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## HUMAN RIGHTS IN AFGHANISTAN

### ISSUE

The human rights situation in Afghanistan is among the world's worst. The ongoing civil war is being fought with great brutality and complete disregard for the safety of civilians. Lawlessness reigns throughout much of the country: security and personal freedoms are almost entirely absent while violence, including torture and murder, are widespread.

### BACKGROUND

Since the toppling of Kabul's communist regime by the *mujahadeen* in 1989, Afghanistan has been without a functioning central authority. The "government" of President Rabbani, in place since 1992, has not been able to extend its writ much beyond the immediate area of the capital. The rest of the country is a patchwork of separate fiefdoms, only some of whose leaders pay nominal allegiance to the authorities in the capital.

Afghanistan has been in a state of *de facto* civil war for the last two years. Intense factional fighting, which erupted on January 1, 1994, has inflicted death and suffering on the civilian population of Kabul and other provinces, resulting in military and civilian casualties in the hundreds and injuries in the thousands. This chaotic situation has resulted in a widespread breakdown of legal and humanitarian norms. Violence is dispensed on ethnic, religious, factional, regional, and gender lines, and numerous armed groups terrorize the populace.

Artillery attacks aimed at civilian targets have caused large numbers of casualties, especially in and around Kabul. Refugees have been vulnerable to abduction and mistreatment at the hand of checkpoint guards and other armed groups. Such groups routinely invade civilian homes to seize property and frighten the populace.

Women live in constant fear of rape by armed gangs, and rape has been used as a tool by armies intent on terrorizing conquered populations. Women have also been vulnerable to crude versions of Islamic justice, dispensed by fundamentalist groups, including stoning for adultery. Summary and vigilante justice is dispensed by *mujahadeen* groups and local warlords, and executions are frequent. Beatings and torture, in diverse and gruesome forms, are meted out to political detainees and military captives.

The situation in many parts of Afghanistan is, in short, brutal and tragic.

### CANADIAN POSITION

A lasting peace settlement is a necessary precondition for ending Afghanistan's human rights tragedy. The Canadian Government, through its High Commission in Islamabad, closely monitors the situation in Afghanistan, and consults with the UNHCR and other international organizations on meaningful and practical ways to achieve peace. Canada has strongly

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