

COP21

What's next for Bangladesh?



As global leaders reached an agreement at the conclusion of COP21, international cooperation for addressing climate change has solidified at

a crucial moment in time. Although the negotiations were watched with trepidation by many who feared that the countries would not be able to come to an agreement, the 21st Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change has delivered a landmark accord. With the endorsement of 196 countries, the Paris Agreement becomes the first universal climate deal and a crucial instrument to limit and mitigate the negative impacts of climate change.

One of the defining challenges of our time, climate change is increasingly felt by countries and communities the world over. The effects of climate change are already hitting those most vulnerable. In Bangladesh, climate shocks and stresses are already damaging assets, undermining livelihoods, and displacing people from their homes. The Agreement reached in Paris marks a turning point on how the world will address climate change.

The Agreement sets the world on a pathway toward limiting temperature rise to less than 2 degrees, with an eye on the benefits of achieving the goal of 1.5. The Paris Agreement is also an ambitious, dynamic, and universal agreement. It covers all countries -



Facing rising seas, Bangladesh confronts the worst consequences of climate change.

PHOTO: STAR

developed and developing - and all emissions, and is designed to last. The Paris Agreement sends a message to the world that countries are serious about addressing climate change. Where the Kyoto Protocol only required certain countries to cut emissions, the Paris Agreement requires all countries to take action, while recognising their differing situations and circumstances. Responsible for taking action on both mitigation and adaptation, countries have officially submitted their own nationally determined climate action plans,

including cutting emissions. They now have an obligation to implement these plans, and if they do, it will bend the curve downward in the projected global temperature rise. The individual contributions of states all over the world will be crucial to highly exposed countries like Bangladesh, where climate change effects, like rising sea levels and changing cyclone patterns, are already felt.

The Agreement not only formalises the process of developing national plans for addressing climate change, it provides a binding requirement to

assess and review progress on these plans at least every five years. This mechanism will require countries to continuously upgrade their commitments and ensure that there will be no backtracking. The Agreement will be a key instrument for mobilising global partnerships. To this end, developing countries have assumed increasing responsibility to address climate change in line with their capabilities, while developed countries have agreed to lead in scaling up technology support and capacity building and mobilising finance. This

includes the continuation of the existing \$100 billion per year flow of funds for climate finance beyond 2020, with the intention of improving it further by 2025. For Bangladesh, which is already mobilising access to funds from the Green Climate fund to build the resilience of communities along the coasts and in other climatic hotspots, this is good news indeed.

Bangladesh has already intensified its efforts to integrate the Sustainable Development goals into its seventh five year plan, with Goal 13 - to take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts - as a key national concern. The agreement reached this week calls for the support of the UN agencies to countries in implementation. In line with this, the UN will continue to support the Government of Bangladesh with high quality policy advice and programme support. The Paris Agreement confirms the necessity for Bangladesh to both take action to adapt to keep lives and livelihoods safe in a changing climate, and to adopt a low-emission economy to continue growing as a prosperous country.

Now is the time for markets to invest in the low-emission economy and to move away from fossil fuels in order to minimise the loss and damage from climate change. The Paris Agreement represents a unique opportunity for Bangladesh and the rest of the world to move towards a global transformation that will help to safeguard our planet for generations to come.

The writer is the UN Resident Coordinator in Bangladesh.

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A harsh reality for Muslim-Americans

LAVINA AMBREEN AHMED

WHEN I first heard about the San Bernardino, California shootings that happened on December 2, I hoped that the gunmen didn't turn out to be Muslims. But the perpetrators were indeed, a Muslim couple. They opened fire at a holiday party that left 14 people dead and 21 wounded. The reason I was hoping that the perpetrators of such a horrific crime didn't turn out to be Muslims was because I know very well, the aftermath of these barbaric acts of violence is going to lead to a scary new reality for Muslim-Americans. A group that often feels socially alienated and live under the suspicion of being potential terrorist threats to their communities and country.

The backlash against Muslims had already started following the Paris attacks that killed 130 people. Initially there wasn't adequate coverage in the mainstream media, but many personal accounts were posted on social media and blogs to understand that Muslims were being stigmatized, vilified and attacked by their fellow Americans after the carnage in the French capital. Since the San Bernardino incident happened so soon after the Paris mass shootings; when emotions were still fragile, it made anti-Muslim sentiments escalate to an all time high.

This animosity towards Muslims has been fueled further by the inflammatory comments spewed nonstop by the Republican US presidential candidates, especially the billionaire business magnate Donald Trump. Among the series of racist rhetoric he made against Muslims, his most controversial message so far is to block the entry of all Muslims into the US. Preposterous as it sounds, the loudmouthed presidential candidate does have a lot of supporters. In fact, he is using the terrorist attacks to his full political advantage, to feed the xenophobic frenzy in the country and win over the ill-informed voters who have found an outlet to vent their anger towards Islam and all Muslims. Gone is the need to hide behind politically correct behaviour, Trump's vitriolic speech encouraged a certain group of Americans to abandon all pretences of tolerance and turn against Muslims with a kind of hatred and bigotry not previously displayed. These days major newspapers are regularly publishing reports on Muslims living in fear amid a surge in Islamophobia. Muslims are speaking out about how insecure they feel in their own country. But there are cases of school



Protesters in New York demonstrate against Donald Trump's anti-Muslim stance.

PHOTO: GUARDIAN

children being bullied and attacked, Muslim owned stores and mosques being vandalised that are not even reported in the media because Muslims don't want to draw attention to themselves and be more susceptible to hate crimes.

At a recent work meeting, I was asked by a white Christian American man what "we" are going to do about global Islamic terrorism. The question annoyed me. But it didn't surprise me. Muslims are expected to openly and repeatedly condemn all barbaric acts committed by Islamic militant organisations. But why am I expected to bear the burden of defending my faith? If I don't immediately condemn such attacks do people automatically assume I'm a sympathiser/supporter of Jihadi groups? Or do they feel I should be ashamed of my faith? When Dylann Roof, the white Christian gunman killed nine African-Americans in a South Carolina church to start a race war, did we think all white Christians needed to distance themselves from the likes of Dylann Roof and condemn his act of violence? When

Robert Dear, a white orthodox Christian man killed three people in a Planned Parenthood centre in Colorado because he was against abortion, did we want the white Christian folks to condemn his crime? No we didn't. We do not expect all Christians to condemn domestic terror attacks committed by a few fanatical Christians in America. So I get upset when I am expected to apologise for being a Muslim whenever some crazy, radicalised person commits a terrorist act in the name of Islam.

American-Muslim leader Dalia Mogahed, the Director of Research at the Institute of Social Policy and Understanding in Washington, DC thinks this attitude is very unfair. In a recent interview on NBC, Mogahed said it is wrong to ask Muslims to condemn terrorism. She feels we should instead ask this question: "is it justified to demand that Muslims condemn terrorism?" Mogahed explains, that condoning the killing of civilians is about the most monstrous thing one can do. And to be suspected of doing something so monstrous, simply because of one's faith, seems very unfair. She argues that according to FBI, most domestic

terrorist attacks are committed by white, male Christians." But we do not suspect other people who share their faith and ethnicity of condoning them. We assume that these things outrage them just as much as they do anyone else. And we have to afford that same assumption of innocence to Muslims."

Moreover, moderate Muslims have more reasons to detest a terrorist organisation like ISIS/Daesh whatever you call them; simply because the members and followers of the organisation kill more Muslims than non-Muslims in the Arab world and elsewhere. A fact that is reported in the media but often goes unnoticed. These groups are ready to hack to death anyone who dares to protest their extreme ideology. And because of these terrorist groups, a population of 1.6 billion Muslims worldwide, representing diverse cultures and countries are being maligned.

In these troubled times, Muslims are probably the "least liked" minority group in America. At least that's the impression I get when I read the comment section of any newspaper article. I do agree that Muslims have some responsibility to combat global Islamic terrorism. But the responsibility is not simply to condemn terrorist acts and organise "not in our name" campaigns which honestly do not serve much purpose other than allowing us to vent our outrage. From a layperson's perspective, here are some basic suggestions. We should know the religious leaders in our community mosques and Islamic centres before we send our children to learn about Islam. We should make sure the instructors practice the correct understanding and interpretation of Islam and are authorities on the subject. We also need to better understand Islam ourselves, to grasp the true meaning behind the Arabic verses of the Quran. Once we have more knowledge, we can stop the misrepresentation of our faith if we see it happening. While I'm definitely concerned about the spread of radical Islam, I am equally concerned about the virulent anti-Muslim comments coming from people like Donald Trump. I feel it is also the responsibility of all conscientious Americans to denounce Trump's racist propaganda. It is the responsibility of not just Muslims, but also non-Muslims to combat hate and promote tolerance in today's multicultural society.

The writer is a freelance journalist living in the US.

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QUOTABLE Quote section featuring a portrait of Thomas Hobbes and the quote 'Curiosity is the lust of the mind.'

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH section with ACROSS and DOWN clues and a grid.

YESTERDAY'S ANSWER section with a crossword grid and solutions.

BEETLE BAILEY and BABY BLUES comic strips by Mort Walker and Kirkman & Scott.