

## AFGHANISTAN

### ISSUE:

The human rights situation in Afghanistan.

### BACKGROUND:

Developments concerning Afghanistan during 1988 offer some hope for a resolution to the conflict there, and a consequent improvement in the human rights situation. Seven years of UN-sponsored indirect talks culminated in the signature of the Geneva Accords on Afghanistan on April 14, 1988. The Accords entered into force on May 15. They required the Soviet Union to withdraw half its troops by August 15, which it did. The remainder are to be withdrawn by February 15, 1989.

However, on November 4, the Soviet Union announced that it was suspending its troop withdrawal, although they indicated that the February 15 deadline would still be met. The Soviets also announced the provision and deployment of more advanced weapons, including MIG-27 aircraft and SS-1 (SCUD) missiles. These have since been heavily used against Mujahideen positions, which has resulted in fresh influxes of refugees into Pakistan.

Meanwhile, widespread fighting has continued as the Mujahideen (who did not support the Accords, and are not a party to them) seek to overthrow the Afghan regime supported by the Soviet Union. Direct talks between the Soviets and the Mujahideen on the return of prisoners of war have broadened into discussions on a political settlement to complement the Soviet withdrawal. If those talks are not successful, the Mujahideen and Kabul Government forces will continue their efforts to resolve the situation by military means. In that event, it will be some time before a national representative government emerges in Kabul. Until that time, there is unlikely to be a significant improvement in the human rights situation, and the five million Afghan refugees in Pakistan and Iran are unlikely to return home.

This year, the Commission on Human Rights was for the first time able to consider a report by its Special Rapporteur, Felix Ermacora, which was based on actual visits to Afghanistan. His visits, and those by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) to prisons, were permitted under the policy of national reconciliation announced by the Kabul government on January 1, 1987. However the policy is for the most part a propaganda tool used by the Afghan government in its efforts to seek international recognition and legitimacy, and it is clear that the human rights situation in Afghanistan remains grim.