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## Kidnapping of Innocent Civilians Continues

June 2, 2016

Afghan civilians have been suffering from the negative impacts of growing terrorism in the country to a large extent. They are victimized during the clashes and become the target of suicide and road-side bombings that are carried out by Taliban. The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) announced last month that during the first quarter of 2016, 600 civilians were killed and 1,343 were wounded, representing 1,943 victims (610 children) or 2 percent more than in the first quarter of 2015.

On many occasions civilians are compelled to leave their houses and move to other places where they search security and tranquility but mostly face further misery. And, when Taliban insurgents want to show their strength, they target the civilians by kidnapping them and even killing them mercilessly.

In one of such acts, Taliban stopped a number of buses along the Kunduz-Baghlan highway, in Arzaq Angor Bagh locality in the early hours of Tuesday morning and kidnapped over 200 passengers. Later, most of the kidnapped were released but 40 were held by Taliban, out of whom, 13 were killed and the rest released except 10. These 10 passengers are still believed to be kept by Taliban. There are worries that they may be harmed by them, as well. According to the statements of the concerned officials a military operation to rescue the 10 passengers is still ongoing. According to police, 190 hostages have been freed in the past 24 hours. Acting police chief for Kunduz, Mohammad Massoum Hashimi said in a statement, “We are doing everything possible to free the [remaining] passengers and recently three kidnappers

were arrested, three of them killed and investigations are underway to find the remaining passengers.”

The relatives of those who are still under the control of Taliban are really worried. Moreover, the people who travel through the highway have also showed their concerns regarding the kidnapping. They emphatically criticize the loose control of the government on the highway, where Taliban were able to create their own check-post and kidnapped such a large number of people with such convenience. They fear that such activities will be continued by the culprits if strong measures are not taken against them.

Last year as well seven innocent civilians belonging to Zabul province were kidnapped on a highway and later killed brutally, which included the 9-year old girl Shukria, whose throat was slashed by the kidnappers.

This act of Taliban is really cowardly; however, they keep on repeating it on the main highways throughout the country to show their strength. As the government authorities are not able to keep consistent look over the long routes, the Taliban insurgents create their own check-posts, stop the vehicles, search the passengers and even loot them on various occasions. They mostly target the ones whom they believe to be working for the government, Afghan and international forces or the international organizations.

With such a situation prevailing, it is really tragic to find the government authorities unconcerned. They mostly claim that they make efforts to ensure the security of the civilians but different incidents, every now and then, show that they either do not have the capability to do so or they lack the motivation. Their efforts are mostly observed after the incidents take place and the poor civilians are killed. Even last time the government ensured of the safety of the kidnappers but their assurance bore no fruit.

Afghan president Ashraf Ghani has condemned the kidnapping of the civilians by Taliban and on Wednesday June 01, 2016 he blasted the new Taliban leadership for their inhuman act. He said that the newly-appointed Taliban leader Mullah Haibatullah in deed had no knowledge of religion. His lack of religious knowledge was disturbingly highlighted by the kidnapping and killing of innocent people. A statement from the Presidential Palace quoted Ghani as saying that Afghan security forces had been authorized to use all resources at their disposal to protect the people and defend the motherland.

President Ghani also directed the Ministry of Interior (MoI) and transport officials to work together to improve the security of highways across the country. He asked Ulema and civil society to raise their voice against the abduction and killing of innocent people. It is, however, to be seen whether these condemnations and directions would have any tangible result. Earlier as well promises were made to protect the civilians on the main highways but they ended up in smoke. People want to see tangible results and they can only be satisfied of the performance of the relevant authorities if they find changes in their circumstances and see their lives secured and free from different sorts of threats. They also deserve that because it is a part of their basic rights and the government has the responsibility to fulfill those rights.