

others, with women among those who suffer most because of severe restrictions on their education and employment, and the obligation to wear what is described as Islamic dress. On the question of the freedom to manifest one's religion or belief, the report refers to information indicating that non-Muslims are unable to practise their religion freely and Muslims are said to be forced to attend Friday prayers at the mosque. The report also refers to incidents of mistreatment.

**Torture, Special Rapporteur on:** (E/CN.4/1998/38, paras. 9–10; E/CN.4/1998/38/Add.1, paras. 1–2)

The report notes that two urgent appeals were sent, one concerning the application of amputation as a form of punishment. The Special Rapporteur (SR) expressed concern over the use of extreme forms of corporal punishment often specifically inflicted on women where it was determined that they had been involved in offences of a moral nature.

The SR noted that sentences of amputation may be decreed following summary trials by Islamic Courts or may be carried out on the orders of Taliban commanders or other officials. Amputation was said to be performed by doctors or, in some cases, by Taliban guards. The SR appealed to the Taliban authorities to ensure that no further acts of amputation are carried out. An urgent appeal was also sent on behalf of an opposition general and former governor of Herat province who was reportedly arrested by other opposition forces in May 1997 and handed over to the Taliban authorities in the city of Kandahar.

**Violence against women, Special Rapporteur on:** (E/CN.4/1998/54, Section I.A)

The Special Rapporteur (SR) referred to a number of points relative to Taliban edicts and their impact on the situation of women, including the virtual ban on women in the public sphere which has had devastating consequences for the health care system in Kabul. Women nurses who have gone to help patients have been repeatedly beaten by the Taliban guards. The report states that, though the Taliban has taken the denial of the human rights of women to new lows, laying down rule after rule denying women their basic human rights, all warring factions in Afghanistan are responsible for violating women's human rights. The SR stated that the international community has yet to take concerted action to ensure the protection of women's rights in Afghanistan; and if members of the international community have provided support to the warring factions, as it is alleged, then they have a duty to ensure that women's rights are protected by the factions that receive the foreign assistance.

## OTHER THEMATIC REPORTS

**Children affected by armed conflict, Special Representative:** (A/53/482, paras. 43, 45–48)

The Secretary-General's Special Representative (SRep) made two assessment visits to Afghanistan and

Pakistan in January and March 1998. The report notes the following main problems affecting children: severe poverty, which is manifested in multiple ways such as street children and children being recruited for military purposes; lack of access to education and health services; discriminatory practices against girls; physical disabilities owing to mine casualties and non-existent or poor health-care facilities; and psychological trauma. The SRep stated that in the complex humanitarian emergency situation that prevails in Afghanistan, children and women suffer doubly; they suffer from both the devastations of the ongoing war and by the difficulties of the humanitarian assistance community in providing protection and relief.

The SRep identified the following types of initiatives to guide future efforts: improving children's access to humanitarian assistance, including non-life-saving assistance such as education; encouraging donors and implementing partners to give priority to assistance programmes and provide a coordinated response in such key areas as emergency food and health care, education, mine clearance and awareness, drug control, creation of employment opportunities and support for displaced persons and their voluntary repatriation; highlighting the plight of children affected by the war as part of an effort to mobilize domestic and international pressure on Afghan parties and involved governments to, at the minimum, desist from violating children and, ideally, to undertake meaningful efforts at finding a peaceful solution to the conflict; and advocacy with Afghan political groups and governments of neighbouring countries to ensure that children are not recruited for military purposes.

## GENERAL ASSEMBLY

### Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights

The Special Rapporteur's (SR) interim report to the 1998 General Assembly (A/53/539) notes that the security situation, arising from events in northern Afghanistan in August 1998, made it impossible to visit Afghanistan and Pakistan. As an alternative, the SR tried to obtain the most credible information possible from reliable sources on the events that occurred in the city of Mazar-I-Sharif, which was taken over on 8 August 1998 by the Taliban and forces allied with them. A memorandum was drafted containing allegations of violations of human rights and submitted to the representatives of the Taliban movement for comments and observations. The report reproduces, verbatim, both the memorandum and the Taliban's reply.

The memorandum referred to widespread killings and atrocities and noted that the Hazara ethnic minority was principally targeted, although not exclusively. Violations of rights included, *inter alia*: widespread, random and indiscriminate killings without warning (the estimated total number of killings ranging between 5,000 and 8,000), noting that bodies remained on the streets for