

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



November 23, 2017

## Children Undergo Immeasurable Suffering

Children are the vulnerable layer of a society and suffer in one way or another around the world. They are susceptible to hardships, domestic violence, and militancy. Despite their physical weakness, children carry out backbreaking chores. Their sufferings are turned a blind eye and will be viewed only on Children's Day.

A great number of children are forced to support their families financially rather than going to school. They are left with a burden of responsibility from their childhood. To get a morsel of bread, children struggle from dawn to dusk in hot summers and cold winters. In some war-torn countries, children are recruited by militants. They succumb to the demands of militants to alleviate their families' financial pressures. They are most likely to be engaged in moral corruption simply for earning bread and butter for their mothers and siblings.

To view the issue from another lens, scores of children lose their lives in terrorist attacks around the world. They are not only recruited by militants but also targeted by them, mainly in war-torn countries including Afghanistan. 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. Moreover, UNICEF recorded that more than 850 children were recruited to fight in the conflict.

Similarly, the graph of children's casualties is also high in Afghanistan and they are killed in suicide bombings and terrorist attacks in public places, streets, etc. That is to say, the street vendors, mainly children, are not safe to terrorist attacks. In a suicide bombing, you will see children lied in blood with their plastics, which were on sale, in their hands. This is the story of some Afghan children.

If you walk in Kabul city, you will see countless of children who implore you to buy a piece of plastic or hand them a penny. Their shabby clothes and old slippers in cold weather bespeak of their profound misery. Children, who are supposed to go to school with piece of mind, wander on streets for a morsel of bread. They do not touch peace or tranquility and have no idea of comfortability. In short, a large number of Afghan children are the breadwinners of their families and have to endeavor from early mornings to late nights. Subsequently, they remain illiterate and will be engaged in physical labor for the whole of their life.

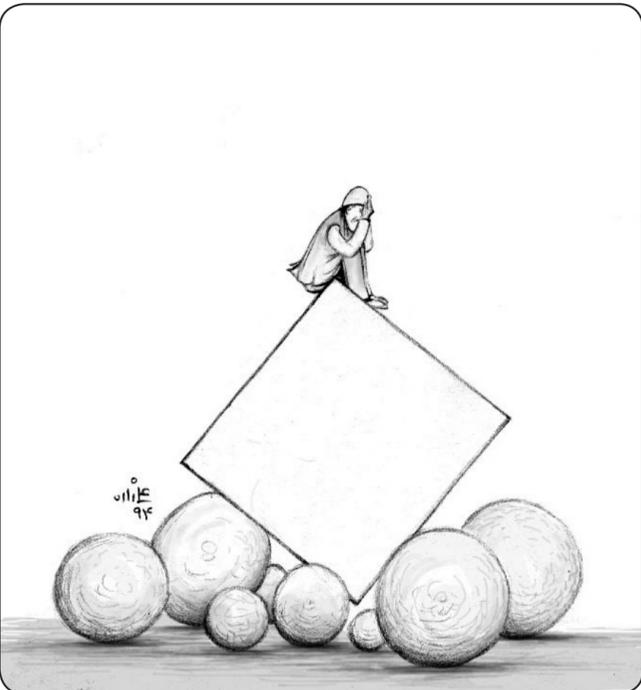
"Millions of girls and boys like you are in danger, and we are letting them down. They are fleeing deadly conflicts. They are going hungry, or without the medicine they need. They are separated from their parents, or making long, dangerous journeys to safety. They are displaced and living in refugee camps far from home," UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres is cited as saying. "All this is completely unacceptable. As a global community, we cannot continue failing all the children". He added that every child has a right to a safe, healthy, peaceful childhood and to develop to their full potential.

There is no doubt that children have a set of rights, similar to many others, that must be respected. They are not supposed to carry out backbreaking labors. Getting education is one of the fundamental rights of children and should be observed by all families. Meanwhile, recruiting children in war and militancy is against national and international laws. Their poverty or lack of mental maturity for deciding the right and wrong must not be exploited. Currently, a number of children study in religious seminaries both in Afghanistan and Pakistan. They go to learn knowledge, but they are brainwashed by their radical teachers and sent to war. So, this is a gross violation of children's rights.

Domestic violence is one of the issues prevailing in society. Some children are punished severely by their parents due to making a mistake, which is common of children. They are degraded within the families and their needs are ignored. These are violation of their rights which will result in horrible consequences. In short, punishing children or degrading them will be counterproductive.

The world will have to respect the rights of children. If children are simply forced to alleviate financial constraints through laboring, recruited by militants, killed in attacks, etc. their tragedy will never come to an end. So, the world must adopt a strategy to alleviate their sufferings.

Afghan Constitution forbids forced labor in article 49 as it says, "Forced labor on children shall not be allowed." Constitutionally, Afghan government is supposed to adopt necessary measures to attain the physical and spiritual health of the family, especially of the children. However, it is believed that children are forgotten by the state and no palpable change has been taken in this regard.



## The Echo of Zahra's Suicide

By Mohammad Hedayat

The news about Zahra's suicide went viral and triggered public conjecture, which was stereotypical. There were words about the refusal of her monograph for six times, lack of patience about writing her monograph, poverty, and probability of illegal demands by her lecturer.

Whatever the reason was, she killed herself. After five years of pain and sufferings, she has lied inside a coffin. She put an end to verbal wounds inflicted on her and witnessing her parents' misery.

Now the question is that why Zahra killed herself? The answer will be very hard unless you were the student of Kabul University or know what is going on inside the university. Zahra chose committing suicide which is not easy to condemn. The death of Zahra Khawari, who was from a remote and poor area, has triggered questions. Perhaps one will simply ponder over the answers. The question will be answered with the passage of time.

**Who was Zahra?**

Zahra Khawari was born in a poor family in Ghochan area of Shahristan district, Daikundi province. Similar to many girls, she struggled hard to enter university. She was majored in veterinary field in Kabul University and completed the four-year course with indescribable sufferings. She wished to alleviate the suffering of her father, who was a farmer. But she took all her wishes to the grave with herself.

One of her classmates says that after completing four years of her university, Zahra's monograph was approved with the title of the Effect of Feeding Straw and Vegetable on the Growth of Sheep in Daikundi Province. Her monograph was refused despite her struggle in this respect. To Zahra's unmitigated chagrin, her next monograph which was entitled Feeding Chickens were also refused. To research in this regard, Zahra was feeding 30 chickens from their birth up to fifty days inside a container in campus under four categories.

She fed the first and second categories by the food prepared by herself and the third and fourth categories fed by food prepared by credible companies. She compared and weighed the chickens and charted them every day. But the chart was favored neither by her lecturer nor by his obsolete books.

It is worth saying that the chart was in accordance with standard list of feeding chickens. So, the frequent refusal of her monograph led to her suicide.

One of Zahra's relatives, who has a drugstore, says that Zahra brought sick chickens for examination for several times and prepared drug for them. She had keen interest in her education and activities.

**Who is Zahra's lecturer Mr. Tanin?**

Whatever the reason was behind Zahra's death, now all

the attention is focused on her lecturer who is said to refuse her monograph for several times. It is said that he approved Zahra's first monograph on which she struggled for one semester, but when she was supposed to defend her monograph, it was refused by her lecturer named Tanin. Zahra adopted another subject.

Despite her struggles in this regard, it was again refused by her lecturer. There is no exact information about Mr. Tanin. Based on his record, he is from Logar and authored many academic books.

He has PH.D and called "Pohand" (a high academic degree in Afghanistan). Since there are three members of Tanin's family teaching in a single department, it triggers suspicion. However, he is not described with any specific quality by Zahra's classmates. One of Zahra's roommates says that university lecturers are mostly bad-tempered and Mr. Tanin is not an exception.

When I called Mr. Tanin to ask about the issue, he was under the investigation of police and could not opine. But he emphasized that he would express his idea as soon as he is released.

Zahra's classmates express their bitter memories with Mr. Tanin. Their hearts are filled with pain. One of her classmates said that head of her department, Mr. Tanin's brother, deprived her of lesson in her fourth year and no one listens to her petition. She adds that she passed four years of her lifetime in veterinary field, but all four years of her struggles and sufferings were in vain. She was expelled from university and was not let to take part in the final exam or gain her bachelor degree.

**The echo of Zahra's suicide**

Suicide has been debated hotly in many years back and no one has reached a definite result. Suicide existed in primitive societies and it was viewed from religious perspective. The first one who explored suicide in academic way was Emile Durkheim. According to him, social issues were the main reasons behind suicide. His theory will be applicable in Zahra's death only to some extent. But her death will be evaded into oblivion as usual. She conveys a clearer message from university.

Her death resounded widely and many ideas are expressed in social media, none of which are believed to be the reason behind her death.

The fact is that Kabul University is obsolete and will not meet the needs of youths or quench their educational thirst. Many voices were raised from inside university, but none of them were listened. Perhaps, it was not an individual who motivated Zahra in committing suicide but the entire structure and environment in university might have been the reason.

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## Casualties Lead to Despair

By Hujjatullah Zia

Despite the democratic system, the issue of terrorism has filled the air with a sense of disappointment. The high graph of soldiers' casualties has hardened the process of recruitment for Afghan government. In the current years, the Taliban carried out large-scale attacks that resulted in great fatalities of Afghan soldiers. In such a case, families will hardly ever let their members join the army.

The insurgents have made inroads in eastern and northern Afghanistan - long the most important recruiting grounds for the army - they are directly threatening the military's ability to replenish its dwindling ranks. A report says that the Taliban pressure is taking a serious toll, with officials in some provinces reporting recruitment down by as much as 50 percent.

Taliban pressure includes fines on families of soldiers, physical punishment of soldiers who return home, and even confiscation of land and homes. "In the first six months of this year, we recruited 13,000 personnel, but we are planning to recruit 25,000 in the second six months. We do face challenges in recruiting enough personnel, I cannot hide that," Gen. Mohammed Ibrahim, the commander of the Afghan Army's national recruitment center, is cited as saying. He adds that the force had recruited 37,000 men last year, and 42,000 in 2015.

In one recent massacre in Kandahar Province, the Taliban nearly wiped out an entire army unit of 60 men. In April, insurgents drove into the army's headquarters in the northern province of Balkh and killed at least 140 soldiers in a rampage that lasted several hours.

In a March attack claimed by the Islamic State, militants barged into the military's main hospital in Kabul, slaughtering dozens of soldiers who were being treated there. The drop in recruitment is a major blow to a force that is suffering from drastic losses of men and territory. Some of the units struggled so much, losing men and equipment, that they had to be entirely rebuilt.

The Global Terrorism Index (GTI) report states that the Taliban had evolved and focused more on taking control of territory by using traditional conflict tactics.

A global study by the Institute for Peace and Economics has ranked Afghanistan the 2nd worst country, out of 163, in terms of terrorism in the world. The GTI put Iraq at number one and Afghanistan at number two, followed by Nigeria, Syria, Pakistan and Yemen - in that order.

Based on the report, Afghanistan had the second highest number of deaths from terrorism in 2016. However this

was 14 percent lower than the previous year, in part due to reduced terrorist activity by the Taliban.

While this reduction provides some hope, the number of deaths recorded in 2016 was the second highest recorded from terrorism incidents in Afghanistan since the ousting of the Taliban regime in 2001. The Taliban are said to be responsible for 94 percent of attacks by known groups in Afghanistan in 2016.

The Taliban's cruel practices are no more a mystery and thousands of combatants and non-combatants are killed or amputated in terrorist attacks. The Taliban carry out the bulk of attacks in Afghanistan. Their indiscriminate attacks in public places result in civilian casualties. However, regarding soldiers, they show no iota of mercy and violate the International Humanitarian Law (IHL) through killing torturing and killing detainees and the wounded soldiers.

The self-proclaimed Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) also kill civilians and soldiers indiscriminately. This group fills the air with fear through harsh practices. Within the two past years, the ISIL claimed the responsibility of a large number of attacks. The ISIL fighters mostly targeted ethnic minorities and civilians on the ground of their race and religion. Hence, this group is also responsible for many fatalities.

It is highly shocking to see that Afghanistan had the second highest number of deaths in 2016 and it has been ranked the second worst country in terms of terrorism. The bloody incidents and high graph of civilian and soldiers' casualties prove this fact. People suffer severely. Almost no day goes without killing - the tragedy which continues unabated.

If Afghan government does not intensify its defensive attacks, the casualties will not stop. It has been proved that the Taliban will never cease their attacks since they did not succumb to the persistent calls of Afghan government for peace talks. Their formidable decision in continuing war and violence originate from their dogmatic beliefs and radical ideology, which justify their attacks against both soldiers and civilians.

To mitigate the challenges of recruitment and allay the public worry, Afghan soldiers and foreign troops need to intensify their attacks against the Taliban and eradicate their hideouts. Moreover, reinforcing intelligence is believed to foil many attacks and suicide bombings, which will be a strong blow to the militant fighters.

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