighters, mainly by ISIL. The outbreak of the ISIL group and its rapid expansion is really jaw-dropping. It also suggests that the group has been strongly supported by a mysterious hand and the ISIL fighters are likely to be pawn in the political game. It carried out deadly attacks in many parts of the world, including Europe and America, since the declaration of caliphate.

Consequently, the US president Donald Trump vowed to eradicate the ISIL group. Last week, American officials announced plans to nearly double their forces in Syria with 400 more troops and the Pentagon is reportedly considering sending 1,000 extra troops to Kuwait as a reserve force. They are also weighing more troops for Iraq, where about 5,000 Americans are training and assisting Iraqi security forces.

Though the Americans are not expected to be involved in ground combat, they are moving closer to the front lines. As a candidate, Mr. Trump derided Mr. Obama's anti-ISIL strategy as a disaster, though offering none of his own.

Now, in office, he should not ignore the progress that has been made. Local forces backed by American airstrikes have retaken large areas of Syria and Iraq that ISIL captured in 2014. The eastern part of Mosul, once Iraq's second-largest city, was recently liberated from ISIL.

On Feb. 19, Iraqi forces launched a battle for the western part of the city, where a million people are trapped in desperate conditions. Last week, an American-backed militia in Syria captured the main road connecting Raqqa to territory the group holds in Deir al-Zour Province, severing the last supply and escape route for its fighters. The group's claim to legitimacy has rested mainly on holding territory, so losing those strongholds would be a devastating blow.

Meanwhile, many terrorist fighters have been killed and fewer replacements are arriving from other countries. ISIL's finances - from oil revenues and the taxes it extracts from people under its control - have fallen from about \$1.9 billion in 2014 to no more than \$870 million in 2016, according to a study by the research organization RAND.

One of the tough questions facing Mr. Trump is whether to arm the Syrian Kurds for the fight against ISIL. American military commanders consider them crucial partners in any campaign to retake Raqqa, where some 4,000 ISIL fighters are dug in. The problem is that Turkey, a NATO ally, opposes arming the Syrian Kurds because it considers them terrorists in league with the Kurds who are waging a separatist war in Turkey. I believe that arming the Syrian Kurds will do more harm than good. The policy of arming locals against the Taliban made no tangible changes in Afghanistan. So, a more cautious strategy is to be adopted so as not to lose the past outcome.

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## Address to the Kurdish Nation

By Bernard-Henri Lévy

By history and language, I am a member of a very old nation, one of the world's oldest: France. And in spirit I am a member of a very old people - the Jewish people - who founded one of the world's youngest states. Today, another old people, the Kurds, are preparing to replicate that experience.

The Kurds, like the Jews, have lived through countless trials, endured innumerable twists of fate, suffered domination again and again. Through it all, they held fast, resisting the forces that sought to extinguish them. And today, they are approaching a milestone: a declaration of self-determination in the form of a free state that ensures its citizens liberty, security, and dignity. The Kurdish nation was forged over centuries of pain and pride. It was strengthened in the course of the war against Islamist terrorism, in which the Kurds have been the civilized world's staunchest - and sometimes solitary - spearhead.

I know no Peshmerga fighter who, while waging our common battle, did not have in mind the achievement of that ancestral dream of Kurdish independence. Mosul will be liberated; the Islamic State (ISIS) will be defeated; and, when the moment comes for the referendum that Massoud Barzani, President of Iraq's Kurdistan Regional Government, has described as the Kurds' inalienable right, the will of each citizen will be shared by all. Even some of the Kurds' closest allies worry that recognition of a Kurdish state might upset the regional balance and pose a threat to peace. I believe that the contrary is true: the Kurds will be a pole of stability in a region increasingly susceptible to fanaticism and terror.

To their eternal credit, the Kurds have defended against all odds the standards - respect for borders, for laws, and for fundamental human rights - that underpin stability, and that tyrants from Saddam Hussein to Bashar al-Assad have flouted. In a region where others create refugees, the Kurds provide a safe haven.

Indeed, the Kurds have forged one of the region's few examples of a vibrant democracy that upholds tolerance, cultural coexistence, and the rule of law. In what other part of the Muslim Middle East does one find such a strong belief in a geopolitical order that tends toward peace, not war; favors reconciliation over ancient hatreds; and prefers respect for the other to a war of civilizations?

The Kurdish state's small size will not make it fragile or weak. History offers many examples of small nations that are solid and strong because their people are united in the face of powerful neighbors. For their citizens, the sword has always been close to the plow when the time came to defend the nation. And, crucially, they are nations of citizens united by their shared history and spirit, not by ethnicity, a sense of superiority, or a distrustful, insular identity.

The Kurds are such a nation: a people of volunteers who know why they fight, a people who, from the humblest to the greatest, from the Peshmerga regular to the loftiest of Kurdish commanders, do not hesitate to take up arms to discourage or dismantle despotism - and not only on their own behalf. They have been soldiers of freedom who kept Christians from being purged from the last place in the world where the language of Christ is still

spoken, while defending the principle of equality of the sexes, even in combat - a principle that is the hallmark of great civilizations. For these reasons, I believe that the birth of a Kurdish nation-state will be a force for peace, not disorder, in the Middle East - an advance that will help drive out the genes of violent extremism, tyranny, and disintegration. Like one of the world's greatest nations - though one currently debased by those who purport to lead it - the Kurds will be a "shining city on a hill," a luminous lodestar for the dispersed Kurdish people and a source of hope for all of the world's dispossessed and displaced.

As such, the Kurds should never be afraid to proclaim their ethos, which is both universal and, if the words have any meaning at all, truly internationalist.

The very voices of Kurdistan embody this. One thing that has struck me in the course of my frequent visits to Kurdistan is that the Kurds are a multilingual people. In addition to Kurdish, they speak the languages acquired in exile. Like the French nation, which was enriched over the centuries by immigrants and oppressed peoples, the Kurds are diverse in origin and cosmopolitan in outlook. And their provision of refuge for persecuted Yezidi and Christian communities is further proof of this.

Today's populists in the West deny it, but "internationalism" is a beautiful idea. For two centuries, it has been the animating spirit of so many battles for freedom, and has inspired so much courage, resistance, sacrifice, and nobility. Despite the traps into which it has sometimes fallen, internationalism has nourished the best of what "the West" has represented.

One of Kurdistan's merits is to have kept the flame of internationalism burning in a benighted region. Reflect for a moment on the Kurds' battle against ISIS, which they have waged not only for themselves and their safety, but also on behalf of the rest of the world. The Kurds have acted as internationalists, while also being internationalists in heart and soul.

The new Kurdish state's powerful neighbors will, one expects, be hostile to its example. Across the Middle East, free Kurdistan will be a living reproach to the false nations, anti-nations, and prison nations in which Kurds, among others, remain confined. Confronted with the new tests and challenges that await them, the Kurdish people must recognize that they are likely to find themselves as alone as they have ever been in their long history. Charles de Gaulle once said that a people has no friends, and, alas, the Kurds will find out soon enough that today's friends may prefer their supposed world order to friendship, justice, and the cause of true stability and peace.

The Kurds are preparing for this. And, fortunately, there are also millions of men and women abroad, in France and throughout the world, who believed in Kurdistan when governments wanted nothing to do with it. That sort of friendship - the support offered by so many of the world's citizens - is much more constant. Friends like that will never fail. (Courtesy Project Syndicate)

Bernard-Henri Lévy is one of the founders of the "Nouveaux Philosophes" (New Philosophers) movement. His books include *Left in Dark Times: A Stand Against the New Barbarism*, *American Vertigo: Traveling America in the Footsteps of Tocqueville*, and most recently, *The Genius of Judaism*.



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