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HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION IN AFGHANISTAN

ISSUE

The political situation in Afghanistan remains essentially unchanged due to continued factional fighting. This situation amounts to a civil war. The human rights situation is of grave concern: abuses are widespread and are being perpetrated by all the warring factions, particularly in the Kabul area.

BACKGROUND

The intense factional fighting that erupted on January 1, 1994, continues to inflict senseless deaths and needless suffering on a brutally battered civilian population in various parts of Afghanistan, including in and around Kabul. Military and civilian casualties to date are in the hundreds, and injuries are in the thousands. The ongoing fighting represents an effort by Prime Minister Hekmatyar, aligned with northern warlord and Communist proponent, General Rasheed Dostum, and other factions to oust President Rabbani and Defence Minister Masood.

Initiatives by the UN, Pakistan and Iran, among others, to end the fighting have been largely ignored by the warring factions. The UN Special Representative for Afghanistan, Sotirios Mousouris, has been active in trying to convince the factions to cease fighting, but with little effect. However, there has been a recent encouraging development with a number of faction leaders, including President Rabbani, apparently having agreed in principle (albeit with some caveats) to a peace plan put forward by Ambassador Mahmoud Mestiri, the UN Secretary General's Special Envoy. It remains now for those faction leaders who have not accepted the proposed peace plan formula to reconsider their position.

The present military impasse, and the demonstrated intention of the various factions to continue the conflict, makes a durable ceasefire, or a military solution, unlikely. In the meantime, there is little else other interested foreign parties can do of a practical or political nature in response to the Afghanistan debacle, beyond calling for an end to the hostilities and supporting the efforts of others in this direction.

CANADIAN POSITION

Canada's High Commission in Islamabad continues to monitor the situation in Afghanistan (Canada has not had diplomatic relations with Afghanistan since the invasion by the former Soviet Union in 1980), and consults with the UNHCR and other international organizations. Canada has disbursed or pledged a total of \$6.5 million through UN and other international organizations. Some of these funds are directed to assist refugees from the Afghanistan conflict.

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