**Victims of terrorism**

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Tuesday, Sep 07, 2021

Our country plunged into deep sorrow and gloom on December 16, 2014 when terrorists attacked Army Public School in Peshawar and killed hundreds of children and members of the school’s staff. What a horrific scene it was. Even though Pakistan had been a victim of aggression since its inception, it became the worst affected country after the world reshaped post-9/11 attacks.

There is, however, some solace in the fact that the UN has declared August 21st as the ‘International Day of Remembrance of and Tribute to the Victims of Terrorism’ to honour and support the survivors of terrorism and to protect their human rights and fundamental freedoms. The UN is seeking to implement the global counterterrorism strategy by aiding victims and mobilising the international community, but the prime responsibility to help victims of terrorism and advocate their rights solely rests with an individual country.

The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 and the US-Afghan war in the 2000s made us pay the price for something we had no part in. Also, criminal and nationalist elements that were produced by certain political, religious, and ethnic groups, elites, and other vested parties in the country created a highly volatile situation here. Consequently, such insecurities forced the police and civil and armed forces to carry out large-scale operations against these elements.

In Pakistan, more than 70,000 civilians and a considerable number of defence and police personnel were martyred during the ‘war on terror’. These fatalities were usually the result of terrorist activities like suicide bombing, target killings, kidnapping and airstrikes. Not only men, but women officials have also suffered in the hands of terrorist activities and rendered their lives in the line of duty. They are also our ‘unsung heroes’ whose names barely make it to the news.

There is no substitute for the lives lost. However, frontline casualties are visible to everyone, but the suffering faced by the families of martyrs remains hidden. The worst victims of terrorism are the inhabitants of war-torn regions who pay the price for unluckily being at the wrong place at the wrong time and who have got nothing to do with the crusade. These lives should not go in vain and be acknowledged frequently by the state which can comfort their families and commence incentives for a violence-free society.

As a police officer, coming across victims of various crimes, accidents and terrorism is agonising and traumatic. Strangely, violence is embedded in humans; it is not going anywhere despite all religious aphorism, progressive doctrines, humanitarian laws and fear of punishment. Today, terrorist activities that are viewed by perpetrators as patriotic, ideological, and virtuous acts have injured and harmed thousands of innocent people every year. Seeing people dead – or dying – is horrifying.

It is appropriate that our nation, which is a frontline victim of terrorist aftershocks, remembers and empathises with these unfortunate citizens who became victims of terrorism. We should reiterate that the dehumanisation of victims – the angry survivors – contributes towards situations conducive to promoting terrorism. Our resolve should be to reaffirm our ongoing endeavours to combat terrorism, achievable only through the promotion and protection of human rights and rule of law at the national level.

It is time we established a national database of victims to help them recover from and cope with their trauma through multi-pronged care, including physical, psychological, social, and financial, facilitating them to heal and live with dignity. Also, acknowledgment of victims/survivors on a national level is a necessary step. The state should allocate enough resources and introduce capacity-building initiatives to fulfil the essential needs that are required to rehabilitate and integrate victims back into society. Building the capacity of law-enforcement personnel and various stakeholders, establishing networks, and supporting civil society organisations which work chiefly for victims of terrorism is also crucial. Our reassurances to victims should be beyond figurative camaraderie and must emphasize on robust engagement to advance their rights, particularly the needs of women, children and those affected by sexual and gender-based violence committed by terrorists.

This year, the fourth UN commemoration of the International Day of Remembrance of and Tribute to the Victims of Terrorism took place across the world. Pakistan should ramp up its efforts to listen to the formidable voices of victims of terrorist attacks and experience the importance of relationships. Making a difference in someone life should not be a choice. Honouring the victims of terrorism and doing more to ease them is necessary to help them rebuild and rectify their lives.

The roots of terrorism need to be wiped out as they are a big hurdle in bringing ‘socio-economic prosperity, political balance, and geostrategic sustainability’ in the country. We need to work towards a holistic approach for pluralistic culture, tolerance, and peaceful behaviour which can be catalysed simply through mass literacy and education. As one of Nelson Mandela’s timeless quotes goes, “Great anger and violence can never build a nation”.

Victims are neither responsible nor accountable for what they go through. It’s our obligation to ensure that they receive our sympathy, and the best way forward is to take actions against all delinquent groups/people and uphold rule of law. The policies and tactics of expediency and part-time gains should be cast away. We should stop creating Frankenstein’s monsters and must take actions against them in a timely manner. Terrorism is a man-made affliction; it is tremendously painful with trauma being felt by just those who have been direct victims. However, we shouldn’t forget that anyone of us could be next.

One who dies leaves behind sorrow, but those who are fortunate to survive can have a life full of pain, dependency and one of obscurity. In some moments, they wish they would rather die than live such a life. Relentless recognition, endless care, and timely monetary compensation to the victims of terrorism and crimes should be the state order and our resolution for the International Day of Remembrance of and Tribute to the Victims of Terrorism. We should do everything we can to address the root cause of terrorism to alleviate the suffering of the people in future.

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