Terrorism and Refugees in the Middle East

The international community, especially the United Nations Human Rights Council, must wake up and deal with contemporary reality, the increase in terrorism and in the number of refugees caused by the surge in violence. It is high time for them to give up their capacity for illusions, their obsession with baseless allegations of violations of international law by the State of Israel, and to examine and attempt to end the manifest atrocities being committed across the world, especially in the Middle East.

At a moment when the democratic countries of the world are experiencing the highest level of peace in their history, the Arab and Muslims countries of the Middle East and North Africa have become more violent.

Whatever the optimistic hopes of an "Arab spring" and/or a change from authoritarian to more democratic systems, the condition of Middle East and North African countries has worsened as a result of civil wars and armed uprisings.

The world in recent years has become a less peaceful place, according to the Global Peace Index 2015 that ranks 162 countries on a number of indicators, such as amount of militarization, ongoing conflict, and social measures. Peace is defined as the absence of violence or the fear of violence. The record is uneven. 76 countries were more while 86 were less peaceful. Of the 19 countries in the Middle East and North Africa that have been surveyed, 13 have deteriorated in the last year.

Violence is experienced least in the western democratic countries where deaths from organized external conflict have declined. The most peaceful countries have continued to make

the most improvement, while the least peaceful have become worse. Violence is most true of the countries of the Middle East whose internal peacefulness has continued to deteriorate. Among the reasons are the substantial increase in refugees and displaced persons as a percentage of the population, deaths from internal conflicts, the impact of terrorism, the violent demonstrations, and criminality.

It will come as no surprise that Iceland, followed by Denmark, is the most peaceful country in the world, while Syria, followed by Iraq and Afghanistan, is the least peaceful. Only two Muslim countries, Egypt and Tunisia, have improved, while Libya, Yemen, Iraq, and Syria, have deteriorated.

In most of the democratic countries, there has been a decline in military activity, levels of military expenditure, and rates of homicide. However, in the world as a whole, armed conflict has increased dramatically. The number of people killed in conflicts increased from 49,000 in 2010 to 180,000 in 2014.

In economic terms the cost of violence is estimated at $14.3 trillion or 13.4% of the global GDP in 2014. While military expenditure, homicide and police forces accounts for two-thirds of the total cost, an increasing amount comes from support of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs), a cost now amounting to $128 billion.

The United States and the international community are confronted with the factors responsible: religious sectarian divisions, the bitter civil war and internal conflict between multiple factions in Syria, the increasing disruption by the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (IS), the Islamist groups in Libya, the Houthi extremists in Yemen, the large number, perhaps 20,000, of foreign fighters who have joined IS, and the struggle between Saudi Arabia and Iran for regional hegemony.

The conflicts can be categorized in two ways: the non-state conflicts, as in Syria and Nigeria; and the internationalization of armed conflicts, as regional and international powers have become involved in a conflict, as is the case both in the Middle East, Syria, Libya, and Iraq, and in Afghanistan, Mali, and Somalia.

From the survey of armed conflicts and peace in the world, two factors stand out. One is the increase in terrorism, the other the increase in the number of refugees and IDPs.

In 2014, deaths from terrorism were recorded in 69 countries, indicating the increasing employment of terrorist tactics, not only in the Middle East but also in Nigeria, Cameroon, and Niger. The most deadly was the massacre by Boko Haram of more than 2000 civilians in Baga, Nigeria in January 2015. Terrorist networks have expanded and have killed increasing numbers.

Most important has been the increase in terrorist activity in the last three years, particularly in the Middle East and Sub-Saharan Africa. Deaths from terrorism in 2014 amounted to at least 20,000. Most have occurred in countries with civil conflict or war, but the impact has also affected a larger number of countries.

The most notorious terrorists have been Boko Haram, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (IS), al-Qaeda, and the Taliban, which collectively have been responsible for two-thirds of all deaths from terrorism. People affiliated with them were responsible for the massacre of 11 people in the office of *Charlie Hebdo* in Paris in January 2015, the murders in Copenhagen in February 2015, and in Sydney, Australia in December 2014. Western countries, in Europe as well as the United States, are now aware of the danger of the considerable number of westerners who have joined IS and may return as jihadists to their country of origin.

The most disturbing factor as a result of the violence is the startling increase in the number of refugees and IDPs. In 2013 about 30 million people, according to information from the UNHCR could be regarded as refugees, internally displaced, or seeking asylum. This number has increased to 50 million, the highest number since the end of World War II.

A reasonable estimate is that, as a result of the civil war and violence in the country, 40 per cent of the Syrian population, once calculated at 21 million, are refugees (3.5 million) or displaced (6.5 million): this is 21 per cent of all refugees and 28 per cent of IDPs. The conflict in Afghanistan has led to the departure of more than 2.5 million.

The refugees and IDPs now amount to more than 50 million or 0.75% of the world's population. Some result from the conflicts in the Democratic Republic of Congo and Columbia, but most arise from conflicts in the Middle East. One-third of people displaced by conflict within their own countries are in Syria and Iraq.

It is crucial that the international organizations of the world, as well as Amnesty International and Archbishop Desmond Tutu, overcome their prejudices and devote their efforts to solving the real refugee problems in the world.

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