



UN Commission on Human Rights (UNCHR)
***Human Rights Violations Under the Taliban
in Afghanistan***

INTRODUCTION:

In June 1997, the U.N.'s Executive Committee on Humanitarian Affairs (ECHA) urged all UN agencies to support and adopt a method geared towards guiding the United Nations in remedying the prominent gender issue under the Taliban rule in Afghanistan. This approach called for UN agencies to engage "in their life-sustaining humanitarian activities to aid all Afghans in need, including male and female refugees and the internally displaced but to refrain from participating in the institution building efforts of the Afghan authorities as long as the discriminatory practices continue" (The United Nations Association of the United States of America). The UN continued its quest to promote gender equity in November of 1997 when it dispatched the first "Gender Mission" team. These seven representatives of UN agencies "examined the condition of women in Afghanistan and the way external assistance is conceived and delivered, explored ways in which the international community can address gender concerns in the delivery of aid, and explored indicators to ensure appropriate, ongoing, monitoring of aid activities." This special committee ultimately furthered the development of a coherent set of guidelines indicating the progress of assistance on a wide scale of gender issues.

Hopes were high as the Taliban began to relax their harsh gender restrictions and U.N. agencies concentrated on the construction of life-sustaining support systems. However, in 1998 all efforts reached an alarming standstill. "When the governor of Kandahar Province physically assaulted U.N. staff, reportedly over the delay in arrival of funding for flood relief, the United Nations closed its offices and left" (New York Times, 4-2-98). In response, Taliban authorities closed the nation's doors to any female employees of the United Nations unless accompanied by a male relative. This marked the deterioration of the U.N.-Taliban relations, leaving the gender issue in Afghanistan unresolved.

HISTORY/BACKGROUND:

Afghanistan is a landlocked country located in Southern Asia north and west of Pakistan and east of Iran. Currently the population is at 24,792,375 with a birth rate of 42.37 births per 1,000 population and a mortality rate of 17.4 deaths per 1,000 population. A wide variety of ethnic and linguistic groups reside in Afghanistan of which Pashtun and Tajiks are the most abundant. Other groups include Uzbeks, Hazaras, Aimaks, Turkmen, and Baloch. The majority of Afghans are Muslim with Sunnis making up 90% and the other 10% consisting of Shiites. Small groups of Afghan Sikhs and Hindus also exist in Afghanistan



(CIA Factbook).

Years of bloodshed, political upheaval, and civil war have plagued Afghanistan since 1978 when the Communists People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan invaded the country. "The Saur revolution of 20 years ago is perhaps the single event that most upset the political framework in Afghanistan leading to the chaos in the country ever since" (BBC News 1). Popular resistance and factionalism towards the People's Democratic Party allowed the Soviet Red Army to invade in 1979. In the following 10 years of occupation millions of Afghans fled the country until turmoil in the U.S.S.R caused the occupiers to pull out in 1979. As a result, the Soviets left a puppet leader in office until Muslim Holy Warriors, the Mujahideen, took over in 1992 with the Peshawar Agreement. Under the rule of the Mujahideen, tens of thousands of innocent civilians were killed and countless others injured as different groups fought their way around the city and other parts of country. The near devastation of Afghanistan's capital, Kabul, led Pakistan to support a tribe of Pashtun refugees, the Taliban.

The Taliban, a Sunni Muslim rebel group, presently controls two thirds of the nation including its capital. The word talib means "God's students", hence giving the name Taliban. Claiming to be students of Islam, the Taliban preaches that Allah has sent them to implement the Sharee'ah (Islamic law). The Taliban feel that, as teachers and students of Islam, the Afghan population should accept their leadership of the nation. As stated by the Governor of Nangarhar Maulvi Abdul Kabeer, "Every human has a goal and objective in his life. The Taliban people have chosen their goal, the implementation of Sharee'ah and the Afghan public have accepted Islam as their religion."

CURRENT STATUS:

Imagine if a band of machine gun-toting zealots overtook your city – overnight – imposing laws that sounded like science fiction: burning books, confiscating TV sets, outlawing toys, making it a crime to fly a kite, and punishing severe crimes by amputation, beheading, and hanging. That's not fiction. It's Afghanistan. For men here, life is difficult; for women it's intolerable.

--Dateline NBC

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/Wplat/1999-05/11/0021-051199-idx.html>

After conquering Afghanistan's capital, Kabul, in September of 1996, the Taliban began incorporating their radical beliefs into the political system. Using force, the Taliban army opened fire on all civilians not practicing the Sunni Muslim religion. Thousands were detained in the city jail and at least several hundred bodies were buried in the desert outside the city. But this was only the beginning. Men are now being forced to leave their homes, families and jobs to join the army and fight for the Taliban army. Frequent checks are made by



officials policing the streets for people with any sign of western influenced hair or clothing style, and all beards must be at least 3 inches in length. If men do not meet these standards, the violator most often faces imprisonment. It is not uncommon to see public amputations, stoning and executions performed by the Taliban officials. Opposition to the government is strictly forbidden and men are beaten or executed for failing to attend the five daily prayer sessions required by the Sharee'ah.

All books not of religious context have been burnt and banned, and children are primarily educated in the Sunni Muslim religion. Female children are forbidden to receive any schooling whether private, public or in the home. "Non-religious music, cassette tapes, TV and movies are all banned. Multi-colored signs are prohibited.....Children cannot fly kites, play chess or play with pigeons since it distracts them from their religious studies." (http://www.nutshellnotes.com/afghanistan_text.htm) But perhaps the most shocking thing is the way children are beaten and punished like adults.

One mother tells us her son can't stop talking about watching a thief get his hand chopped off. Her daughter has had nightmares ever since she was beaten with a metal rod by one of the Taliban's religious enforcers for not wearing a Burqa, even though she was only eight years old at the time.

Zohra Rasekh

Even more devastating is the lack of human rights granted to women. After the Taliban gained control of Afghanistan, girls' schools were shut down and women were banned from the work force. Women are required to remain in their homes unless accompanied by a male relative and fully clothed from head to toe in a burqa, a shroud-like veil that leaves only a small slit to see out of. This intricate garment costs three months salary; more money than an unemployed woman can earn. "Thirty five thousand women are now trapped in their homes because they can't be seen in public without their husbands" (Clotman 1). Women's health care has significantly declined as well. According to a 1998 survey published in The Journal of the American Medical Association, 71% and 81% of 160 women reported a decline in physical and mental health status and 62% reported a decline in access to health care. (http://www.ama-assn.org/special/womh/library/readroom/vol_280/jsc80298.htm) Whether for a terminal illness or simply the common cold, women may not receive treatment or even see a doctor. It is against Taliban law to be directly questioned or examined by a male other than a woman's husband, and because female doctors are no longer allowed to practice, women are denied healthcare.

Despite all of the human rights violations, the Taliban has strengthened Afghanistan as a nation. The economy has grown tremendously, and drug trafficking has been minimized. As put by one supporter of the Taliban, "I'm helping them because they're doing the right thing for the country. They've brought peace and security, law and order, things that the country was in incredible need of." (Leile Helms) However, to complicate the issue, the United



Nation refuses to acknowledge the Taliban as the official government of Afghanistan.

BLOC POSITIONS:

Many foreign nations have become entangled in the Taliban crisis. While some have clear positions on the topic, others are still unwilling to commit to a definite side. It is your job as a delegate to accurately represent your country and form an alliance, or bloc, with nations who hold similar beliefs.

Because Afghanistan is predominately a Muslim country, the surrounding Islamic states feel very strongly regarding the Taliban. Pakistan, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, and Uzbekistan support the Taliban because of their attitudes toward Islam. The Taliban owes most of its success to Pakistan's military and it is often said the Taliban is merely Pakistan's puppet government. In addition, Pakistan was instrumental in securing Saudi and American support for the religious refugees in Afghanistan.

On the other side of the coin, Iran, Russia, Tajikistan, Hazaras (Hazara is a northern Afghani ethnicity), and members of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), fear a flood of refugees, increased flow of drugs and the spread of Islamic fundamentalism. A rivalry exists between the Taliban and Iran who feel the extreme religious practices of the Taliban give Islam a bad name. (http://www.nutshellnotes.com/afghanistan_text.htm) This issue is further complicated by the fact that more than 1,000 miles of the Iranian – Afghani border are no longer safe. After the death of eight Iranian journalists in Afghanistan, the Iranian Shiite leadership promised to use force and the Sunni Muslim Taliban placed troops on the border to defer conflict.

Other countries, such as the United States have not yet chosen a definite side. Originally, the U.S. supported the Taliban because they helped removed the communist regime, decreased drug trafficking and would hopefully bring overall unity and stability for the once war-torn country. As a result, trade doors for oil and other Afghani exports would be open to the United States. Recently, the tables were turned when the Taliban began to infringe upon basic human rights, greatly upsetting the western bloc.

(note: Pay special attention to national history of problems with international recognition.)

COMMITTEE MISSION:

In attempting to resolve the human rights issues in Afghanistan, it is imperative for the General Assembly to consider the religious, economic, and political strife plaguing the country. However, before any action is taken the international community must determine whether or not to recognize the Taliban as the official government of Afghanistan. Choosing not to recognize the Taliban may cause further complications and create conflicts between countries.



This is an extremely delicate issue and it is necessary that delegates acknowledge all aspects of the conflict. While fundamentalism could create problems in the future, it has also imposed restrictions on corruption and crime. This committee must determine whether the economic surplus is worth the deterioration in human rights.

Delegates must note that there is increasing tension between Iran and Afghanistan, and in the result of a war humanitarian groups might discontinue their support for the Afghani people.

We strongly urge you to consider the option of sending UN monitors into Afghanistan to organize and supervise a free election in which all citizens may vote for the government of their choice. However, this is just an option and the schematics must be worked out before endorsing this idea. The Afghani people long for stability and in attempting to tackle the Taliban, the UN must not ignore their needs.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

1. Where is your nation located in relation to Afghanistan? Are you concerned about refugees or Islamic fundamentalism spreading to your nation?
2. What are your ties to the Islamic movement? Do you have a large Muslim population? If so, are the predominantly Shiite or Sunni?
3. What is your nation's record on human rights violations/ What safeguards have you instituted to prevent such violations? Especially violations of women's rights?
4. In your country's recent history, have you experienced any questions of international recognition of either your government or an internal faction?

Sources:

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