

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

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Electoral Violence Prevention: Using Biometric System as a Major Step

Electoral violence is one of the main characteristics of Election in developing countries. It is several months that the Afghan government and the political parties are on odds about the forthcoming parliamentary and district councils' elections in Afghanistan.

Though the political parties have leveled serious accusations on government leaders over what they describe it deliberate attempts to deprive the people from the right to be informed about all aspects of free and credible elections. Ensuring that biometric system is used on the day of voting by government has been one of the main demands of the political parties.

However, Dr. Abdullah Abdullallah, the CEO, has recently said that the NUG will ensure using the biometric system on the day of voting. If the NUG can afford the financial costs of the biometric system, it would be a major step towards more transparent elections in Afghanistan. In addition to this, it will address one of the main concerns of the people and political parties in terms of electoral transparency in the country.

How Using Biometric System increases transparency

As we have witnessed in the previous Afghan elections, an inaccurate voter register has caused many problems in the electoral process of Afghanistan by raising doubts about the election's inclusiveness and outcome and by opening up avenues for fraud and manipulation. As a result, Afghanistan has been trying to create an accurate voter registration system through the introduction of biometric technologies. Such reform is aimed at increasing trust in the electoral process by enfranchising all eligible citizens and, at the same time, reducing various forms of electoral fraud, such as voter impersonation and multiple voting.

According to electoral experts the biometric voting projects have been a huge success in other developing countries facing the same electoral challenges and Fraud allegations. It has enabled leading millions of eligible voters to register their identities with electoral commissions. These countries have been able to establish political legitimacy through biometric voter registration. It has helped them to create a free and fair election absent of fraud and corruption positioning some of them as a model of democracy for other countries.

Using biometrics not only increases transparency and enables Afghanistan to have a free and fair elections but it also acts as bridging the gap between the government and political parties to reach an agreement on the current elections conflicts; it is currently impossible for the Afghan government to Change the country's' election system, because it requires to change the Constitution. However, using biometrics will be considered as a sign of good will that government does its best to ensure fair and free elections in the country considering the resources and time limitations of the forthcoming elections.

A Trilateral Effort to Bring Peace in Afghanistan

By Hujjatullah Zia

On late August, a 12-member Chinese high-level delegation met the newly appointed Afghan National Security Adviser Hamdullah Mohib and Deputy Foreign Minister for Political Affairs Hekmat Khalil Karzai in Afghan capital city of Kabul to discuss security issues and bilateral cooperation on counterterrorism. The two sides had reiterated mutual cooperation on combating terrorism – mainly in the two neighboring areas of Afghan province of Badakhshan and China's Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous region – and exchanged views on establishing a better mechanism for counterinsurgency, deepening economic relations and holding the second round China-Afghanistan-Pakistan foreign ministers' dialogue in the near future.

The Chinese side asked for signing a security agreement between Kabul and Beijing in a bid to enhance cooperation in war on terror and offered to pave the ground for professional training of the Afghan security forces.

On the other hand, a Pakistani delegation led by Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi met Afghan President Muhammad Ashraf Ghani on Saturday to discuss peace and stability. The two sides discussed security, regional peace and stability, joint fight against terrorism and issues related to Afghanistan-Pakistan Action Plan for Peace and Solidarity (APAPPS). Ghani stressed complete implementation of the new bilateral ties framework the APAPPS.

Earlier, Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan said Afghans had suffered severely in compare with other countries' people and are in dire need of security.

Considering the above facts, there are two good pieces of news for Afghanistan. For one, China is highly determined to support Afghanistan's peace process and bring Kabul and Islamabad together. As a result of China's efforts, the mistrust between the two sides has been minimized. Second, with Imran Khan's leadership, the ties between Afghanistan and Pakistan have been cemented and both sides seek to join efforts in combating terrorism.

China has made concerted efforts to support peace and stability in Afghanistan adhering to the Afghan-owned peace process. Releasing Position Paper of the People's Republic of China for the 73rd Session of the United Nations General Assembly, China has said, "China always supports the Afghan-led and Afghan-owned reconciliation process. We believe that broad and inclusive political reconciliation is the only solution to the Afghan issue and call on the Taliban to join the reconciliation process at an early date." It further calls the international community to "create a sound external environment for the early resumption of peace talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban."

Putting its weight behind Afghanistan's peace process, China's role is highly significant for two main reasons: First, China is a close neighbor of Afghanistan and Pakistan and could minimize the mistrust and misunderstanding between the two sides.

Second, Afghan officials and the grassroots as well as the Taliban exercise an optimistic view toward China since it played no de-

structive role in Afghanistan. That is to say, China has constantly respected the territorial integrity of Afghanistan and pursued the policy of mutual cooperation and win-win result. Likewise, China played no aggressive role against the Taliban and sat on the fence during their regime. Therefore, besides Afghanistan, the Taliban also seem less likely to resist China's offer for talks.

Since China and Afghanistan share borders, China has a stake in peace issues. China fears that the insecurity crisis will spill over into Chinese Xinjiang autonomous region. Thus, China's worries will be allayed with a stable and peaceful Afghanistan.

To view Kabul government, it has been constantly offering olive branch to the Taliban and urged them to stop spilling the blood of Afghan people, mainly women and children. Nonetheless, the Taliban's incumbent leader Mullah Haibatullah Akhundzada has turned the peace offer down and intensified attacks against the government. Since Kabul has no leverage on the Taliban, it urged the neighboring countries in general and China and Pakistan in particular to support Afghanistan in brokering peace talks through bringing the Taliban to the table. The process is yet to come to fruition.

Meanwhile, Afghan soldiers have been fighting at the frontline against terrorism and paid huge sacrifice in this regard. The two last years have been the deadliest years for Afghanistan as both soldiers and civilians sustained heavy casualties in the wake of the indiscriminate attacks carried out by terrorist groups. Since NATO forces could not bring peace in the country after more than a decade of their military mission, it will be hard for Kabul government to defeat terrorist groups on its own.

With this in mind, stakeholders, especially China and Pakistan, believe that negotiation and non-violent mechanism will be the only solution to the insecurity. Now Afghan officials hope that Afghanistan's two neighboring countries China and Pakistan will nudge the Taliban to come to the table and reach agreement with Kabul government.

It is self-explanatory that China is a heavyweight stakeholder and has played a highly constructive role so far, however, there is still a lot to be done. Notwithstanding all efforts made to stabilize the country, Afghan nation suffers severely as a result of escalated insurgency. That is, the Taliban's indiscriminate attacks against Afghan people show their lukewarm response and mala fide intention to peace talks.

Since terrorism has changed into a global threat, it is hoped that Afghanistan's neighboring countries and international community will support Afghanistan in combating terrorism. If the Taliban show no conciliatory remark despite all the concerted efforts made by Kabul and Beijing, the world should support Afghanistan in its military deal against terrorists. In short, Afghanistan receives all stakeholders, including China and Pakistan, with open arms to partner it in counterterrorism and peace process.

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Governments Must Stand Up for Health

By Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus

It was just a century ago that the Spanish flu epidemic spread across the world and killed tens of millions of people. Long before the moon landing, the Internet, or the discovery of the Higgs boson, the world was at the mercy of a disease that struck indiscriminately and did not respect national boundaries. The epidemic required an absolutely extraordinary response.

A hundred years on, contagious diseases continue to cross borders faster and more efficiently than people or goods. But other epidemics, of chronic and noncommunicable diseases (NCDs), are also a scourge to communities around the world. In fact, in terms of the scale of human suffering and the costs for society, these diseases can be even more devastating than their contagious counterparts.

At the United Nations General Assembly in New York, global heads of state are meeting on September 26-27 to highlight two major health threats. On the first day, they will discuss strategies to end tuberculosis (TB), an ancient bacterium that remains the world's deadliest infectious disease. TB claims more than 4,000 lives per day, and is among the top ten causes of death globally. To make a bad situation worse, it is also a major cause of deaths linked to antimicrobial resistance, as well as the leading killer of people with HIV.

Then, on the second day, world leaders will convene to discuss plans to beat leading NCDs such as cancer, diabetes, and cardiovascular and lung disease. Combined, NCDs are responsible for seven out of every ten deaths globally. All told, NCDs kill 41 million people every year, including 15 million people in the prime of their lives, aged 30-70. In addition to confronting TB and NCDs, world leaders will also discuss ways to promote mental health and wellbeing.

Developing countries bear the brunt of the TB and NCD epidemics, as most of the people suffering and dying prematurely from these diseases are in low- and middle-income countries. But while TB and NCDs are very different types of health threats, the best response to them is the same: We must build stronger health systems that are capable of delivering universal health coverage (UHC).

UHC makes health care accessible to everyone, no matter their circumstances. It delivers the full range of essential services, from prevention and treatment to palliative and rehabilitative to all people, not just those who can afford it.

The principles underlying UHC apply equally to protecting people against TB, NCDs, and promoting mental health. But while the

urgent need for UHC is widely understood, real change will not happen without a greater commitment from the highest levels of government.

This means that presidents and prime ministers must become the champions of their people's health. Only by ensuring a government-wide response can UHC be achieved, given that what drives good and bad health so often lies outside the remit of health ministries.

By highlighting the challenges posed by TB and NCDs, the UN is giving political leaders a unique chance to put the wellbeing of their citizens first. They should remember that promoting health pays dividends on many other fronts, too, from economic development to security.

So far, governments have already committed to achieving key global targets for TB and NCDs. With respect to TB, the world still needs to treat the 40 million people living with the disease, and provide preventive care to another 30 million, all by 2022. And to meet the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), we must end the epidemic by 2030. Countries can meet these targets by making investments geared specifically toward scaling up prevention, detection, treatment, and research.

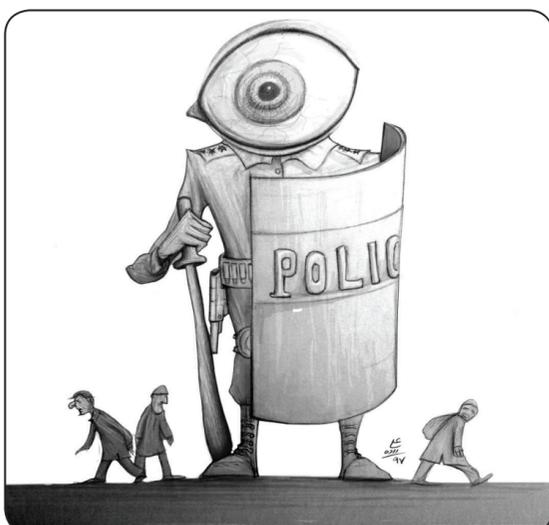
As for NCDs, the SDGs commit governments to reduce premature deaths from these diseases by one-third. Progress toward this goal has not been fast enough to ensure that it is met before 2030.

Fortunately, there are low-cost ways for governments to meet these targets and save lives. Regulatory measures can protect people from exposure to the common causes of NCDs: tobacco, alcohol, physical inactivity, and foods and drinks high in trans-fats, salt, and sugar. Investments in health systems can improve disease detection and treatment for conditions like hypertension and diabetes. Vaccinating girls against the human papillomavirus (HPV), and screening women on a routine basis, can drastically reduce deaths from cervical cancer.

At meetings in Russia and Uruguay last year, health ministers from around the world committed to accelerating action against TB and NCDs. Now it is time to take the next step.

The UN General Assembly is a unique opportunity for world leaders to foster a true global good – better health for their citizens – by advancing universal coverage to end TB, beat NCDs, and promote better mental health.

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