

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



October 10, 2019

## Ethnicity and Electoral Behavior in Afghanistan

**E**thnicity is one of the strong social fabric of Afghan society. It involves the common consciousness of shared origin and tradition among a group of people. Ethnicity in a traditional society plays a dominant role in many social aspects and is a determinant of the ethnic group behavior.

Ethnicity is seemingly experienced in every facet of our national life and has also been blamed for the many conflicts that have befallen Afghanistan. Such problems as electoral malpractice and inability to practice democratic governance have their basis, to a large extent, in ethnicity. In the past, military incursion into politics is seen in some cases to be ethnically motivated. Another example is the issue of census in Afghanistan, which has never been successfully conducted due to ethnic politics.

Ethnicity has remained a serious problem in the development of our Nation. We see it comes to play often in issues such as employment into the central government civil service and in admission into institutions of higher education. It is common phenomenon in the Afghan society to see a section or sector or its higher echelons dominated by people of a particular ethnic group.

However, these acts are largely perpetuated in the name of the ethnic groups, just as the phenomenon of ethnicity cannot be said to be peculiar to one group. Rather it is widespread and every ethnic group in Afghanistan is guilty of it in various ways and in varying degrees. Ethnic nationalism has earned us unforgettable and bitter experience such as bloodbath of the 1970s of the civil war and other civil unrests, which have had a heavy toll on human lives.

Ethnic conflict or ethnic politics has long been recognized as one of the more fundamental threats to institutional stability, political order and state cohesion in multi-ethnic societies of the third world including Afghanistan. This is not to imply that ethnicity is just a third world or parochial phenomenon. There are few places on earth where ethnic politics cannot be found. Ethnic conflict just as we have in the third world like Afghanistan, so also it exists in the developed countries, conflicts such as that between Azerbaijan and Armenia. Thus, ethnicity has played a devastating role in Afghanistan. Many Afghan citizens have been killed based on their ethnicity in the past. Many Afghans are indirectly denied their rights in Afghanistan even now.

Ethnicity plays a vital role in elections. However, the view that Afghanistan electoral choice is largely based on ethnic considerations as the elections of the first republic. Afghan ethnic groups largely voted to their ethnic candidates in first Afghan parliamentary and presidential elections. However, as the fourth presidential elections showed, the electoral behavior of the Afghan citizens has been seriously undermined by the electoral trends of the aborted Third Republic and the present Fourth Republic. In the fourth Afghan presidential elections, candidates won appreciably in areas outside their ethnic homelands in some instances and in others, some lost in their own ethnic localities. From the foregoing, one would be tempted to assume that ethnic nationalism as previously exhibited in the country in voting patterns, is fast becoming outdated in the more recent Afghanistan in political process.

Ethnic politics is one of the Afghan political behaviors that have acted as one of the main barriers to nation building in Afghanistan. Consequently, ethnic politics has been one of the main causes of instability in the country in the past. Afghan governments have taken specific measures to address the ethnic divide in Afghanistan. However, these efforts have not been much successful because they have remained on the policies. To strategically curb the ethnic politics and conflicts in Afghanistan, Afghan leaders shall change their mindset about the Afghan ethnic groups and Afghan politics; they shall consider all Afghan as equal citizens as it has been enshrined in the Afghan constitution. The political behavior of Afghan citizens show that they tend to support those political leaders that see all the ethnic groups as the equal members of the society and they vote to those candidates as well.

## EU Ambassadors Against Death Penalty

**T**oday is the World Day Against the Death Penalty. We, the Ambassadors of the European Union, its Member States and Norway to Afghanistan, reiterate our strong and principled opposition to the death penalty as a cruel, inhumane and degrading punishment. Seventy years after the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, worldwide abolition of the death penalty is closer than ever to becoming a reality. Three quarters (142 countries) of the world, representing 74% of the UN member states, have abolished the death penalty in law or practice. In 2018, no executions took place in 174 countries, which constitutes 90% of the 194 UN Member States.

This positive trend makes even more obvious the possible flaws of justice in the execution of capital punishment. No legal system can claim to be perfect; any error in the carrying out of the death penalty represents an irreversible loss of human life. This is something that global experiences have amply demonstrated in cases where people are proven innocent after decades of imprisonment in view of new evidence.

Numerous studies show that the death penalty does not deter serious crimes more effectively than other punishments. And its abolition does not lead to an increase in crime. It is also socially unjust, since it disproportion-

ately affects those who have less access to proper legal representation.

In this context, we commend the February 2018 revised Penal Code of Afghanistan which has significantly reduced the number of crimes where the death penalty is applicable. Accordingly, no time should be spared by the Government to complete the review of cases of prisoners on the death row.

Afghanistan has not carried out any executions since February 2018 and it can now take the next step. We call on the Government to observe a de facto moratorium on executions prior to the final abolishment of the death penalty. This would demonstrate a firm commitment to promoting human rights. Neither the prevailing climate of violence, nor cultural or practical justifications, can possibly legitimate the death penalty.

The EU has a strong and unequivocal opposition to the death penalty at all times and in all circumstances. As the High Representative of the EU for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Federica Mogherini, recently said in Brussels at the World Congress Against the Death Penalty: "Little by little – but not too slowly – we can get closer to our common goal, of a world where crime is met with justice, not with vengeance, and where human life is finally a universal value, respected and protected."

## Human Rights Discourse through Religious Prism

By: Hujjatullah Zia

**M**etaphysical human rights, which are discussed among religious scholars, will neither heal the bleeding wounds of human societies nor prevent from violence and bloodshed. Human rights' discourse from religious perspective will widen the schism between religious and secular parties and religious wars and crusades will be repeated in human history – which is against the objective of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR).

It is believed that the soul of religions nurture the UDHR but fundamental interpretations of religious texts, which deny pluralism and relativism, challenge the Declaration.

Human rights' discourse is debated hotly in Islamic world, and UDHR is acceptable only among the moderate followers. Since the maudlin religionists were indoctrinated persistently by religious radicals, they deem the UDHR contradictory to their faith, beliefs and moral values.

It should be noted that the UDHR is based on moral values and international principles, adopted to preclude from violence, oppression and barbarity which had outraged the human conscience, and to ensure freedom, peace and justice around the globe. The modern human rights' discourse aims to recognize human's rights and dignity which root in moral values and religious concepts. The objective of the UDHR is stated in its preamble, "Whereas recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world,

Whereas disregard and contempt for human rights have resulted in barbarous acts which have outraged the conscience of mankind, and the advent of a world in which human beings shall enjoy freedom of speech and belief and freedom from fear and want has been proclaimed as the highest aspiration of the common people,

Whereas it is essential, if man is not to be compelled to have recourse, as a last resort, to rebellion against tyranny and oppression, that human rights should be protected by the rule of law ...."

Many religious intellectuals believe that there exist "substantial" and "accidental" issues in Islam. The accidental matters took place on the grounds of historical, social, economic and political conditions of Hejaz – the geographical center of Prophet's invitation. Since Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was a charismatic leader, his charisma oozed charms and attractions in a way that the maudlin religionists, who were smoldering with burning faith and strong sense of godliness, did not involve in rational and analytical discussions.

Fourteen centuries have elapsed from the age of our Prophet and we live in modern era with different cultures and social facts. It is time to analyze the substantial

and accidental issues of Islam. We have to consider the locality and social and historical phenomena of our Prophet. It is believed that studying the religious issues apart from historical facts will be fruitless. The accidental facts root in historical phenomena of a certain locality. For instance, if Islam emerged in a locality having different culture from Hejaz, the accidental issues would be colored by that culture or social facts.

Religious and political freedoms, which are stated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, were not discussed in Hejaz in their modern concept. These freedoms were not recognized in Hejaz on the grounds that the necessary social evolutions did not come to existence. Islam emerged in a land that idolatry reflected the social identity of Mecca people. Idolatry was handed down from one generation to the next. The strong animosity and violent backlash against the Prophet and his followers in Mecca reveal that religious freedoms and conversions jeopardized their social solidarity which was beyond their tolerance. Since religion was considered the social identity and social solidarity of those societies, religious freedom, in its modern concept, was beyond their imagination.

The same was the case with political freedoms. People were subjugated to sultans and tribal leaders. There was no central government in Hejaz and it was the tribal leaders who ruled over Mecca and Medina. Allegiance and council were the traditional methods of obedience rather than political freedom. However the soul of authoritative-ness existed with puissant force and social or political authority was in the realm of tribal leaders in earnest.

Citizens can be entitled with the right to freedom of religion in a society where social identity and solidarity relate to nationality rather than religion. However, in Hejaz, it was only religion and tribe which were considered as social identity and social solidarity. An individual was deemed as a member of a tribe rather than a citizen and there was no cultural ground for freedom of religion or political liberty. Hence, if social identity and solidarity do not transit from religious factors to secular ones and an individual does not be considered as citizen, discussing about the freedom of religion and political liberty will be in vain. So, religious and political freedoms are the basic rights of contemporary men and the product of emergence of society and state. Human rights aim to adjust the men's social relations in modern age – the age of pluralism, relativism and skepticism. The freedom of religion in UDHR means that one is entitled with basic rights such as freedom, social rights and the right to citizenship irrespective of his/her religion or beliefs. Thus, freedom of religion, in the modern concept, is merely related to contemporary human rights which was beyond imagination in Hejaz and it does not contradict one's religious beliefs or moral values.

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