

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



November 08, 2017

In Search for Truth

It is really vital for all human beings to search for truth. All human beings are equipped with thinking minds when they are born, but all of them do not reach to the truths in their lives. It is not mind alone that decides that a person would ultimately be able to reach to the ultimate truth; rather, it to a large extent depends on iron will and determination to do so. The path that leads to the truth is not always easy to pursue and human beings have to face myriads of challenges before they can reach to their destination. However, in the search for truth the most important factor is to realize the fact that a person does not already know it. Unfortunately, there are many people who believe that they have already found the truth and they are alone to have done so.

As a matter of fact, those, who claim to have found the truth, have the tendency to stick to it and keep on insisting upon it. They, thus, give up seeking for it and fall into the imagination that the ultimate reality has been discovered and there is no need of further exploration.

The matter of fact is that the human beings understand the world through their knowledge and human knowledge is not perfect and complete enough to understand the entire universe and different phenomena in it.

Thus what they understand at a particular time may be true as per their knowledge at that time but as they further advance in their knowledge and understanding of the universe the situation may change. Their previous truth may seem insufficient and may require further elaboration or the facts may point towards a truth that is totally against the accepted truth and may, thus, reject it completely.

Heraclitus of Ephesus, observing the changing nature of the world around, had said, "You cannot step twice in the same water." What he meant to say is that by the time you step for the second time in the water, the water under your foot already changes because it flows. Considering such frequent changes in nature, it is difficult to find permanent truths very often.

History would also prove the fact that the truths keep on changing. For example, it was believed as a fact during the Dark Era in Europe and even supported by Christianity that earth is the center of the universe and sun moves around it; however, it was only later discovered through development in scientific thinking and scientific technology that actually sun is the center of the solar system and the earth revolves around the sun.

There are myriads of other examples in history that prove that with the evolution in human knowledge there were changes in the understanding of phenomena that human beings considered as universal truths. For example, once it was considered a widely accepted truth that earth was flat; however, the later developments proved that it was round. Knowing the universe as a changing reality is really very important. Those who have this outlook get nearer to the truth, while those who consider the universe as a static phenomenon are at a great loss. The biggest disadvantage for them is that they distant themselves from knowing the truth.

Those who believe that they know the ultimate truth are dangerous as well. They are dangerous in a sense that they consider others as not knowing the actual truths. Then, they become even more dangerous when they want to spread their perceived truths to others and even coerce them. They, sometimes, become violent and cannot tolerate that others should have opinion other than what they know; all because they know the ultimate truth.

People who have the misunderstanding that they know the truth, halt searching for more. They, as a matter of fact, reach to an intellectual death. Their understanding becomes full and there is no space for knowing more. The thirst for knowledge is quenched in them.

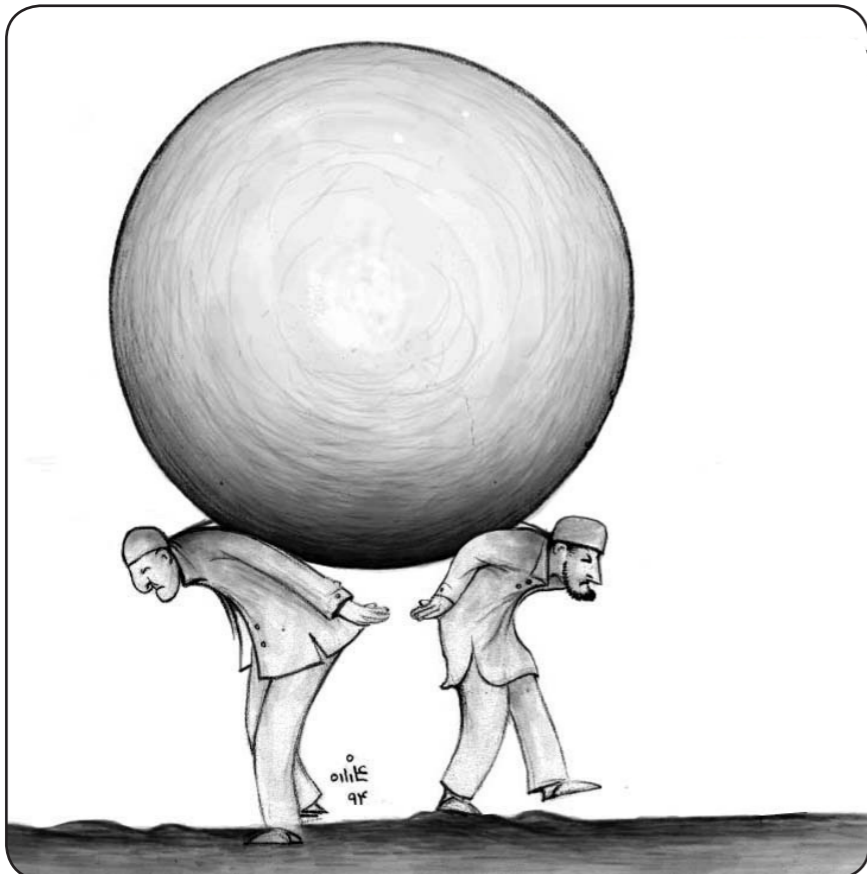
Though they wear the crown of a king over their heads but in reality they are destitute.

Different extremist movements in the world, which have even killed thousands of people without any crime, have basically originated from the thinking that they are right and true, while the rest are wrong and must be amended. Taliban, for instance, consider their way of thinking and their beliefs as true and believe that all others are infidel.

Thus it is their moral and the most sacred duty to make others follow the truth as well.

Resultantly, we have to doubt those who find truth. We do not have to believe them but challenge them. Reconsider their conclusions and must strive to keep on searching for truer.

Therefore, the search for better must always continue. For the people who live in the societies like Afghanistan, the need to realize the facts that govern their lives and their livings must be searched thoroughly so that they are able to find better solutions for the actual problems, not just their misunderstandings.



Who Listens?

By Hujjatullah Zia

Women's rights are violated in many parts of the world, including democratic countries. Women are threatened in social media and harassed mentally and sexually. Their vulnerability is endemic. They are treated unfairly. There are lurid reports about women in Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, etc. Women fall victim to honor killings, traditional cultures, and radical mindset.

The dream of large number of women do not come true, mainly in Afghanistan. They are restricted by social obstacles and cultural hurdles. Although women are supposed to enjoy equal rights and freedoms with men, their rights are disregarded. Men often deem women as fair sex for satiating the carnal desire of men. Therefore, they fall victim to rape in many parts of the world. For instance, there are reports about raping women in democratic countries such as Pakistan and India. Those who cherish misogynistic idea or seek to justify their acts of violence, argue that women should dress properly in public places or else men will succumb to their charm - this was ridiculed by a woman when she wrote that women should dress properly "because men have eyes".

Honor killing is a common practice in tribal belts in both Afghanistan and Pakistan. Furthermore, women are flagellated and stoned in desert courts in Afghanistan by tribal councils, consisting of tribal elders who cherish a highly traditional mindset and sometimes of the Taliban. The Taliban still seek to restrict women and curtail their role in the areas dominated by them. For example, in Moqor district of Ghazni province, where I lived for years, girls' schools are closed since the Taliban are a serious threat. Women present in public places with burqa (a head-to-toe covering). If women unveil their faces, it will fill their families with a strong sense of anger. In areas where the Taliban dominate, people are highly traditional and will commit honor killings in case of being suspicious of their families' behaviors. Traditional culture holds strong sway in tribal areas of Pakistan, too. Women are subjugated to their spouses, brothers, fathers, etc. Unveiling their faces is considered a serious disdain for their families. That is to say, Taliban-styled tradition prevails in tribal areas in Pakistan. On the other hand, women fall victim to rape in cities, where mostly open-minded individuals reside. Moreover, scores of girls get married under the age of 18 in Pakistan. The Family Planning Association of Pakistan (FPAP) warned some years ago that one woman dies every 20 minutes during

childbirth, and that the major cause for high maternal mortality ratio - 276 per 100,000 live births - is child marriage. The United Nations Population Fund puts one in every four girls in developing countries into the category of marriage before 18, and one in nine under 15. But it is, at the very least, acknowledged as a detrimental and archaic practice, and great efforts should be made for its elimination.

Ending child marriage is such an important international goal that eliminating the practice was added as a Sustainable Development Goal, to be achieved by 2030 as it "prioritized the prevalence of child marriage among girls as a key indicator of progress toward this target".

This is in line with the findings of a research report published by the World Bank and the International Center for Research on Women (ICRW) that has found that Child marriage will cost developing countries trillions of dollars by 2030.

Moreover, Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women states in article 2, "Countries must prohibit all discrimination against women by anyone, any groups and any companies and must change any law to protect women from discrimination".

Many democratic countries have ratified international instruments including those upholding women's rights. Similarly, the rights and dignity of men and women are equal in democratic countries and neither of them must be discriminated on the grounds of their gender. The fundamental rights of men and women - i.e., the rights to life, liberty, and property - are deemed natural and inalienable which means that the government neither bestowed such rights to people nor have the authority to deprive them of such rights.

There are many reasons behind violation of women's rights, including child marriage. As it was mentioned above, radical mindset, cultural restriction, and patriarchal systems are the main reasons behind this act. But there are many other reasons as well. Those men who are not able to control their desire, will engage in violating women's rights out of carnal desires. But they should be prosecuted by law for trampling upon both the rights and dignity of women. After all, all countries will have to work in tandem to put an end to child marriage and uphold women's rights and dignity. Indeed, discrimination against women is no more tolerable since both men and women have equal rights based on international instruments.

Hujjatullah Zia is the permanent writer of the Daily Outlook Afghanistan. He can be reached at zia_hujjat@yahoo.com

When Climate Leaders Protect Dirty Investments

By Nathalie Bernasconi-Osterwalder and Jörg Haas

Solutions to the climate crisis are often associated with big conferences, and the next two weeks will no doubt bring many "answers." Some 20,000 delegates have now descended on Bonn, Germany, for the latest round of United Nations climate change talks.

The talks in Bonn should focus on the implementation of the Paris climate agreement. And the path forward is clear. The only way to keep the rise in global temperatures within the limit set in Paris - "well below 2°C" higher than pre-industrial levels - is to shift capital away from fossil fuels and toward zero-carbon projects. To do that, we must change how global energy investments are governed.

At the moment, the very governments leading the fight against climate change continue to support and protect investment in fossil-fuel exploration, extraction, and transportation. Rather than investing in efficient housing, zero-carbon mobility, renewable energy, and better land-use systems, these governments say one thing but still do another.

According to the most recent World Energy Investment report from the International Energy Agency, global expenditure in the oil and gas sector totaled \$649 billion in 2016. That was more than double the \$297 billion invested in renewable electricity generation, even though achieving the Paris agreement's target implies leaving at least three quarters of known fossil-fuel reserves in the ground. As these numbers suggest, institutional inertia and entrenched industry interests continue to stand in the way of shifting investment into sustainable energy. Much of the problem can be traced to bilateral investment treaties and investment rules embedded within broader trade pacts, such as the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), the Energy Charter Treaty, and the EU-Canada Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA). Because these treaties were designed to shield foreign investors from expropriation, they include investor-state dispute settlement (ISDS) mechanisms that allow investors to seek compensation from governments, via international arbitration tribunals, if policy changes affect their business.

This has handcuffed governments seeking to limit fossil-fuel extraction. Compensation from ISDS cases can be staggering. In 2012, an American investor filed a lawsuit against the Quebec government's decision to deny a permit for hydraulic fracturing under the Saint Lawrence River. Arguing that the denial was "arbitrary, capricious, and illegal" under NAFTA, the Delaware-based energy firm sought \$250 million in damages. In January 2016, the TransCanada energy company used NAFTA to sue the United States, claiming \$15 billion in losses after President Barack Obama denied a permit for the Keystone XL oil pipeline. (The company suspended its suit after President Donald Trump approved the project in January

2017).

And in July 2017, Quebec agreed to pay nearly \$50 million in compensation to companies after canceling oil and gas exploration contracts on Anticosti Island in the Gulf of Saint Lawrence. These and other payments are in addition to the hundreds of billions of dollars in subsidies that continue to flow to the fossil-fuel industry.

Big payouts do more than drain public coffers; the mere threat of them discourages governments from pursuing more ambitious climate policies, owing to fear that carbon-dependent industries could challenge them in international tribunals.

Fortunately, this state of affairs is not set in stone. Many governments now see reform of the investment regime not just as a possibility, but as a necessity. Last month, the UN Conference on Trade and Development convened a high-level meeting in Geneva, with the goal of developing options for comprehensive reform of the investment regime, including the renegotiation or termination of some 3,000 outdated treaties. Governments should start by overhauling or exiting the Energy Charter Treaty, the world's only energy-specific investment pact. The ECT's investment protections and lack of climate provisions are no longer appropriate. Since its inception, the ECT has served as the basis for more than 100 claims by energy firms against host countries, with some challenging national environmental policies, such as the nuclear phase-out in Germany. Russia and Italy have already withdrawn from the ECT; other countries should do the same or commit to renegotiating it.

Moreover, countries should put climate concerns at the center of their trade and investment negotiations, such as by carving out fossil-fuel projects from investment clauses. That is essentially what France recently proposed, when ecology minister Nicolas Hulot announced his country's intention to enact a "climate veto" to CETA. Hulot said France would ratify the treaty only if it contained assurances that its climate commitments could not be challenged before arbitration tribunals. Fossil-fuel projects could also be exempted from investment protection in new environmental treaties, such as the Global Pact for the Environment presented by French President Emmanuel Macron to the UN General Assembly in September. Rebalancing the global investment regime is only the first step toward a zero-carbon economy.

To shift capital from fossil-fuel heavy initiatives to green energy projects, countries will need new legal and policy frameworks at the regional, national, and international levels. These agreements should promote and facilitate zero-carbon investments. Big meetings like the one getting underway this week and the Paris Climate Summit next month can kick-start these conversations. (Courtesy Project Syndicate)

Nathalie Bernasconi-Osterwalder is director of the Economic Law and Policy Program at the International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD). Jörg Haas is Department Head: International Politics at the Heinrich Böll Foundation.

Chairman / Editor-in-Chief: Moh. Reza Huwaida

Vice-Chairman: Kazim Ali Gulzari

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.