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The Plights of Afghan Working Class

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Afghanistan celebrated the International Labor Day on first of May while the plights of Afghanistan's working class have further intensified. Afghanistan has one of the highest rates of unemployment in the world. The country saw perhaps an unprecedented wave of people fleeing the country. And the flow of people out of Afghanistan does not seem to be halted. Though many leave the country because of the Taliban insurgency and the deteriorating security conditions, there are also many who migrate due to the dire poverty and lack of employment.

Generating sufficient employment was one of the main promises during 2014 presidential campaigns. And now, improving the lives of the ordinary Afghans by improving the country's economy and creating more jobs is a real challenge for National Unity Government (NUG) in its efforts to stabilize the country. Creating new job opportunities has been stated as a key objective of the National Unity Government (NUG). However, the government seems far from being able to reach the stated goals and provide jobs for citizens. As it is like in other countries, celebrating the International Labor Day has become a norm in Afghanistan like many other celebratory programs that have minimal impacts on changing the lives of the Afghans. Officials at the Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs, Martyrs and Disabled said that the government is committed to improve the status of the country's laborers and promote their rights. However, like many other areas the efforts to improve the economy and create more jobs have been lagging due to the enormous challenges existing like insecurity and the Taliban insurgency, corruption and inefficiency of the administration. Aside from the insecurity and the ongoing war, the government has a large share of the responsibility for the failure to improve the lives of the people by creating jobs and using the existing potentials within the government and the private

sector. The widespread corruption and nepotism and lack of good governance have significantly contributed to the failure to fulfill the promises made by NUG leader. There are hundreds of job-seekers with many of them having higher education who want to be employed but are desperate and helpless to find jobs. This is while, according to the government, there thousands of job positions in the government agencies and the ministries that remain vacant due to the lack of capacity in the government offices to manage and recruit new people. A large portion of the population in Afghanistan lives under the poverty line. The situation has further deteriorated after the withdrawal of the foreign forces and the decline in the aid assistance by international community. Since 2014, the year when the national unity government took over power and the US concluded NATO's combat mission in Afghanistan, the situation has dramatically deteriorated with many people losing employments and seeing their lives getting worse. NUG has failed to prevent Afghanistan's economy from declining after the withdrawal of the most of the US-led NATO coalition.

The government introduced some measures to encourage investments in the country. But those policies have been less effective to salvage the country's economy from declining as the investments have persistently decreased with investors remaining concerned over the country's political, security and economic prospects. NUG did manage to sign some major trade and economic programs involving Afghanistan and a number of regional countries. Though crucial for Afghanistan's economy in the long run, however these projects are yet to produce results and help the government to prevent the sharp decline in employments and economic wellbeing of the Afghans.

Those projects face a daunting test from the Taliban insurgency and the conflict in the country is going to remain a major threat for the implementation of these projects in the near future. The government of Afghanistan also needs to do more to utilize all other possible means for generating employment and using current potentials within the government and the public sector. In Afghanistan the most imminent problem for many of worker class is lack of employment rather than quality of employment or the rights of laborers in the market. Afghanistan has some legislation aimed on ensuring rights of the working class and preserving quality of employment. However, the laws remain insufficient and faulty. But the bigger problem is that laws are implemented.

There is no culture of committing to rights and obligations from both the employers and employees. In addition to the high rate of unemployment, Afghanistan's working class remains one of the most deprived segments of the society in Afghanistan as there are no social security arrangements and no sufficient and robust legal mechanisms to support the laborers in the labor market and ensure their rights are preserved. The government needs to refocus on the efforts to improve employment for the job-seeking Afghans and, in the meantime, work on promoting rights of the laborers. The government needs to do better to revive the public confidence over its performance. Lack of public confidence on the economic performance of the government would make it more difficult for the government to stabilize the country and defeat the Taliban insurgency.