

other violations of human rights as well as violations of international humanitarian law; strongly condemned the murder of Iranian diplomats in Afghanistan by Taliban combatants; recalled its condemnation of the murders of members of the UNSMA and the personnel of humanitarian agencies in areas controlled by the Taliban, demanded that these crimes be investigated, and that the Taliban ensure the safety and security of all international personnel; supported the steps taken by the Secretary-General to launch investigations into alleged mass killings of prisoners of war and civilians in Afghanistan; expressed concern at the sharp deterioration of the humanitarian situation in several areas in Central and Northern Afghanistan caused by the Taliban-imposed blockade of the Bamyan region; strongly urged the Taliban to let humanitarian agencies attend to the needs of the population; and reiterated that the continuation of the conflict in Afghanistan provides a fertile ground for terrorism and illegal drug production and trafficking, and called on the leaders of the Afghan parties to halt such activities.

## OTHER REPORTS

### Commission on the Status of Women

#### Office of the Special Advisor on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women

The UN Special Advisor on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women led a seven-member mission to Afghanistan from 12 to 24 November 1997 (Report of the United Nations Interagency Gender Mission to Afghanistan). The mission visited selected areas in Afghanistan and Pakistan, including assistance-supported projects, and interviewed a wide range of assistance agency officials, local authorities, NGO staff, community leaders and Afghan nationals. The focus of the mission was to examine the condition of women in Afghanistan, the contexts within which external assistance is conceived and delivered, the ways that the international community can address gender concerns in the delivery of aid, and indicators that can be used to ensure the appropriate monitoring of assistance activities. The report offers guidelines for strengthening the role of women in Afghanistan, based on a principle-centred approach, and addresses the rights of women at risk, in light of the absence of state structures that promote and protect respect for human rights. Consideration is also given to ways that UN agencies should incorporate principles for gender awareness, mainstreaming and balance in their own personnel and programming practices, noting that the reform of these UN practices is critical to the effective implementation of future assistance. The report specifically includes information on, *inter alia*: background to the interagency gender mission; the principle-centred approach to gender in Afghanistan; the socio-economic environment — health, food security, water, sanitation and environment, education, employment and income-generation programmes; the rights of women at risk; governance; and UN practices. Proposed guidelines and related indicators for implementing the principle-centred approach are also included.

The overall objective of the Mission was to help field operations clarify the context, principles and goals of their work with reference to the principle-centred approach toward gender. The Mission was specifically mandated to: assess the gender situation in Afghanistan; propose practical, field-oriented guidelines to address gender concerns in the implementation of assistance programmes; recommend a code of conduct for all UN, implementing and partner agencies and groups working in Afghanistan; establish key indicators in selected major assistance sectors; and, recommend monitoring and accountability mechanisms for reaching assistance goals.

The report recalls that the principle-centred approach, intended to guide UN operations in Afghanistan, was adopted in the form of recommendations by the Executive Committee on Humanitarian Affairs (ECHA) of the UN, in June 1997. The ECHA also endorsed the establishment of an ad hoc Interagency Task Force on Gender in Afghanistan, under the leadership of the Secretary-General's Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women. The approach includes nine general directives: (a) life-sustaining assistance activities will include all Afghans in need, including women and men; (b) the rehabilitation of Afghanistan's socio-economic infrastructure must benefit women and men equally in participation and results; (c) community-based rehabilitation must benefit women and men equally in participation and results; (d) the Taliban will be urged to guarantee the security of women engaged in assistance activities, and not prohibit their participation on the basis of security concerns; (e) UN agencies will not engage in institution-building until discriminatory practices cease; (f) UN agencies will maintain discussions with the Taliban with a view toward bringing about their adherence to the principles of the Universal Declaration, so that institution-building will be possible at a later date; (g) UN agencies will be sensitive to cultural practices, sensibilities and approaches toward these issues in urban and rural areas; (h) UN agencies will strive to ensure that all staff will be allowed to work effectively, securely and in accordance with their expertise; (i) UN and implementing agencies will undertake to convey a consistent approach to these issues with the Taliban, and UN agency heads will not offer unilateral declarations of UN human rights practices and principles. The approach was intended to enable the continuation of life-sustaining, immediate survival and other humanitarian activities, while, at the same time, recognizing that selective disengagement of some UN agencies from some institutional assistance programmes might be necessary.

The report states that the principle-centred approach can be applied in three different ways, each with related problems, namely:

- ♦ strict application: requiring that programmes be ended if "equal participation and benefit" is not possible; applying principles in this way has adversely affected the people of Afghanistan — and, in particular, women and girls — by removing assistance specifically because women cannot participate in certain programmes — either at all or at parity with men;