

CARTER'S VOICE OF DISSENT

Violation of Human Rights by America

Farooque Chowdhury

Jimmy Carter, former US President, criticized the US administration for "clearly violating at least 10" of the 30 articles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. He said these violations as "disturbing". Of the violations he mentioned prohibition against "cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment."

It's unprecedented! It's neither Fidel Castro nor Hugo Chavez, neither Moscow nor Beijing, but a former US president is accusing the US president of sanctioning the "widespread abuse of human rights". Mr Carter has not mentioned Barak Obama, the US president, by name. However, he used the words "our government" and "the highest authorities in Washington".

Mr Carter made the point by referring the authorization of drone strikes to kill suspected terrorists. In a *New York Times* op-ed article titled "A Cruel and Unusual Record" on June 25 he said the "United States is abandoning its role as the global champion of human rights." He mentioned drone attacks on Afghanistan, Pakistan, Somalia and Yemen.

"Revelations that top officials are targeting people to be assassinated abroad, including American citizens, are only the most recent, disturbing proof of how far our nation's violation of human rights has extended", he said.

"We don't know", Mr Carter wrote, "how many hundreds of innocent civilians have been killed in these attacks, each one approved by the highest authorities in Washington. This would have been unthinkable in previous times." He cited recent revelations about the US drone program that allows for highest authorities to track, target, and kill suspected terrorists or militants—including US citizens—without due process or transparent oversight.

He wrote: "Despite an arbitrary rule that any man killed by drones is declared an enemy terrorist, the death of nearby innocent women and children is accepted as inevitable."

He mentioned that "[t]hese policies clearly affect American foreign policy."

Referring to implications of these drone attacks he wrote: "Top intelligence and military officials, as well as rights defenders in targeted areas, affirm that the great escalation in drone attacks has turned aggrieved families toward terrorist organizations, aroused civilian populations against us and permitted repressive governments to cite such actions to justify their own despotic behavior."

Drone strikes are a fact in the daily life of people of Pakistan. In Yemen and Somalia, it's a fact also. It's apprehended that peoples in other lands may have the same experience. Interests

of *Naked Imperialism* (title of a book by John Bellamy Foster, editor, *Monthly Review*) will determine the extent of drone operation in future.

Citing the New America Foundation estimates ABC News said in Pakistan alone 265 drone strikes have been executed since January 2009 killing at least 1,488 persons, at least 1,343 of them considered militants. The foundation estimates are based on news reports and other sources. ("Jimmy Carter Accuses US of 'Widespread Abuse of Human Rights'")

"Instead of making the world safer", Mr Carter wrote, "America's violation of international human rights abets our enemies and alienates our friends."

The Guantanamo Bay detention center and waterboarding issues were not skipped by the former US president. He criticized the US president for keeping the detention center open, where prisoners "have been tortured by waterboarding more than 100 times or intimidated with semiautomatic weapons, power drills or threats to sexually assault their mothers."

"While the country has made mistakes in the past," Mr Carter wrote, "the widespread abuse of human rights over the last decade has been a dramatic change from the past."

Mr Carter blared the US government for allowing "unprecedented violations of our rights to privacy through warrantless wiretapping and government mining of our electronic communications."

He condemned recent legislation that gives the president the power to detain suspected terrorists indefinitely, although a federal judge blocked the law from taking effect for any suspects not affiliated with the September 11 terrorist attacks. Mr Carter said: "This law violates the right to freedom of expression and to be presumed innocent until proved guilty, two other rights enshrined in the declaration."

Citing the events of September 11, 2001, he argued that the policy catastrophes since then have been "sanctioned and escalated by bipartisan executive and legislative actions" and were made possible by a citizenry, by and large, unwilling to dissent.

"At a time when popular revolutions are sweeping the globe," Mr Carter wrote, "the United States should be strengthening, not weakening, basic rules of law and principles of justice enumerated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights." He urged "concerned citizens" to "persuade Washington to reverse course and regain moral leadership".

Mr Carter is keeping his hope on the moral leadership of the US. But, military-industrial complex has taken it out long ago.

Moral standard is being set by the economic interests that utilize political and military power and manipulate diplomacy to widen and to make safe its domain of accumulation. The system has its own conscience, which is different from human conscience. The system has its own mind, which is different from human brain. The conscience, the mind, the ethics, the moral standard of the system is political, not apolitical; it's a-human, a-personal. It's neither a president nor a

group of good-soul senators, not even generals, who determine the moral standard. No state's moral standard can be personified. Dominating interests determine the moral standards, the ethics, the flight path drones follow and the targets drones make.

Violation of human rights within a state and outside the state has been mentioned by the former US president. How "things" are, as he wrote, "sanctioned and escalated by bipartisan executive and legislative actions"? Don't they have that wisdom that can warn them of the harm the actions might create? Or, that check and balance that can restrain that force? What's the root of the limitation or failure in prudence and wisdom, or in check and balance system? Even, the question comes: Why is "a citizenry, by and large, unwilling to dissent"? Is it inertia? Why the inertia? Or, is there no space for dissension?

A state's pattern of behavior in a certain historical period has been revealed by the issues raised by Mr Carter. These expose a state's requirements, limitations, etc. Mr Carter's criticisms of human rights violation, his yearning for safety and security of human life can't be ignored. But these shall not provide any answer to the victims of violation.

What to tell the mothers of the children killed by drones in Pakistan villages? What to tell the children maimed by drones in Pakistan-Afghanistan border villages? What to tell the old father, who lost his young son, probably the only earning member of the family? What moral standard can bring in peace to these mothers, to these children, to these fathers, who are poor, working people, who know nothing about geopolitics, great game in the central Asian zone, peak oil, oil pipeline, western hemisphere designed democracy and its stooges, MNC-interests? All geopolitics, all power, all interests turn incapable to bring in solace to the hearts of crying humanity in rural mud houses demolished by drones! Ringing bells of humanity are not within hearing range.

It's not only a fact in Pakistan or Yemen. Other lands bear also pains of violation and interference. The US is no exception. The question of human rights in the US was raised by the UN more than once.

It was reported that the UN envoy for freedom of expression was drafting an official communication to the US government demanding to know "why federal officials are not protecting the rights of Occupy demonstrators whose protests are being disbanded—sometimes violently—by local authorities." Frank La Rue, the UN "special rapporteur" for the protection of free expression, told *HuffPost* in an interview that "the crackdowns against Occupy protesters appear to be violating their human and constitutional rights." "Citizens have the right to dissent with the authorities, and there's no need to use public force to silence that dissension", he said.

It was also reported that the UN was to conduct an investigation into the plight of the US Native Americans. A UN statement said : "This will be the first mission to the US by an independent expert designated by the UN human rights council to report on the rights of the indigenous peoples."

Many of the US' estimated 2.7 million Native Americans live in federally recognized tribal areas overwhelmed with unemployment, high suicide rates and other social problems.

Accusations of human rights violation in the US are now a regular diplomatic event in the Chinese capital. China raises the issue seriously. It has become a part of public diplomacy. Once, only years back, it was only a US monopoly. Now, China has stepped in boldly.

But Mr Jimmy Carter's voice is not a part of public diplomacy. He is a dignified personality. It shows dissent within the upper echelon of the US society. And, dissent signifies state of governance, understanding, rapport, efficiency of ruling mechanism. So, Mr Carter's voice is significant. □□□