

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



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## Widening Disparities between the Rich and Poor

A recent report by Tolo news highlighted the widening gap between the rich and poor in Afghanistan and how that influences the poor, some among whom do not have anything else to do but collect garbage and suffer in various ways so as to earn their livelihoods. The report highlighted that though the international community granted around \$63 billion for non-military purposes over the past 15 years to Afghanistan, 39 percent of the population is living below the poverty line, with some of them having the most difficult ways of living. The so-called development in the country seems to have been skewed and it has favored only some people who have accumulated wealth that can be sufficient for their several generations. On the other hand there are many others who have been suffering for many generations.

The widening gap between the rich and the poor or the class disparities can be best observed in capital Kabul. There are some tall, luxurious and magnificently built houses with visibly all the facilities of life while on the other hand there are houses that cannot be termed houses in the true sense of the word. Many of them are nothing more than tents that cannot guard the people against the severe weather conditions. Then there are many people who live without houses. They have to spend their nights along or under the different bridges in the city.

These disparities between the rich and poor are affecting the society as a whole. Though the stratification into rich and poor classes existed in Afghan society earlier as well, but it has changed its primitive shape; even in the urban regions the stratification is more like modern upper class and lower class division.

Some argue that this stratification of the society in different classes is a necessity. They believe that it is because of interaction of various strata that the society tends to function as whole. However, this argument is quiet debatable. Actually the class based setup in a society is mostly the outcome of the practice of Capitalism. Capitalism, at least in theory, tends to follow justice and demands that everyone should be gifted according to his ability. Thus people with more ability can have as much as they deserve lawfully. Further, the system of Capitalism also allows the individuals to have lawful private property.

This system seems to be working for most of the developed and developing countries. In fact, if this system has been working for so many countries, there are few pre-requisites that are maintained to a varying extent by these countries that have been helping the system to develop instead of facing a failure.

First, it has been made sure that justice should be maintained in its true spirit, i.e. it must not favor only the upper class; rather the upper class itself should be treated by the law and order system in the same way as the other two classes; namely, lower, middle and upper classes.

To put it in simpler terms it can be said that social stratification has not been changed to social injustice. Second, social mobility has been made very easy in such societies. Social mobility basically means movement from one social class to another.

For example, it has not been very difficult for a person taking birth in a lower class to work hard, develop the capability and move to the middle and even to upper class. There have been equal opportunities for almost all the members of the societies to excel in their lives and become rich. Social mobility has been able to provide some oxygen for the social setup to inhale so that it must keep on living.

It is also vital to note that in Afghanistan the wealth has poured in without much accountability and weak check and balance system, therefore, the stratification has led to sufferings. The upper class in Afghanistan cannot be said to be in the form as it exists in an industrialized society. Rather, it includes the landlords, tribal heads and religious leaders. Both political and economic systems tend to revolve around these people who are in total control of entire wealth and its distribution. Further, it is also true that all these people do not seem to have the ability for what they are gifted.

They in pursuit of their own benefits have only made the opportunity of development favor themselves. The poor people of Afghanistan, who have been badly stricken by decades of wars, have only suffered the worst manifestations of poverty. There are millions who do not have the basic requirements of life and are compelled to live their lives in the remotest areas, without much support and attention. Food, cloth, shelter and other requirements like education and security are non-existent for them. And at the same time there are people who own properties worth millions of dollars.

These are all the results of an intense stratification. The poor do not seem to be having many opportunities of improvements in their lives and that means that social mobility, which can provide oxygen to a stratified society does not exist, while the social injustice is on the rise. The law and order system, instead of treating everyone alike, has served as the slave of the upper-class. The current scenario if goes unchecked can bring further misery to Afghan society.



## Intolerance leads to Fratricide

By Hujjatullah Zia

There is a fascinating little story that is preserved for us in Greek literature about Ulysses and the Sirens. The Sirens had the ability to sing so sweetly that sailors could not resist steering toward their island. Many ships were lured upon the rocks, and men forgot home, duty, and honor as they flung themselves into the sea to be embraced by arms that drew them down to death. Ulysses, determined not to be lured by the Sirens, first decided to tie himself tightly to the mast of his boat, and his crew stuffed their ears with wax. But finally he and his crew learned a better way to save themselves: they took on board the beautiful singer Orpheus whose melodies were sweeter than the music of the Sirens. When Orpheus sang, who bothered to listen to the Sirens?

"So we must fix our vision not merely on the negative expulsion of war, but upon the positive affirmation of peace. We must see that peace represents a sweeter music, a cosmic melody that is far superior to the discords of war. Somehow we must transform the dynamics of the world power struggle from the negative nuclear arms race which no one can win to a positive contest to harness man's creative genius for the purpose of making peace and prosperity a reality for all of the nations of the world," these words were spoken by Martin Luther King.

The global wars, which outraged human conscience, inflicted heavy casualties upon nations around the world and led to indescribable pains and sufferings. Streams of men, women and children's blood seeped and millions of people lost their lives or amputated in the worst possible way. In addition, the violence and carnage unfolded men's megalomania and evil. Subsequently, the world realized the fact that violence will lead to horrible consequence rather than resulting in peace and prosperity and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) was endorsed to alleviate the pain and anguish of human societies and preach the spirit of brotherhood. Based on UDHR, men are born free with natural and inalienable rights and dignity and have to be respected irrespective of their color, caste and creed.

The bulk of violence originated from parochial mindsets, religious intolerance, radical ideologies and racial superiorities. In other words, one was humiliated for his/her racial and sexual background and deemed inferior for nurturing a certain type of belief. It is an unmistakable fact that viewing the individuals from the lens of race or religion will lead to challenges in a society. Therefore, the UDHR declared that all men are supposed to exercise equal rights and dignity on the basis of being human and no one is supposed to trample upon the inalienable rights and liberty of the people.

The hegemony of democracy was accepted in many cultures for paving the way for peace and prosperity. Democracy is based on the policy of nonviolence and plays a constructive role in the society. In democratic systems, citizens have equal rights and responsibilities before the law and natural dignity matters the most. Since democracy originates from liberal idea, it extends tolerance and is likely to form a civil society void of violence and bloodshed, in case of being exercised truly. In a democratic administration, there is no room for violence and ethnocentrism.

However, the individuals' rights and liberty are violated to a great extent despite the approval of UDHR and establishment of democratic administration. It is needless to say that a number of people, who exercise radical ideology, do not believe in democracy and seek to impose their ideology on others with the barrel of gun.

The resurface of men's megalomaniac and ethnocentric emotions changed many men and women into sacrificial lambs and the ethnic minority groups bear the brunt of the issue. The current insurgency and terrorism, which blackmail the entire globe, root in religious oversimplification and adamant persistence on one's personal narration from sacred texts. In another item, stereotypical views will aggravate the challenges and breed incessant violence in human societies. The world should be cautious enough not to repeat the history in one way or another.

"Whereas disregard and contempt for human rights have resulted in barbarous acts", the human societies will have to respect the unalienable rights and inherent dignity of mankind and strengthen democracy. The destruction and horrible consequence of war is known to all. War has taken its toll on every family in every nook and cranny of Afghanistan and the nation is highly exhausted by it.

A large number of Afghan soldiers and civilians were killed within the two past years without a positive outcome. After all, the situation deteriorates with each passing day and warring factions, mainly the Taliban and the Islamic State of Khorasan Province (ISKP) intensify their attacks. War leaves heavy casualties behind but its positive outcome is hardly tangible. Warring factions will have to come to negotiating table and stop violence and bloodshed.

It is believed that if the world respects the United Nation's Charter and UDHR, the sufferings of people will come to an end. It is hoped that the rights and liberty of all nations be respected around the world on the basis of international instruments so that human societies experience a civil society void of carnage and cruelty.

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## New Wave of Violence Against Journalist

By Mohammad Zahir Akbari

In spite of the media's rapid growth since the fall of the Taliban in 2001, Afghan journalists and editors have been facing serious threats and challenges imposed by insurgent groups while the local authorities, the military and police are also contributing to the climate of fear for media personnel. As a result, journalists in Afghanistan work under extremely difficult circumstances and routinely face violence, threats, and intimidation that prevent them from carrying out their work. According to Nai, a supporting open media organization, 377 violence cases are recorded against journalists in the past 10 months of 2016, which are equal to all cases documented in the past eight years. Nai, on Sunday said that violence against journalists has hit a new record in the past ten months, which is equal to the figure of violence taken place in all eight past years across the country. Executive Chief of Nai, Sediqullah Tawhidi added that annually they have recorded averaged 48 cases of violence against journalists in the past 15 years, but this year violence drastically increased against journalists. He called on government and international community to take serious measures in order to prevent violence against journalists across the country. As many as 96 journalists and staffs of media in Kunduz, 75 in Helmand, 108 in Farah and 13 in Uruzgan coerced to left their duty, due to threats dominating in the their cities, he claimed. Pointing to different violence cases including 13 murder cases, Tawhidi said that still no prosecution taken place in this regard to be acceptable and accordance to expectation. Despite of acceptance of journalists' regulation by National Security Council and establishing of coordination committee between journalists and government, we were not witness for decreasing of violence against journalists, he noted. He said that although president recently released a decree regarding access of journalists to information, but we were not witness to see any positive changes yet. Situation got worse day by day for journalists this year, he asserted. Additionally, In Nili, the capital of the Dai-kundi province, a homemade bomb attack on Radio Nasim on the night of October 11, 2016 caused considerable damage but no injuries, station manager Mohammad Reza Vahedi reported. While a few hours before the bombing, two unidentified men went to Vahedi's home, threatened him and beat him, he added. One more example in Zabul province, despite repeatedly request regarding prosecution, still no steps has been hold to bring perpetrators before justice. Terrorist groups, governmental officials' particularly provincial officials, private sectors including protestors said to be the main factors behind violence against journalists throughout the country. Journalist from Zabul complains of violence against journalists in Zabul province. Unveil challenges in the governmental organs in the province by journalists are said to be the main reason behind most violence against reporters. It is also said that Journalists

not afraid of Taliban and other terrorist groups, but from governmental officials in Zabul province. Recently Ahmad Wali Sarhad, a freelancer working for the Zabultimes website, who was harassed for months by the police. His problems began when the Zabul prosecutor's office issued a warrant for his arrest after he wrote that a transport ministry official was probably collaborating with the Taliban. He blamed the harassment on the governor, although the governor's office denied any role in the case.

Another study conducted by Afghanistan National Journalist's Union (ANJU) reveals that government has not investigated 70 percent of violence, murder and harassment cases against journalists and 70 percent of media personnel are not satisfied with government's activities to prevent the issue. The survey was carried out in 11 provinces, interviewing 1,088 journalists and media workers. The survey also speaks of gender-based discrimination and states that 30 percent of women journalists and media workers were mistreating at workplace and out of office due to gender issues. "Nearly 30 percent of women interviewed in the survey have said they have witnessed discrimination and harassment inside and outside office," Dashti said. In addition to security issues, a number of journalists complain that they have low access to information provided by government offices.

The increase of violence in several provinces has again fuelled tension and frustration between journalists and civil society. As many governors and local officials do not respect journalistic independence. Journalists have been harassed or come under attack by local officials, their bodyguards, police officers and the Taliban in several provinces including Mazar-e-Sharif, Kandahar, Herat, Ghazni and Kabul. The police and judicial authorities, who are susceptible to being influenced by governors, often interrogate and even punish journalists.

These waves of violence and complains come after approval of access to information law caused new hopes for journalist and other citizens as a great step towards democratic development in Afghanistan. In democratic system, media considered as the fourth pillar; According to international conventions to which Afghanistan is a signatory and according to Article 50 of the Afghan Constitution, "Right to Know" or "Right of Access to Information" is a fundamental human right for every Afghan citizen. It can play an important role in the fight against corruption and the right to access information increases transparency, accountability, public participation and democracy development. So, it is expected that human right organizations and local citizens strongly support media and journalist to monitor social, political or administrative issues or else a nation of sheep will beget a government of wolves.

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