

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



September 17, 2016

Brussels Summit on Afghanistan and Human Rights

The upcoming Brussels Summit would be pivotal for Afghanistan; not only because of its importance regarding the upcoming nature of the support and assistance for Afghanistan but also for highlighting some major issues that Afghanistan face and what sorts of decisions are made that may influence those issues. One of the major issues in Afghanistan has been the violation of human rights; particularly women rights and there has to be serious discussion in the Summit on the issue and there should be more support and assistance for Afghanistan so that it can play a better role in this regard. However, the performance of the current government has not been satisfactory regarding the efforts for elimination of discrimination of human rights and violence and injustice against women. Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) along with some women rights protection institutions currently raised concerns over the rising violence against women in the country. They reaffirmed the determination to raise the issue at the summit in order to spotlight the main reasons behind the trend. A 14-member delegation comprising representatives from the Afghan human rights commission, the High Peace Council (HPC) and women's rights associations will report on the violation of human rights in Afghanistan and the surge in violence against women in the country at the summit. According to AIHRC, up to 10,000 cases of violence against women in Afghanistan have been recorded this year with the majority of incidents happening in the nation's remote and volatile regions. Unfortunately, with such a situation at hand, the authoritative institutions and individuals in the society are not doing much. From the government, there are just promises while in reality there are no practical measures. On its starting days, NUG came up with strong promises to deal with the issue of human rights and particularly women rights. It promised that the issue would be among its top-priority considerations; however, nothing tangible could be witnessed afterwards. Even the lawmakers are not ready to take action in this regard. It is unfortunate to note that Afghan authorities and many important personalities themselves have favored the recommendations and suggestions to limit the participation of women in social and political lives. As most of these authorities are themselves nourished in an extremist patriarchal society and do not have much consideration regarding the role and empowerment of women and consider it against their tribal values that they come out of their houses, they would never follow a movement to save women from violence and make them achieve their due place in Afghan society. The human rights commission has also accused tribal elders of interfering in the affairs of the Afghan legal and judicial institutions. Rafiullah Bedar, AIHRC spokesperson said in a statement, "In some cases, there are interferences into the jobs of our legal and judicial institutions so that lenient punishments are handed down to perpetrators, at the same time, we also face problems in the structures, in 34 provinces, special tribunals for dealing with violence against women cases are still not operational." It is of immense importance that the authorities must fulfill their responsibilities with honesty and determination and must play their part in bringing about positive changes as it would be in the favor of the people of Afghanistan and at the same time it would help in fulfilling the conditions of the international community as it would never continue supporting Afghanistan unless it makes considerable strides in this regard. For the policy makers in Afghanistan the guideline is clear, all they require is a commitment. They can make a difference if they ensure that the policies that they form meet the international concept of human rights that is developed on the basis of the United Nations Charter and the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). Article 1 of the UDHR says, "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood." Its preamble also emphasizes on the 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. The objective for Afghan government to play a tremendous role can be what is set forth in Article 55 of United Nations Charter which suggests for '(a) higher standards of living, full employment, and conditions of economic and social progress and development; b) solutions of international economic, social, health, and related problems; c) international cultural and educational cooperation; d) universal respect for, and observance of, human rights and fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion'. To be very much realistic about Afghanistan, one can say that guidelines are many; the only missing factor is practical measure. There is a wide gap between the guidelines/commitments and actions, and this gap becomes wider once the intentions and honesty are doubted; and in case of Afghanistan this gap is really wide.



Talks with HIA

By Hujjatullah Zia

Within the escalated violence and bloodshed, peace talks between the Afghan government and Hezb-Islami Afghanistan led by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar (HIA) come under discussion. Earlier, the complete withdrawal of foreign forces was included in the preconditions set by Gulbuddin Hakmatyar, which was refused by the Afghan government. However, it is said that he has stepped back from this demand and preparations are underway for a final declaration regarding the peace deal. Peace talks have been a top priority for Afghan government and the door for negotiation was and will be open for warring parties – it is what Afghan officials have articulated constantly and urged the militants to cease spilling the blood of innocent civilians. The state has made great sacrifices for bringing warring factions, mainly the Taliban to negotiating table, but the talks came to a stalemate in one way or another. In other words, whistle-blowers and foul players played their destructive role and created a split between Afghan government and the Taliban (that formed the bulk of the mala fide players). Following the futility of peace talks with the Taliban, despite the government's persistent efforts, HIA has declared preparation for holding talks. The group has conducted some widely publicized attacks during the past few years. HIA spokesman Haroon Zarghoon claimed responsibility for a Vehicle-Borne Improvised Explosive Device (VBIED) attack in Kabul on July 07, 2015 against a NATO convoy. HIA also claimed responsibility for a deadly insider attack on April 2015 in Nangarhar Province in which a US soldier was killed. On February 10, 2014, the group carried out an attack which killed at least two US civilians and wounded two other Americans and seven Afghan nationals and on May 16, 2013 suicide VBIED attack in Kabul, which destroyed a US armored SUV and killed two US soldiers, four US civilian contractors, eight Afghans, including two children, and wounded at least 37 others. The attack marked the deadliest incident against US personnel in Kabul in 2013. Afghan nation also sustained heavy casualties in suicide bombings and terrorist attacks carried out by militant fighters, including the Taliban, self-styled Islamic State (IS) group, HIA, Haqqani network, etc. Recently, the Taliban have intensified their attacks and Haibatullah Akhundzada, the Taliban's ideologue leader, follows his predecessor's footsteps through continuing the Omari Operation declared by him. Last week, several suicide bombings took place in Kabul which left dozens of combatants and non-combatants dead and wounded. It is believed that making peace with HIA will not ensure the rights and freedoms of Afghan nation. In another item,

militancy will not be diminished in the country through holding talks with one insurgent group while others continue violence and bloodshed. After all, it is believed that there is a sense of mistrust between Afghan nation and HIA and the issue of peace with the group seems to be a sore point for the public. Moreover, it is feared that with the participatory role of HIA in Afghanistan's political issues, the role of minority group and women will be weakened. Indeed, HIA's parochial worldview will restrict the role of women in political and social arenas to a large extent and marginalize them from the government. So, if peace deal be signed at the cost of people's rights and freedom, this will do more harm than good. It is the government to be vigilant enough so that the negotiation does not be counterproductive or create a gap between state and nation since it seems to put the government on a collision course with the public. In a nutshell, the Taliban's deceptive play in peace game should be an eye-opener for Afghan officials and further sacrifices in this regard will be beyond the tolerance of the nation.

It is believed that Afghan High Peace Council (HPC) has not played a significant role since its establishment (2010) and the security situation has been deteriorated. To strengthen the effectiveness and efficiency of HPC's mechanism vis-à-vis peace talks, it will be fruitful to engage the nation's representatives (MPs) and let them play their role. Moreover, the analyses of political pundits should be considered in this regard rather than abortive persistence. Reinforcing military deal and counterinsurgency will be the second option for supporting peace and security in the country. John Allen, the former Commander of US and NATO forces in Afghanistan, has recently said that the situation on the ground in Afghanistan was "more challenging" today but not beyond the capacity of Afghan forces. "The situation has become more challenging and perhaps worsening, but this is not something which is beyond the capacity of the Afghan forces," he is quoted as saying. According to him, resurgence in Afghan Taliban activities had been seen and the challenge Washington faced was stabilizing of US troop numbers and providing air support to Afghan forces.

He believed long term success of Afghanistan was going to be the function of the Afghan security forces and their capabilities to secure the nation.

A bona fide peace talk should be welcomed but an illusory role is to be foiled through military deal. High demands and setting impossible preconditions reveal the militants' unwillingness towards the talks. In addition, the government has to declare that talks will be held with the parties who stop violence and bloodshed as the first precondition.

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The Climate's Low-Hanging Fruit

By Patricia Espinosa and Mario Molina

Next month, signatories to the 1989 Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer will convene in Kigali, Rwanda, to consider an amendment to the treaty that would gradually reduce, and eventually eliminate, the use of hydrofluorocarbons. HFCs, which are one of the six main greenhouse gases, are commonly used in air conditioners and refrigeration systems worldwide. The amendment would be a boon for sustainable development, and could prevent the release of as much as 100-200 billion tons of climate-changing emissions by 2050. That would be enough to take the world a quarter of the way toward achieving the 2° Celsius global-warming target set by the December 2015 Paris climate agreement. The Montreal Protocol was established to repair the ozone layer, which protects all life on the planet from deadly levels of ultraviolet rays. So far, it has been a remarkable success, with nearly 100 ozone-destroying chemicals phased out over the past three decades. The ozone layer is healing and, according to the latest estimates, it could recover by 2065, saving trillions of dollars in global health-care and agriculture costs. Much of this improvement is thanks to HFCs, which are excellent ozone-friendly alternatives to older chlorofluorocarbons, which have been phased out. However, HFCs, some of which are 4,000 times more potent as greenhouse gases than carbon dioxide, are a disaster for climate change, and their use is still increasing annually by 10%. It thus makes sense to focus on HFCs in taking action on climate change. For starters, reducing them can yield economic benefits, owing to the significant energy-efficiency improvements afforded by newer air-conditioning and refrigeration systems. Just phasing in more efficient air-conditioning systems would be the emissions equivalent of retiring 2,500 medium-size peak power plants (power plants that come on-stream during periods of high demand, such as during the summer). In China, switching to climate-friendly refrigerants and boosting the energy efficiency of air conditioning and refrigeration could lead to the equivalent in emissions savings of eight Three Gorges hydroelectric dams. In India, the switch could be equal to two more of the Indian government's current National Solar Mission, which promotes solar-energy penetration and the construction of new roof-

top and ground-mounted solar plants.

Many countries – including the European Union and the United States, as well as Belize, Burkina Faso, Colombia, Egypt, Serbia, and Yemen – already recognize these far-reaching benefits and are taking unilateral action to phase out HFCs. A strong HFCs agreement in Kigali would add momentum to these efforts and provide financial support for developing countries that want to move to newer technologies but currently can't afford it.

In the private sector, retail giants such as Walmart, Nestle, and Tesco have joined the Consumer Goods Forum, a cooperative climate initiative, and agreed to phase out products with HFCs. The United Nations and Greenpeace, through an initiative called "Refrigerants, Naturally!", are working with Coca-Cola, PepsiCo, Redbull, and Unilever to do the same.

The Kigali meeting is set to yield a strong HFCs amendment. However, some countries in especially hot parts of the world heavily worry that climate-friendly alternatives for their essential air conditioning may not function as well. Any agreement can account for those concerns through a temporary exemption for those countries, while others move ahead with newer systems to demonstrate their effectiveness.

A warming planet is already having a devastating impact on some of the world's most vulnerable populations, and it will only continue to do so. Ultimately, all countries will have to find a way forward on reducing HFCs and climate change generally, through national action plans and emissions reductions agreed to under the 2015 Paris agreement. Frameworks established by sister agreements like the Montreal Protocol can help to do this.

HFCs will also be a central topic at the next major UN climate change conference, COP22, which convenes in Marrakesh, Morocco, in November. We are confident that the governments preparing to meet in Kigali understand the need for a strong HFCs amendment, which would give momentum to other agenda items, such as the UN Sustainable Development Goals, in Marrakesh.

If the world is to succeed in quickly reducing global emissions to prevent climate change from reaching catastrophic levels, reducing HFCs is a sensible – perhaps the most

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