

US: Slow Progress on Human Rights

High-Level Pronouncements Marred by Systemic Racism, Abuse of Asylum Seekers

The administration of President Joe Biden has made slow progress protecting human rights in the United States, Human Rights Watch said today in its World Report 2022.

"The Biden administration has made some big-picture pronouncements on key issues like racial and gender equity with little evidence so far that the words will translate into real impact for people whose rights have been systematically and historically ignored or trampled," said Nicole Austin-Hillery, US Program executive director at Human Rights Watch. "Black people in the United States still suffer from significant economic disparities stemming from systemic racism that have impacts across generations, and border policies have shredded the right to seek asylum while officials subject migrants to violent, abusive treatment."

In the 752-page World Report 2022, its 32nd edition, Human Rights Watch reviews human rights practices in nearly 100 countries. Executive Director Kenneth Roth challenges the conventional wisdom that autocracy is ascendent. In country after country, large numbers of people have recently taken to the streets, even at the risk of being arrested or shot, showing that the appeal of democracy remains strong. Meanwhile, autocrats are finding it more difficult to manipulate elections in their favor. Still, he says, democratic leaders must do a better job of meeting national and global challenges and of making sure that democracy delivers on its promised dividends.

In addition to executive branch

policies and actions to achieve racial and gender equity and protect LGBT people's rights, the US House Judiciary Committee voted to move H.R. 40, a bill to study the provision of reparations for slavery, to the full House for a vote for the first time in 32 years. But at the end of 2021, this landmark step toward reparations for the legacy of slavery

inequality remains high and has slightly increased in the United States, although poverty dropped largely due to increased government benefits. The wealth gap between Black people and white people persists.

The Biden administration has also kept in place the harmful Title 42 border policy, under which it expels asylum seekers

administration announced its commitment to "putting human rights at the center of US foreign policy" and to multilateralism. The US sought - and won - election to the UN Human Rights Council and rejoined the Paris Climate Accord. It rescinded the harmful Global Gag rule on funding for women's health care, reinstated funding to the UN

Population Fund, and reintroduced reporting on reproductive rights in the State Department's annual human rights report. But significant failures to protect and promote human rights include continued arms sales to governments violating international human rights and humanitarian law including the Philippines, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia, and failing to publicly condemn rights abuses by perceived strategic partners.

The Biden administration should end the abusive and illegal



has stalled in the House.

Among the rights failures in US domestic policy linked to systemic racism, despite some reductions in incarceration rates for Black people, they remain vastly overrepresented in jails and prisons. Black people are killed by police at a per capita rate that is three times the rate of white people. Black people still make up almost 42 percent of the current death row population despite being only 12.4 percent of the US population.

Black, Latinx, and Indigenous communities have been disproportionately harmed by Covid-19, which has deepened existing racial disparities in health care, housing, access to safe and affordable water, employment, education, and wealth accumulation, Human Rights Watch said. Economic

to unsafe conditions in Mexico or their home countries on specious public health grounds. In a particularly grievous example of the policy, US Border Patrol agents on horseback menaced Haitian border crossers in Del Rio, Texas in September, and the United States then summarily expelled thousands of Haitians to dangerous conditions in Haiti.

Human Rights Watch reported on other evidence of abusive treatment of asylum seekers by US border officials as described in Department of Homeland Security documents obtained after litigation. The documents catalog over 160 internal reports of physical and other abuses of asylum seekers as well as violations of their due process rights.

In its foreign policy, the

Title 42 policy and take concrete actions and robustly report on progress aligned with its policy pronouncements on racial and gender equity. State and local governments in the US should end abusive policing of Black people and other people of color and instead invest in communities in ways that address structural racism. State policies threatening the right to access to abortion and reproductive freedom should end in order to fully protect the rights of women and girls.

"The US government needs to take bold and concrete actions to protect the human rights of all people in the United States - Black and white, citizen and noncitizen alike, as well as to promote human rights globally through its foreign policy," Austin-Hillery said.

Afghanistan: Taliban Takeover Worsens Rights Crisis

Broad Threats to Women, Media; Aid Loss Heightens Famine Risk



The Taliban takeover of Afghanistan accelerated the country's human rights crisis and humanitarian catastrophe, Human Rights Watch said today in its World Report 2022.

After the Taliban took control of the country on August 15, 2021, they rolled back women's rights advances and media freedom - the foremost achievements of the post-2001 reconstruction effort. Many secondary schools for girls remained closed by the end of the year, and women were largely prohibited from working in jobs outside of teaching and health care.

"Afghans are caught between Taliban oppression and the spectre of starvation," said Patricia Gossman, associate Asia director at Human Rights Watch.

"Governments involved in Afghanistan over the past two decades should provide humanitarian aid and fund basic services, including health and education, while using their leverage to press for an end to Taliban rights violations."

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ic leaders must do a better job of meeting national and global challenges and of making sure that democracy delivers on its promised dividends.

The chaotic evacuation of thousands of Afghans left behind many who remained at risk of Taliban retaliation.

Taliban forces summarily executed many former members of the Afghan government's security forces. A freeze on Afghanistan's currency reserves and the loss of foreign aid accelerated an economic collapse, leaving millions of Afghans at risk of famine. The collapse of the country's health services meant that many Afghans faced a loss of most physical and mental health

along with the flight of many journalists abroad, nearly 70 percent of Afghan media outlets closed. Both the Taliban and the Islamic State of Khorasan Province (ISKP), the Afghan branch of the Islamic State (ISIS), carried out targeted killings of civilians including government employees, journalists, and religious leaders.

The number of civilians killed and injured in the conflict surged in the first six months of 2021 from attacks by both Taliban and Afghan government security forces, the latter primarily from airstrikes. The ISKP carried out numerous attacks on civilian facilities, including schools and mosques, killing hundreds, most of them members of Afghanistan's Hazara community. ISKP attacks continued after the Taliban takeover.

The prosecutor of the International Criminal Court sought authorization to resume his investigation but stated he would focus on alleged crimes by the Taliban and ISKP, and deprioritize those committed by the US military and CIA and former Afghan government security forces.

care.

In the weeks after the Taliban takeover, the new government announced a steady stream of policies and regulations that rolled back women's rights. Taliban authorities also imposed wide-ranging restrictions on the Afghan media, and

Germany: Conviction for State Torture in Syria

Former Syrian Intelligence Officer Found Guilty

Photos of Syrians who have been detained or disappeared set up by Families for Freedom, as part of a protest in front of the court in Koblenz, July 2, 2020. © 2020 Alexander Suttor (Berlin) - The conviction of a former Syrian intelligence officer for crimes against humanity by a German court is a ground-breaking step toward

German prosecutors accused Anwar R. of overseeing the torture of detainees in his capacity as head of the investigations section at the General Intelligence Directorate's al-Khatib detention facility in Damascus, also known as "Branch 251." January 5, 2022 Seeking Justice for Syria How an Alleged Syrian

Germany's lead, and actively bolster efforts to prosecute serious crimes in Syria." Human Rights Watch issued a question and answer document and a feature article on the trial and how it is situated in the larger context of the Syrian conflict on January 6, 2022. The trial against Anwar R. and Eyad A., who was found guilty of aiding and abetting crimes

experts in Syrian affairs. The testimony included well-documented accounts of torture and sexual abuse in Branch 251, descriptions of mass graves, and details of Syria's government policy to violently crack down on peaceful protesters in 2011. Several of the witnesses were able to identify Anwar R. in the courtroom. One of the major challenges of



justice for serious crimes in Syria, Human Rights Watch said today. The judgment is a meaningful moment for civilians who survived torture and sexual abuse in Syria's prisons. On January 13, 2022, a German court delivered its judgment in the trial of Anwar R., a former member of Syria's General Intelligence Directorate, one of the country's four main intelligence agencies commonly referred to collectively as the mukhabarat. Anwar R. is the most senior former Syrian government official to be convicted for serious crimes in Syria.

Intelligence Officer was Put on Trial in Germany The judges found Anwar R. guilty of committing crimes against humanity and sentenced him to life in prison. Following the verdict in the case, Anwar R. has one week to appeal. "More than 10 years after the violations were committed in Syria, the German court's verdict is a long-awaited beacon of hope that justice can and will in the end prevail," said Balkees Jarrah, associate international justice director at Human Rights Watch. "Other countries should follow

against humanity in February, began in April 2020 and was the first anywhere in the world for state-sponsored torture in Syria. Eyad A.'s appeal against his conviction remains pending. Syrian survivors, lawyers, and activists have been central to making this trial a reality, not only pressing for justice but laying the groundwork that makes justice possible, Human Rights Watch said. More than 80 witnesses testified, including former detainees, former Syrian government employees, German police investigators, and

this trial was witness protection. Several witnesses living in Germany and other European countries canceled their appearance in court out of fear for their lives and safety, or that of their families. Several witnesses, some who were also victims, testified that they feared a risk to themselves and their families given their role in the trial. German authorities should ensure that witnesses and victims are sufficiently informed about their rights to protective measures, including to appear anonymously before the court. The lack of translation has also



throughout the country. The Syrian government continues to detain and forcibly disappear thousands of people.

Many of those detained have died from torture and horrific detention conditions. Comprehensive justice for these and other unchecked atrocities in Syria has been elusive. Syria is not a member of the International Criminal Court.

And in 2014, Russia and China blocked efforts at the United Nations Security Council to give the court a mandate over serious crimes in Syria.

The trial of Anwar R. and Eyad A. is possible because Germany's laws recognize universal jurisdiction over certain of the most serious crimes under international law. That allows for the investigation

and prosecution of these crimes no matter where they were committed and regardless of the nationality of the suspects or victims. Universal jurisdiction remains one of the few viable pathways to justice for crimes committed in Syria. Germany has several elements in place to allow for the successful investigation and prosecution of grave crimes in Syria. It has above all a comprehensive legal framework, well-functioning specialized war crimes units, and previous experience with prosecuting such crimes. Countries with universal jurisdiction laws should establish specialized war crimes units within law enforcement and prosecution services, and ensure that such units are adequately resourced and staffed.

"Germany's trial against Anwar R. is a message to the Syrian authorities that no one is beyond the reach of justice," Jarrah said. "The Koblenz case has shown that with other avenues blocked, national courts can play a critical role in combating impunity."

marginalized survivor and community participation in the trial. To be meaningful, justice should not only be done, but be seen to be done. The trial took place in German. Non-accredited Arabic language journalists and people from affected communities who spoke Arabic were not given access to translation devices in the courtroom. Although some of the interested Arabic speakers

had a basic knowledge of German, it was not easy to follow the court sessions, especially due to the technical language used and the speed of the conversations in the courtroom.

Tens-of-thousands of people have been detained or disappeared in Syria since 2011, the vast majority by government forces using an extensive network of detention facilities

Have social strata hampered the entry of women in the digital world?

Women's role in this world is not based on a hypothesis, assumption, fantasy, unrealistic or unjustified grounds. It has been proved on many levels and a lot of spheres of life that women are exceptional human beings when it comes to performing a daunting role in the social, economic, religious, educational sectors of this community.

Since the beginning of life, women have faced numerous challenges concerning equality. Gender discrimination has been and is still a hot and solution demanding challenge in this society. But as the world is evolving and increasing in every domain, women are still encountering issues related to the gender divide. This study is about gender division in ICT. This study entails information, discussion, and possible suggestions about the digital divide between genders.

GSMA Development Fund

reported that only 28% of Indian women own mobile phones compared with 43% of men. This approach adversely affects the development of women's traits like receptiveness and self-confidence. A survey conducted by Intel revealed that one in five women in India and Egypt question the propriety of using the internet by women. They also smell reluctance on their families to let them have free use of it. Furthermore, the low literacy rate among middle-income societies and poor communities tends its residents to perceive technology as 'toys for boys' as they fail to appreciate the use of the internet among women. Therefore, despite the widespread availability of the internet in rural areas of India, only 2% of women use it. The examples, thus, demonstrate that gender bias regarding IT is firmly entrenched among the people.

The socially discriminatory environment has also been observed in IT education and employment. Even teachers and parents show a differential attitude while advising students in career planning. This trend is evident from the statistical data presented by the European Commission engaged in the ICT sector, which shows 9.6% of women students in tertiary education study ICT-related degrees, against 30.6% of men. Additionally, the lack of female role models in science and technology serves as a deterrent for women in pursuing their careers in ICT. In Germany, for example, only 20% of women are IT graduates. In Peshawar, on the occasion of the Digital Youth Summit, there were expressions of satisfaction, from the locals and lawmakers alike, at the availability of internet facilities at home. It was felt

that this access to the world from home would open up avenues of progress for women. Moreover, the uneven gender divide is also witnessed in the ICT employment sector, where women than men hold fewer jobs, and this discrepancy is on the rise.

In this era of modernization, many developed societies have been trying to teach such an attitude among their members that using the internet would cherish well-being in various spheres of life. However, despite forming a significant part of the world's population, women have been underrepresented in the ICT sector. They are deemed techno-phobic and, hence, late entrants in the realm of information technology (IT), which is thus generally male-dominant. However, this trend needs to be revised, and the women folks ought to be persuaded to make use of the internet in their lives.

While PTI is busy playing the blame game, Pakistan's gas crisis worsens

Ministers are more interested in salvaging the crumbling reputation of PTI than they are in the depleting gas reserves

Pakistan, and Karachi in particular, has been plagued by electricity and water shortages for decades now. The usage of generators or UPS' to deal with load-shedding, and a monthly

Broadcasting Fawad Chaudhry makes such a claim, one can't help but be alarmed. After all, this is a serving government official, seemingly with the authority to comment on such matters. Currently, Pakistan's

refuses to acknowledge its role in tackling this shortage. Hammad Azhar, who is currently serving as the Federal Minister for Energy, has stated that the reason the natural gas supply has fallen pitifully short for most households is a result of court orders - absolving himself, and his party, of any responsibility.

Similarly, Special Assistant to the Prime Minister Dr Shahbaz Gill has been busy arguing that gas shortages in Pakistan began in 2009, hence it is unfair to hold PTI to task for the ongoing crisis.

The aforementioned few of many examples make it blatantly evident that, like most issues this regime is confronted with, PTI members are far more interested in trying to salvage the slowly crumbling reputation of their party than they are in ensuring that the problems being faced by the citizens are eradicated.

Naturally, no one expects PTI to work miracles and remedy this problem overnight. But the formulation of a comprehensive, all-encompassing and long-term strategy which

The financial burden of continued inaction is already starting to wreak havoc for Pakistan's exchequer and, in turn, the common man. A failure to invest sufficiently in the development of local gas reserves to meet growing demand across the domestic and industrial sectors has meant that Pakistan now has to increasingly rely on imported liquefied natural gas (LNG) shipments. This is deeply concerning since global gas prices are continuously climbing at an alarming rate. As a result, in just a span of six years, Pakistan has become the ninth highest importer of LNG in the world. This trajectory is simply unsustainable from a financial vantage point and needs to be rectified otherwise the government runs the risk of being backed into a corner where it has no alternative but to pay exorbitant prices to import LNG simply because it failed to pay heed to the warning signs.

In light of this, it is fairly unsurprising that the masses have already taken to the streets in Karachi after Azhar proclaimed that imported LNG

would not be provided to the already deprived domestic consumers. The fact that PTI members like Sindh Governor Imran Ismail have already criticised Azhar's "nonchalant behaviour" speaks volumes about the lack of a coherent strategy from PTI to deal with this crisis. If, in

Ismail's words, Azhar is "not answering our calls", what hope can the average Pakistani citizen have of the country's energy minister paying heed to their concerns?



reliance on water tankers to supply clean water has now become commonplace in most households, ones that can afford such means. Basic commodities which the state is obligated to provide - given the taxes citizens pay - have now become luxuries for many.

As if these shortages weren't sufficient, the government has, for the past few years, been battling a growing inability to ensure adequate supply of gas across the country. This crisis is routinely exacerbated in the winter months when the demand for gas increases in Pakistan. Yet, despite the predictable rise in demand, the state always seems ill-prepared to deal with the surge.

While successive regimes continue to pass the blame amongst each other, the reality of the situation remains unchanged: years of neglect has meant that Pakistan will have "no gas" in the years to come. When Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf's (PTI) Federal Minister for Information and

existing gas reserves have continued to be depleted by nine percent every year for the last two years. If Pakistan remains on this trajectory, it appears this gas crisis is only set to worsen in the years to come.



However, what makes this situation direr is the haphazard manner in which the PTI regime has attempted to tackle this issue. The government cannot strategize a long-term solution for this problem if it sticks its head in the sand and

clearly outlines future policies aimed at tackling this issue head on is the need of the hour. As things stand, it might already be too late, but if PTI fails to chart a course through this crisis now, it's dooming the nation to a gas-less future.

How to make the internet a safer space for women

There are still more efforts needed for the successful implementation of the legislations protecting digital rights

Riding the new wave of digital activism, women and girls are using internet platforms to collectively mobilise and amplify their voices against social injustices. Examples include the recent #MeToo and #TimesUp movements against gender-based violence, which gained momentum globally. However, both the activists and the movements have been targeted by sexist cyber-attacks.

The internet cannot remain an open and democratic space unless all those who want to raise their voice on the platform can do so without fearing for their safety and well-being. This calls for a need to deliberate on how we can work together to make the internet a safe space for all, particularly for women and girls.

Silencing voices

Silencing movements and the voices of women is not a new phenomenon, but it has been amplified through digital platforms. Online harassment often translates into offline impacts and consequences, with much documented evidence in this regard. A few examples from Pakistan, which we are all well-familiar with include: defamation charges and strong online backlash faced by Meesha Shafi for calling out a male colleague for harassment, misinformation campaigns and false blasphemy allegations against the organisers of Pakistan's annual Aurat March, and the unfortunate murder of social media celebrity Qandeel Baloch.

Online violence and hate speech can have grave consequences on the meaningful online participation of women and girls. A recent consultation on online gender-based violence by the World Wide Web Foundation shows that online abuse can "silence, discredit, and censor women's voices

online" and may lead women to leave digital spaces altogether. The report states:

"If this issue is not addressed urgently, the web will remain as one more medium in which women, and particularly women from marginalised communities, are attacked and have their voices suppressed, instead of being the platform that amplifies gender equality and spearheads positive

(PECA), which offered the legal framework to "define various kinds of electronic crimes, mechanisms for investigation, prosecution and adjudication in relation to electronic crimes". The head of Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) cybercrime zone Sindh, Imran Riaz, recently took to social media, to remind users of the legal consequences under PECA of taking photos and

increasingly digital, it has become even more important to step up action for improving online safety so that everyone can participate equally in the opportunities made available by the internet.

Firstly, there is a need to create greater awareness and visibility around online gender-based violence. This can be done through special interest groups focused on digital and women's rights and by supporting researchers, gender activists, and grassroots organisations working in related areas. Advocacy should also be directed towards holding governments and private stakeholders accountable for protecting the digital rights of users and citizens.

Secondly, the institutions and legislations for the protection of digital rights of citizens should be strengthened. Training should be provided to professionals, researchers, and practitioners on internet governance, with a focus on cybersecurity and digital rights, and gendered challenges to both. This should include sharing knowledge of existing initiatives, best practices, legislation and measures for digital rights and data protection.

Thirdly, there needs to be more research on gender-based cyber-violence so that evidence-based policy actions can be implemented to make the internet safer for all users. Moreover, given that "what gets counted counts", data collection should be improved and harmonised to quantify the extent of the problem.

The internet has become a lifeline for citizens in recent decades. However, it can only thrive if everyone has an equal chance to benefit from the opportunities it provides and to get their voices heard without feeling their safety, dignity and privacy threatened. Together, we can make the internet a safer and more inclusive digital space for all.



change that we know it can be".

Slow progress on digital rights According to research by the Digital Rights Foundation in Pakistan, an important factor in the persistence of online violence and hate speech is the moral policing of women and gender minorities in online spaces. While action against cyber-violence and online hate speech is gaining momentum in developed countries, and the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and Digital Services Act gives citizens greater control over their data in Europe, progress has been slower in developing countries. Even in the European Union (EU), differences in the definition of online harassment and approaches across member states makes it difficult to take coordinated action against online violence against women.

In 2016, Pakistan's parliament enacted the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act

videos without consent and sharing them on social media, which include three years in prison or Rs. 1million in fine or both. This came as a response to the online hate speech and abuse against a Pakistani actress when a non-consensual video of her smoking went viral.

However, there are still more efforts needed for the successful implementation of the legislations protecting digital rights. For-instance, the experiences and joint statements by female journalist show that the legislation and authorities have so far failed to grant women journalists the protections offered under the law as they continue to face gendered-based online violence, including harassment, trolling, and coordinated abuse campaigns. The #AttacksWontSilenceus campaign also aimed to bring attention to these prevalent cyber-attacks.

A roadmap for a safer internet for all

With the world becoming

Martin Luther King's Message

No Space Between the Right to Vote and Other Freedoms

The heart of a functioning democracy is the ability of its people to amplify their collective voices through the ballot box. This was something the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. knew all too well. On May 17, 1957, the third anniversary of the *Brown v. Board of Education*

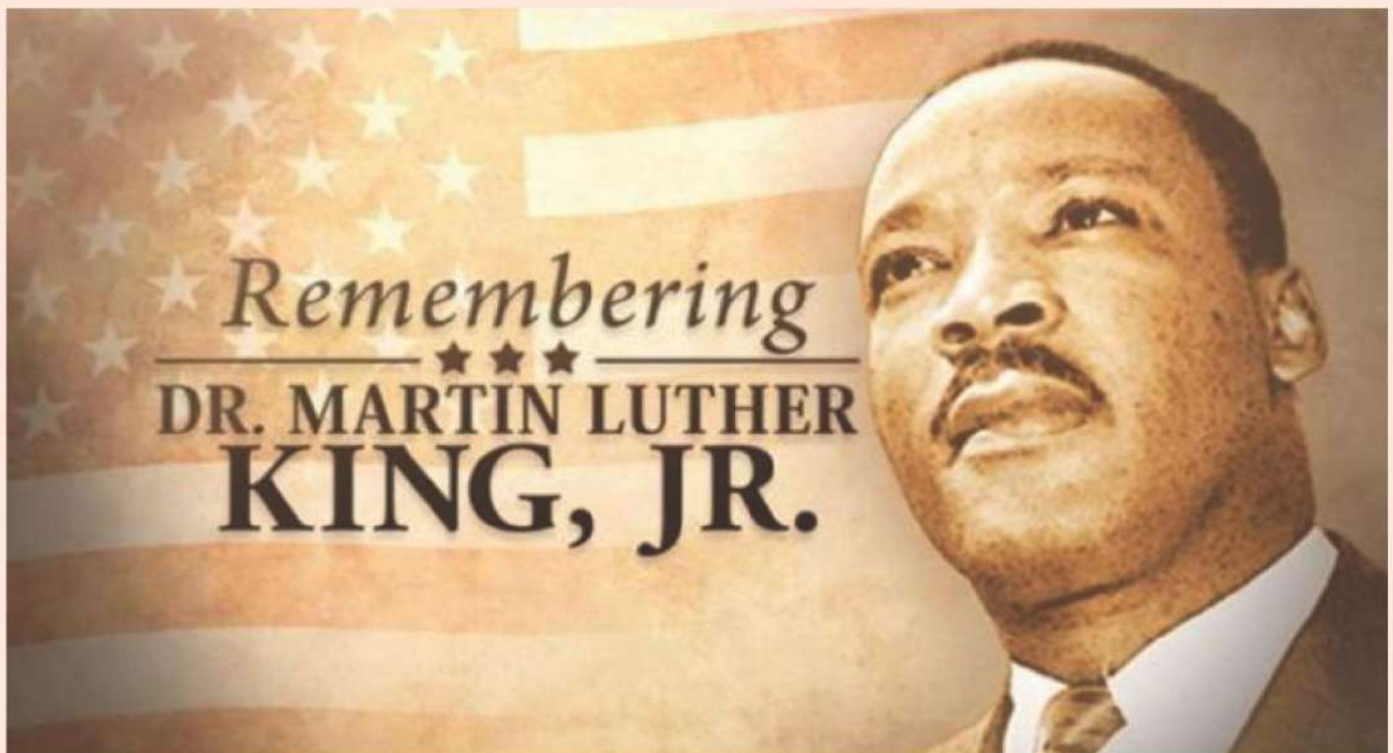
was no light between the right to vote and ensuring the other freedoms that come when living in a democracy.

The intersectionality between voting rights and the fight for justice that is being waged in the US now, almost 70 years later, is just as clear. Battling racial injustice and inequality

and susceptible Black and brown communities are to suffering more harm as a result. This has led more people to demand health and economic equity.

A common denominator in these epic fights for justice and change is the power of the vote to bring about the sought-after

of US democracy. It is fitting to do so on a day honoring a man who understood that shoring up democracy was not only about a fight for a seat at the front of the bus or a battle for equal education, but rather about the protection of all rights that ensure a democracy works for everyone.



US Supreme Court decision ending racial segregation in public schools, Dr. King drew a clear link between voting and democracy.

In a speech he gave at the Prayer Pilgrimage for Freedom, he said, "Give us the ballot, and we will no longer have to worry the federal government about our basic rights." Dr. King went on to elaborate that the vote would allow Black people to elect legislators of "goodwill," help create anti-lynching laws, place judges on the bench who would, as he said, "do justly and love mercy" and implement desegregation rulings like *Brown*. In his mind, there

is not simply about one issue or another. Rather it is about the fight for all civil and human rights. Voting is the most powerful tool in the defense arsenal.

Two timely cultural shifts are salient examples. First, the killings in 2020 of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor and other Black and brown people too numerous to name since then have brought an enormous amount of attention to reforming the criminal justice system and policing. Second, the Covid-19 pandemic highlighted the overwhelming health and economic disparities that exist in the US and how fragile

changes. Voting enables the election of policymakers who can change policies, prevent the implementation of standards and practices that disproportionately harm certain communities, and provide services that strengthen communities in need. In a democracy, voting gives every individual the right, in the words of the late, great John Lewis, to "speak up and speak out" to bring change to their government, neighborhoods and their lives.

In 2022, the King Family has committed to using the King holiday to underscore and reinforce the connection between voting rights and the core civil and human rights at the heart

On Martin Luther King Day 2022, the stakes are too high for mere commemoration. The US Congress has an opportunity to pass critical voting rights legislation. The Freedom to Vote Act and the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act, if enacted, will implement protections for all voters that build upon the foundation established by the 1965 Voting Rights Act. MLK Day this year is rightly about putting the spotlight on the need for the US to guarantee the right to vote, free of suppression and free of interference, for everyone because the future of its democracy depends upon it.

The Murree tragedy - another bandage for a broken system

Those governing us must ensure they are collectively responsible before expecting and demanding the same from citizens

Ayesha Amin
A few years ago, a relative told me that the difference between Pakistan and the western world is a lack of 'personal responsibility'. Having lived in America for most of his life, I believe his statement stemmed from looking at American citizens doing everything on their own - working long hours, running the house, raising children, paying their taxes - with little or no help and complaint. In comparison, an average Pakistani family often has help either in the form of domestic staff or many family members living in large households, and yet there is an almost constant barrage of complaints accompanied with a relatively low sense of personal responsibility.

A younger me at the time understood and agreed with much of what he said. However, as I grow older and assess the increasingly crippling problems that plague our society, I realise that his statement was largely uninformed and shallow, although not entirely incorrect. Yes, we are conditioned to exist amidst the support of people and, perhaps, are less 'personally responsible'. Nevertheless, a major factor behind this co-dependency is the lack of basic infrastructure and facilities such as an uninterrupted supply of electricity, power and gas, strong road networks, regularly maintained sewerage systems, and planned housing. This brings me to the recent tragedy in Murree. Having moved to Canada very recently, this heart-breaking incident with people and their cars buried in the snow - and entire families possibly dying from suffocation - hits very close to home as I sit here staring at the snow falling outside. Since it started snowing here earlier this month, I have seen snow



movers and cleaners do their rounds at all hours of the day in vehicles equipped with a closed cab for the driver to keep him protected from the harsh cold and snow. Imagine being all alone out in the cold, cleaning a parking lot at one in the morning before moving on to the next area. It is tedious to say the least, and I cannot

simply in the mindset and conditioning that a 'lack of personal responsibility' seems to imply. It is in the resources, support and compensation given to these workers here in Canada. A snowplough driver can earn around \$50,000 per year, enabling them to lead a decent life. These workers are trained and given safety equip-

civilians and military workers shovelling away piles of snow mostly with sticks and shovels which I am sure slowed down rescue operations and hence lowered the likelihood of taking people out of their vehicles faster and alive. Moreover, manual shovelling of such proportions is also tough on the people carrying out the task and can cause heart and respiratory problems. The infrastructure was and is clearly not prepared for the prospective tourism the government seems to have been touting so proudly.

I am sure after the tragedy many of you must have heard about carbon monoxide poisoning, which happens when the car engine is left running for a long time with the exhaust pipe blocked by the snow, causing the gas to spread inside the car. Since it is an odourless gas, it goes largely undetected and can cause people to suffocate and die in less than 2 hours.

I ask you, how many of the



imagine many in Pakistan who would do this without complaining. However, the difference is not

ment and machinery which is maintained regularly. On the other hand, news coverage of the tragedy in Murree showed



poor victims trapped in their cars knew this fact? Was it their responsibility to know this or is the government responsible for educating people?

This brings me to another aspect of government support and awareness painfully absent in Pakistan. Many people drive in Pakistan without passing their driving test and going through the handbook of rules and regulations, primarily because those rules are not followed on the roads. I have no idea if Pakistan even has driving rules for winter in the handbook, particularly for areas which receive heavy snowfall. In Canada, one cannot pass the knowledge test without knowing all the rules, including:

" Keeping your exhaust pipe clear of snow to prevent carbon monoxide poisoning

" Clearing the exhaust pipe before starting the engine and avoiding running the engine in closed spaces

" Turning the engine on for around five minutes after every hour if drivers find themselves stuck in snow

" Changing the tyres from summer to winter tyres (and vice versa) on scheduled dates to prevent skidding and accidents in winter

On the other hand, survivors and witnesses from the Murree disaster are now reporting how people stuck in the snow were charged exorbitant prices by the locals to purchase chains for their tyres to prevent slipping, as well as for basic com-

modities like water and food. Not only is this again a glaring gap in government-implemented regulations as roads were not repaired in two years despite the hike in tourism, but it also points to bigger problems. Perhaps this is a manifestation of the locals' resentment at not benefiting from the revenue generated through tourism by the government in

basic common sense. It is precisely this thought-process which prevented these tourists from following weather warnings, including the possibility of road closures issued by the meteorological department before the weekend arrived. However, saying that people in Pakistan lack personal responsibility like my relative did or blaming the people for rushing



Murree, and the fact that tourists often litter in public places and can be unnecessarily rambunctious and disrespectful.

So, do we then lack personal responsibility because of the absence of government regulations and support? As a nation, we do lack discipline and blatantly rebuke regulations. We rely more on hearsay and passing on the blame instead of following given guidelines and

to Murree without checking the weather conditions like Prime Minister Imran Khan did, is a statement given from a position of privilege. When the state creates laws and regulations, and when the state implements those laws, civilians have no choice but to follow. If the highway had been closed keeping in mind the weather conditions, many would not journey to Murree. Rescuing people from more

than 100,000 vehicles in harsh weather conditions with insufficient equipment is a tall and dangerous task, and it could have been avoided with better management.

Unfortunately, it looks like this tragedy will pan out like all our previous losses, with civilians looking to the government for answers and compensation while the federal and provincial governments fight amongst themselves in a never-ending blame game. I ask you, is a Rs800,000 compensation package for the victims' families going to bring their loved ones back? Is upgrading Murree's administrative status from tehsil to district, as proposed, going to matter until and unless it is backed with actual improvements in regulations and infrastructure?

Time and again we pride ourselves for our resilience and tenacity, but sadly all we are is a nation adept at putting on bandages and clearing arteries while being painfully incompetent in changing our lifestyles, questioning the status quo and overhauling the system - be it in our homes, at

the community level or at the state level. Personal responsibility is undoubtedly the obligation of each individual, but it has to come from the top-down. Those governing us must ensure they are personally and collectively responsible before expecting and demanding the same from each citizen. Otherwise, tragedies like Murree will keep happening. And we will eventually run out of bandages - or citizens.

Nigeria: Child Marriage Violates Girls' Rights

States Should Urgently Adopt Laws to Enforce Child Rights Act

A woman protests against underage marriage, Lagos, Nigeria. © 2017 / AP Photo/Sunday Alamba, File

(Abuja) - Child marriage remains prevalent in Nigeria because the federal and state governments have not adequately enforced laws to prevent it, Human Rights Watch said today.

Nigeria's rates of child marriage are some of the highest on the African continent.

Although the federal Child Rights Act (CRA, 2003) prohibits marriage below age 18, the Nigerian constitution contains provisions which appear to conflict with this position. States with Islamic legal systems have also failed to adopt both the federal law and 18 as the age of majority for marriage. Some southern states which have adopted this position have failed to take adequate steps to carry it out.

"It is disturbing that almost two decades after the Child Rights Act was passed, Nigerian girls are still being forced into child marriages," said Mausi Segun, Africa director at Human Rights Watch.

"Nigerian states should urgently act to adopt, implement, and align existing laws with the provisions of the Child Rights Act, which criminalizes marriage before the age of 18 and protects girls' rights."

In August and September 2021, Human Rights Watch remotely interviewed 16 married girls between the ages of 14 and 19, and representatives at eight civil society organizations working to end child marriage and gender-based

violence in Imo and Kano states. Human Rights Watch selected those states because of their different legal, traditional, and demographic situations that are representative of other states in their regions. Human Rights Watch sent an interview request to the Kano State Ministry of Women's Affairs and Social Development, and the Imo State Ministry of Women Affairs and Vulnerable Groups but has received no response.

that married girls in Imo and Kano states are denied their fundamental rights to education, a safe dwelling, and freedom from violence, and often do not have access to adequate health care. Without strong regulatory protections for girls, families force them into early marriage for several reasons, including religious and traditional practices and to avoid the social stigma over teen pregnancy.

Some girls interviewed said

the main drivers of their marriage, in many cases against their will.

In the Sharia-legislated Kano State, the rates of child marriage are some of the highest in the country. In February, the Kano State Assembly voted to adopt the Child Protection Bill, but Governor Abdullahi Umar Ganduje has yet to assent to it. State legislators should ensure that the final version of the law guarantees adequate protections for girls,



Child marriage contravenes the Nigerian constitution as well as the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child and United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which affirm 18 as the age of majority, and guarantee a child's right to be free from coercion and violence, and to get health care and education.

Human Rights Watch found

they have tried to escape their forced marriages. One girl married at 14 had run away six times in three years but family members returned her to her husband each time.

Imo State, a predominantly Igbo Christian state in southeastern Nigeria, adopted the Child Rights Law in 2004. But child marriage is an ongoing problem. Girls interviewed said that their families were

including recognizing 18 years as the age of majority as set out in African regional and international law.

In Kano state, Human Rights Watch found that families often plan marriages for girls without providing any choice over when or whom they marry. Girls and young women said that the decision about their marriage was based on traditional practices and family