

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

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## Voting as A National Duty

Afghans will go to the voting stations on Saturday, September 28. However, what makes this election significant than other presidential elections in the country is the peace process and some of Afghan leader's insistence to form a caretaker government instead of holding the election. Therefore, we shall assess why some Afghan politician and one of our neighboring countries, insist on formation of a caretaker government? Why they insist on delaying the elections? Why they want to push for the peace talks in the absence of a legitimate and strong national government?

The peace process led by Khalilzad had created hope in the heart of many Afghans. Many Afghans thought the US and Afghan Taliban talks would result to a good peace deal that would pave the way for Intra-Afghan talks. Therefore, Afghans hoped that they would reach to a fair agreement on the future of the Afghan governance system, amendment of the Afghan constitution, agreeing on basic rights including women rights, religious rights.

However, the US and the Taliban talks was a total mistake; these talks were held in the absence of the Afghan government and as the draft agreement between the US and the Taliban showed, it was totally the first step to restore the Emarat system in the country. Actually, Taliban had not accepted any of the democratic principles of the current system of the country which was established after the Bonn Agreement in 2001.

The sad reality about Afghanistan is that many Jihadist leaders push for the same agenda that the Taliban are pursuing; destroying the democratic system of the country. This system ensures equality between all Afghan citizens. Our neighboring country wants to destroy system to prevent formation of a strong government that will push for state building in order to have strong nation. Both Strong state and Nation is not in the interest of our neighboring country which tries to have the Taliban in power to give primacy its interest to the Afghanistan interests.

The reason why many Afghan political leaders push for a caretaker government is that they just want to be in power. They do not care about state building in the country. They do not care whether the governance system to be the Emarat or the Islamic Republic.

Peace is important for every Afghan citizen. If we want a lasting and fair peace we shall have a strong government. To have a strong government we shall vote. All Afghan shall carefully take into consideration the current situation of the country and the strategic impacts their decision will have on the future of Afghanistan, including themselves and the future generations of the country. If Afghan citizens make a wise and well calculated decision, they can prevent political chaos in the country, they can ensure the republic system of governance, they can prevent the return of the Taliban in power and they can ensure a peaceful, secure and prosperous Afghanistan. It is time that Afghan people shall vote for institutionalizing democracy in the country.

## Who Is Responsible for Rise of Civilian Casualties in Afghanistan?

By: Mohammad Zahir Akbari

The civilian casualties have been a serious challenge in conflict of Afghanistan which raised a lot criticism and hatred in national and international level. The latest case as claimed by Helmand provincial council members and also some local people, a number of people killed and injured in Helmand province by national security operation, but the national defense ministry announced that 22 foreign members of Taliban killed and 14 others were arrested in the operation. This types of issues become more complicated when Taliban also claim that Afghan government forces target civilians. Therefore, it really needs some impartial researches on who is factually responsible for rise of civilian casualties in the country?

Most of local analysts blame Taliban as they are, directly or indirectly, more responsible for civilian casualties in the country. The government officials also blame Taliban seeing that they use civilian as human shield and so they have been killed or massacred in conflicts of Afghanistan. According to Kabir-e Haqmal, National Security Council speaker, thousands of Taliban crimes have been documented in a book which recently introduced in a ceremony. He said, these crimes include countless killings of civilians that Taliban committed since 2003 up to the date.

According to the National Security Council speaker, the main objective of the published book was to attract attention of humanitarian organization and international community on widespread civilian casualties in Afghanistan. As he said, this book also aims to aware public opinion and make criminals accountable for what they perpetrated and imposed on innocent civilian in the country. Based on this and other daily reports, Taliban and Daesh groups are more often blamed to be the main perpetrators of crimes and civilian casualties in the country. In addition to civilian casualties, there are some mysterious attacks, events and assassination that no one claims its responsibilities and considered as a part of ongoing war in the country.

According to Sobh-e Kabul daily quoted from a humanitarian research center, more than four thousand people killed within the current year. Earlier to this, UNAMA had also revealed a report in which 37% of casualties were attributed to government forces but 52% casualties were attributed to the anti-government elements. The mentioned organization also announced that during the peace talks between the US and Taliban, the war became more destructive for civilian targeted public structures, mosques, schools, villages and other civilian buildings. However, an agreement was signed between the Taliban and representatives of Afghan civil society members and political figures on reduction of attacks on civilians.

Anyway, it is nearly two decades that thousands of civilians and non-civilians and Taliban who are also Afghan killed in the country. In addition, public infrastructure such as schools, mosques, market, masques, roads, and etc have been destroyed. In certain occasions, like during the

peace process and now in the eve of election, the bloodshed intensified aiming to cancel the election. Nevertheless, no one has reached their goal and demand but killed innocent people and destroyed our land which is our common motherland, too.

Hence, let's call everyone to stop destroying our common motherland. Let's expect all warring sides to pay respect to internal humanitarian laws and values. Given the justification of extremist groups, especially Taliban as fighting on basis of Islamic principle, they must take necessary measures on preventing attacks on civilian people and public structures. As, from one hand, killing innocent people is the greatest crime in Islam and on the other hand, no group can reach their goals with killing of innocent children, men and women. No group would reach their goal by attacks on wedding ceremonies, mosques, schools and other civilian gatherings.

Taliban are also Afghan and so we must help them not to be misused by intelligence networks. They think that they are fighting for freedom of the country but their actions pave the ground for more interference of foreign people in the country. The Taliban should understand that their action is not justifiable by any system or criteria in the world. If they had not been against our government in last twenty years, we could better utilize from presence of international allies and opportunities for construction of the country. Taliban might consider violence as its strength point while it shows their weakness and its incompatibility to modern values spreading hatred among the people. The history of Afghanistan will never forget what extremist groups imposed in last two decades on the already deprived people.

Now, in the eve of election, Taliban should not try to interrupt the election because a weak and illegitimate government is not in interest of Afghanistan. Thus, it is the responsibility of Afghan government to protect election process and supreme interests of the country against terrorists and their supporters. We should encourage Afghan allies and friends to take serious steps against increasing casualties in Afghanistan. We must not allow the country to be repeatedly invaded by terrorist groups and other foreign elements. The political circles and political leaders must not try to victimize national interests against their own personal and family interests.

Lastly, people should also contribute to the security forces when they plan to have any big social events or see any suspicious issue in their community and neighborhood. It means, in some cases, some people are also blamable as they do not have enough cooperation with government. Stranger terrorists penetrate into our community; they live in our neighborhood; they implement their destructive plan but we do not know! In fact, it needs a separate study why some of our young generations tend to be more compatible to extremist groups than our legitimate government?

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## A Woman-Focused Climate Agenda

By: Alison Holder and Sivananthi Thanenthiran

From teen activist Greta Thunberg's much-publicized transatlantic journey on a zero-emissions boat to attend the United Nations General Assembly to the proliferation of climate protests, the world is more aware than ever of the climate threat. Yet this increased awareness has yet to translate into collective action by world leaders to mitigate climate change, let alone targeted efforts to protect the most vulnerable groups - beginning with women and girls.

The facts speak for themselves. Women are likelier than men to live in poverty, and gendered social roles that reproduce socioeconomic power imbalances leave women and girls particularly vulnerable to a wide variety of climate consequences, including reduced access to water, food, shelter, and vital services.

Not surprisingly, 80% of people displaced by climate change are women. Moreover, women are more likely than men to suffer from increased workload and income loss due to climate disasters. In South Sudan - one of the world's fastest-warming countries - droughts and flooding have forced girls and women to walk farther to gather firewood and obtain water, a time-consuming and potentially dangerous task.

As meeting households' energy, water, and food needs becomes more difficult, girls are often taken out of school or married off at a young age. This exacerbates existing inequalities and entrenches these girls' vulnerability.

Women are also more likely to face climate-sensitive health consequences, such as undernutrition and malaria, and to die in natural disasters, such as droughts and floods. An Oxfam report found that in India, Indonesia, and Sri Lanka, surviving men outnumbered surviving women by almost three to one after the 2004 tsunami. During the 2015 earthquake in Nepal, many pregnant women were unable to reach health centers, increasing their risk of complications or even death.

The World Health Organization reports that the effects of gender on life expectancy in natural disasters tend to be larger in more severe disasters, and where women's socioeconomic status is lower. In other words, we cannot address the climate crisis without tackling the gender-equality crisis.

Make no mistake: there is indeed a gender-equality crisis. Our partnership, Equal Measures 2030, recently launched the SDG Gender Index, which analyzes data on most of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals from 129 countries, representing 95% of the world's girls and women. Based on indicators like vulnerability to climate change, health, economic opportunities, property rights, and gender-based violence, we calculated a score for each country. On a 100-point scale, the global average amounted to just 65.7 - barely a passing grade - with no country having fully achieved gender equality, as envisioned by SDG5. As for SDG13 - "take urgent action to combat climate change and its

impacts" - our research considered three topics. The first was overall climate vulnerability. This varies across countries and regions: in the Asia-Pacific region, for example, more than 100 million people are already affected by climate change each year. But no one is immune. On the second topic - the state's commitment to disaster risk reduction - only 15 of 129 countries (11%) receive excellent scores. With the world facing a climate emergency, countries should be attempting to anticipate and prepare for disasters, with an eye to protecting the most vulnerable.

The third topic - women's representation in the political process relating to climate change - produced similarly disappointing results. Though research shows increasing women participation in policymaking leads to better outcomes, including lower inequality, women around the world remain under-represented in bodies deciding climate policy. What would it take for countries to make progress on the deeply interconnected SDG5 and SDG13? We offer seven recommendations.

- To improve planning, create gender-disaggregated databases with information on marginalized and vulnerable communities.
- Strengthen accountability by requiring governments to maintain open access to data.
- Improve coordination among government ministries and other relevant bodies.
- Pursue innovative, targeted initiatives, such as a new joint program of the Asian Pacific Resource and Research Centre for Women (ARROW) and the Danish Family Planning Association, which focuses on the intersection of climate vulnerability and sexual and reproductive health and rights.
- Increase women's representation in national and global decision-making bodies working on climate-related issues.
- Develop solutions that reflect the perspectives of women affected by climate change.
- Commit to - and follow through on - more ambitious action on climate change and gender equality, beginning at this month's UN climate summit.

When dealing with complex challenges, it can be tempting to establish false tradeoffs, with leaders claiming that they must choose between action in two areas. But SDG13 cannot be achieved without progress on SDG5, and we can't wait to achieve SDG5 before we take action on SDG13.

This applies to the entire SDG agenda: if countries attempt to pursue individual goals in isolation, they will fail to achieve any of them. Ambitious, coordinated, and holistic strategies are desperately needed.

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