

When skin colour makes difference

Human Rights
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MUHAMMAD RAMZAN says that the UNO has a greater role to play internationally in the maintenance of human rights in the world

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), adopted by the UN on December 10, 1948, is considered as a great achievement for protecting human rights. The International Covenant on civil and political rights and the optional protocol came into force on March 23, 1979. This covenant included all the civil and political rights that were proclaimed in the UDHR. It also included the right of people of self-determination and the right of minorities - to live according to their own culture and practise their own religion. Article 2 of the Covenant, defining the obligations of the states that have signed this covenant, calls upon them to ensure all the rights stipulated therein, to all individuals "without discretion" of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political, national or social background, origin, property, birth or status etc.

The charter of the UN Human Rights begins by reaffirming "faith in fundamental human rights", in the human dignity, equality of rights of men and women and of all nations. Naturally and logically, the objectives of the UN have invariably been to foster friendly relations among nations, states and people based on mutual respect, equality of rights, co-existence and freedom of people to achieve international cohesion and cooperation so as to encourage and promote respect for human rights.

Though theoretical safeguards have been provided, hegemonic powers and colonial states have been stubbornly violating rights under different dubious pretexts. The only superpower while taking an undue shelter of September 11, is all-out to cause wide-spread devastation especially Muslim States. In doing so it pays no heed to the international human rights declarations and agreements including the Geneva conventions which guarantee the rights of civilians during wars and those of POWs. Human rights organisations like Amnesty International and Asia Watch have repeatedly and openly criticised the US uncivilised and gravely unethical conduct in dealing with the Taliban kept as prisoners of war at Guantanamo Bay in Cuba. Like wild animals in cages, leaving aside all human and humane considerations.

Even the Human Rights Commission, which is one of the UN's central policy organisations, whose activities are mostly investigative evaluative, advisory and recommendatory, seems to be helpless to have the situation rectified by recommending effective measures to redress the grievances of these helpless people. Similarly, India has converted the Indian occupied Kashmir into an Army camp and the poor Kashmiri's are virtually made hostages. They are assassinated, subjected to inexplicable tortures, their women are gang raped, their houses are razed to the ground and they are deprived of all civil, moral legal and political rights - because they are struggling for the right of self determination. These Kashmiris, are viciously and falsely labelled as intruders and infiltrates. In their struggle for freedom over 80,000 Kashmiris have sacrificed



their lives. The attitude of the US in combating terrorism globally without looking into and rooting out the causes of terrorism, has emboldened certain hegemonies, biased and racial states to harass, subjugate and suppress the armless, helpless and weak people, communities and minorities. Soviet Russia, India and Israel are playing hell with the poor Chechnyans, Kashmiris and Palestinians. This is in spite of the fact that resolutions for self determination of these people had been passed in the UN General Assembly long ago. On 4th December the top Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erakat lashed out rightly at the US vote against a UN General Assembly resolution condemning Israel. According to him the US has decided to directly support Israel state terror, war crimes, forcible occupations and settlements at the expense of justice and human rights.

Such bad precedents being set by the world's superpower have given impetus to other hostile and racial states to join hands in committing more and more hostilities unabated in their areas of influence, as India is doing with Kashmiris in occupied Kashmir and with minorities especially Muslims in Gujarat and other parts of India, and similarly, Soviet Russia and India have recently entered into an agreement, which besides other covenants, includes a clause allowing collaboration of both the states in combating terrorism. That is obviously meant to snub and curb the people fighting for their right of self determination and basic human right of freedom, in Kashmir and Chechnya.

The general human rights situation in India is very bleak and gruesome. An over-whelming number of low caste Hindus, who are called "untouchables" by the high castes Hindus, are treated with great contempt and indecency. They are deprived of human dignity, social status and civil rights. Although India claims itself as the biggest democracy and secular state, it behaves like a true fascist and racial state, wherein rights of minorities and the Hindus belonging to lower class, are gravely violated and

deserted at the hands of Hindu extremists, civil administration and army. The affected areas and horrendously inflicted people are not allowed to be visited by international human rights activists and organisations so that the world may remain in the dark with regard to the actual human rights position in the country.

Human rights belong to the entire humanity. The conventional human rights concepts concern and deal with personal rights and 'rights of property. While the former concerns the right of life and freedom, the latter pertains to possession and ownership. Now even the right of environment has also been recognised internationally. Time has come when like other human rights, the right of environment will become a basic human right. All the states will be responsible generally and ordinarily but the industrialised states, especially the US will be responsible for the environmental protection and ecological safety, as they are more responsible for the world's pollution than the developing countries. However, the US which is the world's biggest pollution is not showing a sense of responsibility to take requisite measures to bring down environmental pollution, minimise greenhouse gases emissions and ported the ozone layer, which is depleting because of criminally careless behaviour of the world's biggest polluters, US and the industrialised states.

While it is incumbent upon each and every government to safeguard human rights of its people, the government of Pakistan must also ensure to make up deficiencies in this respect wherever needed. Briefly, the over-all gap between the rich and the poor needs to be plugged by adopting effective poverty alleviation programmes. There are deficiencies in jirga system and other informed forums for restoring justice in the tribal areas of NWFP, Balochistan and the remote areas of Punjab and Sindh. This must be replaced by more judicious and fool-proof system.

It has been noticed with great concern that because quality education has become expensive, educational facilities are being availed by the moneyed class only and the poor are deprived of the high tech education and rewarding disciplines. The government is patronising colleges and universities to be run on commercial basis. This is giving a great setback to the teachers and the students both. The former's security of service and other benefits are staked, while the latter's lack of affordability is a great handicap to receive education at such a high cost. A more reasonable approach of mind is needed to solve this problem. The recent laying of some of the government colleges and universities teachers would not serve any useful purpose in improving the literacy rate and upgrading its quality.

The agriculturists and rural population are suffering from many problems, which deserve special consideration. Medical care, educational facilities, link roads, marketing facilities and bank loans are some of their important concerns, which must be taken care of on priority basis.

The condition of women's rights in Pakistan deserves special attention. "Karo-Kari" in Sindh and honour killings of women in he country are surely a stigma on our maintenance of human rights. These crimes and evil practices must be controlled. To cut short the story, the United Nations organisation has much greater role to play internationally in the maintenance of human rights in the world. It must ensure that the more powerful states do not run over the weak and helpless. It should see that the hegemonic powers do not commit human rights violations under the garb of fighting terrorism. The respective governments should take care of human rights situation in their respective countries for easing out the problems of their people, irrespective of their colour, creed, caste, race and religion.