

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



October 08, 2017

Teachers Must be Empowered

5th October is celebrated as World Teachers' Day around the world to commemorate the anniversary of the signing of the 1966 UNESCO/ILO Recommendations concerning the status of teachers. The day brings together governments, multi and bilateral organizations, NGOs, private sectors, teachers and experts in the field of teaching. With the adoption of SDG 4 on education, and the dedicated target 4.c, recognizing teachers as key to the achievement of the 2030 Education Agenda, it has become the occasion to mark achievements and reflect on ways to counter the remaining challenges for the promotion of the teaching profession, like the acute shortage of teachers. This year the theme of the day is "Teaching in Freedom, Empowering Teachers".

Teachers in a society can rightly be considered as the builders of a nation because of the important role that they play. They disseminate education and support the young generation in building their characters, personalities and minds. They guide the students through a very important phase of their lives, which can decide their whole future; whether they become well-educated and positive members of the society or they remain illiterate and have negative impact over the society largely depends on the way they are educated by their teachers.

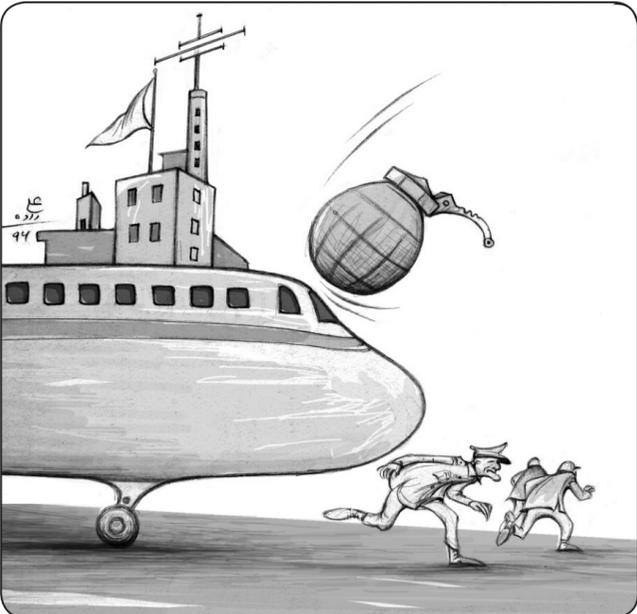
Teachers have the responsibility of not only stuffing the curricula in the minds of the students but supporting them in having better mentality. They have the responsibility of making the students think wisely and stand on their own, instead of making them rely on the words taught to them by others. Students must learn the ways to change their lives and the lives of their fellow beings from their teachers, not only the mathematical formula or the grammatical rules. Teachers must teach the students what paths to follow, instead of making them follow the path they themselves are following. Unfortunately, that is not what we always see from the teachers. The teachers in our society do not always seem to be the ideal teachers. They lack the skills and the talents that are required by a teacher. They, on certain occasions, even lead the students astray and on many other occasions make them follow everything blindly. They want their students to be obedient and dumb and do not like them questioning much. They consider the agile, motivated and enthusiastic students as ill-disciplined and worthy to be standing outside their classes most of the times.

They, in some cases, even beat the students and insult them verbally. They do not treat the students the way they should be treated. At the same time, there are observations that show that our society does not treat the teachers the way they should be treated. The teaching profession is not given the worth it deserves.

Teachers are not paid properly for their tiring job. They cannot feed themselves and their families properly with what they earn through teaching. The training opportunities are very much limited for the teachers. There are only few schools, colleges or universities that pay so that their teachers can be trained. Teachers are expected to be super-humans; much is expected from them while they are not given much as a reward.

It is forgotten that teachers have families and they have lives just like all the other people. It is important that both the responsibilities and the rights of the teachers must be highlighted and debated so that measures can be taken to deal with deteriorating situation properly. Teacher's Day can be such an opportunity. Taking advantage of this opportunity, the government authorities, the teachers and students can highlight the issues pertinent to the rights and responsibilities of the teachers so that they are able to have better role and contribution in the society and can truly play their role in the lives of the students. The government has to play a very imperative role regarding heightening the position of teachers and of modern education in our country. Initial commitments by the President Ashraf Ghani were appreciable. He had directed governors to allot land plots to teachers. He had also promised an increase in salaries of teachers and other privileges. He pledged that no one would be allowed to grab the land plots allocated to teachers by the Ministry of Education. He even ordered the Ministry of Interior to take concrete action to vacate the land plots that the Ministry of Education had allotted to teachers, but were grabbed by powerful individuals.

However, some of the promises are still promises only. The president had earlier said that a commission comprising representatives from the ministries of education, justice and finance and members of the commission on administrative reforms would bring parity to salaries of teachers and other government servants. However, it is not yet clear how much progress has been made in that regard. This initiatives were really very promising but there were not real commitments to make them happen. President, himself, would need to monitor the progress in this regard and make sure that the promises do not remain a promises alone because if they are fulfilled, it would be of great support in lifting the morale of the teachers and standard of education within the country.



Violation of Children's Humanitarian Rights

By Hujjatullah Zia

Children bear the brunt of war and militancy in the region. The spate of war and violence in Syria, Yemen, and Myanmar left children at the mercy of great sufferings. Their rights and dignity are trampled upon without a tinge of mercy. They are traumatized by the adverse effect of deadly wars for being harassed by armed groups or having their parents killed before their eyes.

According to the International Humanitarian Law (IHL) armed groups must not violate the rights of non-combatants, mainly women and children, the soldiers who laid down their arms, and the wounded in action. Warring sides are not allowed to use destructive weapons to the extent that cause unnecessary sufferings for civilians. Violating the rights of non-combatants is considered war crime and perpetrators should be brought to justice.

Nonetheless, warring sides turn blind eyes to this issue and the graph of civilian fatalities has increased tremendously. Moreover, there are reports about women who lost their children and vice versa. A number of Rohingya women fleeing to neighboring Bangladesh as a result of the most recent round of brutal repression by the Myanmar army - described as ethnic cleansing by the UN - lost their children. This will be extremely tragic for mothers to lose their children and also for children to lose their mothers.

The graph of children's casualties in Yemen is shocking. On the Thursday, the alliance, assembled by Saudi Arabia in 2015, was added to the UN chief's annual list of shame for killing and maiming 683 children and for 38 verified attacks on schools and hospitals during 2016. The black-list also named the Houthi rebel group - also shamed last year - as being responsible for the killing or maiming of 414 children. In total, the document highlights the killing of 502 Yemeni children. It also says that 838 children were wounded in 2016.

Additionally, more than 17 million people in Yemen are facing food shortages; the UN warns that the country is on the brink of famine with 80 percent of the country's children in desperate need of aid.

Caroline Anning, senior advocacy adviser on Yemen for the UK-based Save the Children NGO is cited as saying, "All sides in Yemen have shown a complete disrespect for the protection of children. We've seen a situation in which the world's worst humanitarian crisis has been created as a direct result of the war - the cholera epidemic, the hunger crisis; it's all a result of the conduct of the warring parties."

According to the United Nations' children's agency, Syria's conflict took a horrible toll on children last year, with the civil war blamed for killing at least 652 children - 255 of whom were either in or near a school.

Aside from the child fatalities, UNICEF also recorded that more than 850 children were recruited to fight in the conflict - double the number recruited in 2015.

Hence, reports about children's casualties reflect their vulnerability in war-torn countries. Afghanistan is also among the countries where children sustain heavy casualties and severe sufferings as a result of indiscriminate terrorist attacks and suicide bombings.

Terrorist groups also recruit children to fight against the government. Children easily fall for the bogus claim of terrorists, coerced into joining them, or simply succumb to their calls so as to alleviate their hunger and financial constraints. Similarly, radical mindset is implanted in the minds of a number of children who attend seminaries in tribal belts to learn religious knowledge. They are easily trapped into joining the militants.

The graph of children's fatalities is really shocking. Warring parties and states will have to observe IHL and protect the rights of children - who have nothing to do with war, ideology or schools of thought.

Recruiting and brainwashing children are very cruel of the militant fighters that exploit children as object. Targeting children or carrying out indiscriminate attacks are not only against the international law but also against the code of ethics and religious tenets.

The militants who claim to practice upon religious tenets will realize, if they have only rudimentary knowledge about religion, that recruiting children is banned according to religion. The states who are embroiled in war must protect the children's rights to life, education, and security. Besides preventing from targeting children, the states will have to safeguard schools so that children could learn knowledge.

Protecting the rights of non-combatants need to be prioritized by all countries during the war period.

It is hoped that children will be able to enjoy their rights and not fall the casualties of militancy, war or the militants' ideology. The international community also has to bring the perpetrators into justice and stop this war crime. Otherwise, the cruelty against children will turn into daily practice and their vulnerability will be exploited more.

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Dealing with Damaging Institutional Inertia

By Mohamed A. El-Erian

Deeply rooted, credible, accountable, and effective institutions have long been deemed crucial for a society's lasting wellbeing and prosperity. They shield countries from frequent and unsettling volatility, be it economic, political, or social, and they reduce the risk of costly shocks. But, nowadays, key political and economic institutions are being pressured by unusual fluidity in their operating environments and the effects of a cumulative loss of trust on the part of their constituencies.

The implications vary, with a much higher probability of adaptation, including through a relatively orderly process of creative destruction and re-creation, for private entities compared to public ones. The latter require an intensification of reform efforts, lest they constitute another obstacle to the global economy's ability to deliver high and inclusive growth on a lasting basis.

Like a well-designed, well-functioning road network, strong institutions empower economies by ensuring a stable operating environment, smoother transmission mechanisms, less costly and less risky economic interactions, a credible set of property rights, and respect for the rule of law. They act not only as enablers of a wide range of win-win relationships, but also as trusted gatekeepers. Accordingly, for decades such institutions were widely viewed as the main feature differentiating advanced economies from developing countries that are still subject to a much larger array of damaging cyclical and structural shocks.

In recent years, however, this characterization has been challenged, as the standing of private and public institutions with significant systemic influence has declined.

For an expanding set of private firms, the main source of pressure has been technological, particularly those advances underpinned by the increasingly powerful mix of artificial intelligence, big data, and mobility. The challenge has proven particularly severe, if not fatal, for those facing intense competition from entrants able to combine disruptive content and big platforms - the most notable examples being Amazon, Facebook, Google, Netflix, and Uber. As illustrated by the increased regulatory interest they are now attracting, as well as the increased media attention devoted to various controversies (such as those relating to "fake news" and internal corporate cultures), these companies must adapt and remain agile as they gain greater systemic influence and notice.

The adjustment process is even trickier for public institutions, especially given their wide-ranging roles as gatekeepers, enablers, and regulators. Often embodying the properties of "natural monopolies," they are not only shielded from disruption but can also repress and delay beneficial innovations. Internal inertia, incomplete infor-

mation, risk aversion, and conscious and unconscious biases combine to impede recognition of the urgency and importance of adaptation. Even more benign shortcomings - such as slowness in modernizing laws to catch up to changing realities - detract from economic wellbeing.

The visible and persistent failure of education systems to adopt exciting technological breakthroughs is a well-known example of this inertia. Less obvious is the lag among economic institutions in updating policy approaches, including through faster incorporation of important insights and tools from behavioral science, AI, neuroscience, and other disciplines. Then there are the persistent slippages in skill acquisition programs.

As a result, there has been a notable erosion of trust in the effectiveness of public institutions. And the damage to their credibility risks further undermining their effectiveness and perpetuating a vicious circle set in motion by their failure to generate high and inclusive growth.

Our understanding of how public institutions should adapt and reform is still evolving. As such, a complete solution is yet to emerge. But a few imperatives are already clear.

- Limit harm, including by resisting the natural inclination to promulgate increasingly ineffective, albeit established approaches, entities, and mindsets.
- Be much more open to the lessons that can be learned from external disruptors, and be willing to revisit the underpinnings of processes and entire business models.
- Enhance public-private interactions, not just for direct content, but also as a way to broaden the scope for greater cross-fertilization of best practices.
- Improve methods of public communications, lest continued information failures, aging channels, and the cumulative erosion of trust compound operational shortcomings.

Up to now, too many inherently influential institutions have lagged in identifying and implementing reforms. This has amplified the disappointment, alienation, and marginalization felt by segments of the population vis-à-vis governments that do not hear or respond to a deeply entrenched fear of economic insecurity. It is a phenomenon that has been many years in the making, that cannot be eliminated overnight, and that increasingly fuels social and political disruptions.

Institutions matter, especially in a period of economic, political, and social fluidity. The longer it takes to restore confidence in key public and, to a lesser extent, private institutions, the greater the impediments to our wellbeing and that of our children. (Courtesy Project Syndicate)

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