

Hope in Humanity through Rayan

Under the lens of Western-led savage capitalism, basic children's rights are being violated in many places around the world. In China's Xinjiang region, there is unprecedented segregation where innocent minor Uyghurs are being treated inhumanely under awful circumstances. Meanwhile, in Europe's Sweden, the so-called democratic values turned a blind eye to the disobedience and selfishness of the country's Social Authority's act in kidnapping Muslims and Arab immigrant children. Globally, rampant violations are being committed against children's rights in different means including kidnapping, killing, torture, child labor, sexual exploitation, human trafficking, and different forms of threats that endanger the lives of children.

Nevertheless, a completely different situation occurred in Morocco. Who could have imagined that a five-year-old boy could penetrate the hearts of millions of people around the globe in just a few days? Who could even think that an innocent boy named Rayan from a poor family in a rural area of Northern Morocco could spur national solidarity with his disappearance? There has probably never been a time in our recent history when people from different countries, different religions, and different races were so united on the tragedy that ended the life of a five-year-old boy.

Rayan's Disappearance

On February 1st 2022, Rayan went out with a toy and some sweets in his hands after talking with his mother and grandmother. He fell into a well next to their home which his father excavated years ago. The well's diameter is less than 30 centimeters and narrows to 20 centimeters at the depth of 32 meters where the boy got stuck. The family could only find him after he was heard crying and shouting 'Get me out of here!' The family then tried to rescue him with very modest equipment which eventually led to a failed attempt because the well was so narrow. Some young and fit youth volunteered to rescue him before the Civil Protection arrived on site. But five attempts failed to save Rayan. The next day, digging operations using bulldozers and advanced equipment continued in race against time to get the boy out alive as cameras showed him moving. The soil is soft on the surface and rocky as the excavation goes deeper, making the likelihood of collapses very high. The government spokesman Mustafa Baytas released a statement to reassure that the "government is exhausting all venues to safely secure the boy," and to believe in Morocco's capabilities to rescue him.

During the five-day rescue operation, national and international network coverages like Aljazeera, CNN, BBC, as well as social media activists broadcasted the live feeds of the efforts of the Civil Protection, Royal Gendarmerie, Auxiliary Forces and local people. After a total of 100 hours of hard work under harsh conditions, the rescue team reached the boy, but he was already dead by then.

From Local Social Media-Solidarity to Global Unity

Rayan had unified the whole world regardless religious backgrounds, race, skin color, and any differences that would marginalize some groups against the others. His video went viral, initially through social media platforms. Although Rayan's case does not lie in any war-related crime category, yet public opinions suddenly shifted their attention to the tragedy. Some analysts said that this unification of opposites occurred because Rayan's case is a politic-free incident; it is a purely humanitarian act to show consolidation with the small boy and his family. Rayan's story is unlike other cases faced by children, for instance, in war-torn countries.

In those countries, children's rights and freedoms are being violated, as stated by the UN-attached Convention on the Rights of the Child's report. These children suffer from the harsh conditions resulting from wars, political tensions, and socio-economical instabilities on a daily basis. Circulation of these cases, however, is pretty limited, perhaps because individuals are hesitant to circulate or publish politically oriented content for different reasons. In fact, we do not observe similar solidarity and consolidation with the collective sufferings and transgressions as in the case of Rayan. People may feel afraid of being targeted or marginalized by dictatorial regimes when their social media content goes against the dictatorial stream.

Rayan has brought paradoxical opposites together. The first one to announce his death is Morocco's

Royal Court in a statement that demonstrates the king's personal consolidation with Rayan's parents. Many Moroccans from different cities flocked to the incident site to mourn Rayan's death. The Grand Imam of Al-Azhar sent his condolences to the grieving family. Similarly, the Imam of Al Aqsa Mosque mentioned Rayan in his supplications for his rescue on a Friday speech, followed by an absentee funeral prayer after his death. Many state leaders called Rayan's family, posted, or tweeted to show sympathy with Morocco. Even the Pope conveyed a message of condolences to Rayan's family and the Moroccan people. Many international football clubs, celebrities, and influencers did the same on their social media accounts.

Rayan: A Synonym for Innocence

In a poll administered by Aljazeera, surveyed participants were asked "Why Rayan's case went so viral globally?" 'Because he is a boy' received 76 % of the responses. Whenever the target of any kind of tragedy, be it natural or human-made, is children; the question such as 'what's his/her fault?' rises. This is due to human nature as well as the universal common sense among all creatures; that protecting and saving children is a must when their lives are at stake.

The world witnessed similar individual events to Rayan's case. Everybody still remembers the shocking image of the drowned 3-year-old Syrian boy, Alan Kurdi, in the Mediterranean Sea back in 2015. Similarly, Hamza Nassar died smiling, while fasting, after an Israeli airstrike over the Gaza strip. Hamza Al-Khatib was shot, had his genitals removed, then killed by the Syrian regime. Buthaina al-Rimi became the face of the ongoing war in Yemen after her house was bombed causing all her family members killed. Her picture when she was trying to open one of her swollen and bruised eyes sparked on a global scale. Twenty-two years ago, the killing of Muhammad al-Durrah by the Israeli occupation army is still memorable. His father Jamal tried to protect him from the 45-minute hysterical attack but noticed that his son was killed. Right after Rayan's story, the case of Fawaz Al Qetifan in Syria happened far from being a natural accident; it was a simple abuse of power and a violation of a child's rights. After he was kidnapped and tortured, Fawaz pledged an armed man not to kick him in his face and said, "For God's sake do not kick me". This sentence trended the social media platforms much differently.

Although these individual cases received consolidation and sympathy, they are war-related cases, and interestingly less noticeable. However, the case of Rayan happened in a safe and peaceful country. Following Rayan's death, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) released a statement pointing out that "as a new icon of childhood in Morocco and elsewhere, it is our duty to Rayan's memory to make every effort to ensure that all children in the world are better protected and their rights to life, survival and development better defended". Rayan's death provoked the emotions of millions in Morocco and abroad.

Lessons to Humanity and Humanitarian Aid

During Rayan's disappearance, the local people showed sympathy with his family in the very first hours and run for help. Everyone tried their best to help find the boy. As soon as he was heard from the deep of a dry and narrow well, efforts to rescue him were concerted at local and city level before his news of disappearance spread to social media outlets. Rayan's death has opened the folders of thousands of oppressed children with the many sufferings they face. Rayan has revived humanity after it was drowned by Greek Navy officers in the Mediterranean Sea following their heinous act of stripping immigrants of their clothes and freezing them to death. During the rescue operation, villagers came together to provide meals and drinks to the crew who spent sleepless nights in freezing weather. Following Rayan's death, many individuals and organizations competed to hand out support. Moroccan football player Abderrazak Hamdallah offered an equipped house to his family. Many businessmen offered both monetary and non-monetary support. Big media outlets agreed to share their YouTube and other social media incomes with family members of the rescue team. All in all, Rayan's story has shown us the power of solidarity, social media, and humanitarian values in grabbing global attention in times of crisis.

Let us not forget that there are thousands of children suffering from hunger, cold, diseases, and trauma in Syria and Yemen. Let us not forget that thousands of Uyghur children are being oppressed and separated from their parents in East Turkestan. Let us remember the continuous wailing of hundreds of immigrant mothers in Sweden and other Nordic countries due to the forced separation from their own children. Let us unify all the efforts to not only care about individual cases but to transcend solidarity to cover the collective sufferings of children. Rayan's case was possibly a divine message to save oppressed children and orphans wherever they are. Rayan left this world only after he taught a great lesson of unity and solidarity

that many worldwide conferences and international summits failed to fix over decades with just one plea, 'Get me out of here!'

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