



Statements and Speeches

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THE SOVIET OCCUPATION OF AFGHANISTAN

Statement by Stephen Lewis, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Canada to the United Nations, to the Fortieth Session of the United Nations General Assembly, New York, November 12, 1985.

Mr. President. The reports of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) say it all. At regular intervals, these short documents cross the desks of the missions here in New York, setting out, in unemotional language, the chronicle of a ghastly war.

Each report — "Afghan Sitreps" they're called — up-dates the activities of the Red Cross in the border areas of Pakistan. Let me quote briefly from report number 40, issued in July of this year:

"During July, an exceptionally high level of military operations in Paktia Province (Afghanistan) resulted in the highest ever number of war-casualties evacuated through the ICRC/Pakistan Red Crescent Society first-aid mobile post in Miramshah to the surgical hospital in Peshawar... In addition to intense surgical activities, the orthopaedic and paraplegic centres were also very busy, and a high level of activity was recorded for all other ICRC programmes in favour of Afghan conflict victims."

Report number 41 issued in early September, showed no let-up in the fighting. Indeed, throughout the summer of 1985, the casualties mounted. In the words of the Red Cross: "The number of patients continued to increase during August, and over last weekend, emergency measures had to be taken to strengthen ICRC's medical facilities with the provision of additional personnel and equipment."

The report goes on:

"The two surgical teams in Peshawar, as well as the specialized medical staff made available by the National Societies of Denmark, Finland, New Zealand, Norway and Sweden had to cope with the highest number of admissions ever recorded at the hospital. For two weeks from the middle of August... the hospital... reached its maximum capacity with the evacuation of two tents in the hospital compound... It is not possible to further extend the capacity of the hospital and it is, therefore, necessary to establish an independent field hospital in Peshawar with the staff to run it, and to find additional staff for the existing surgical structure."

In the sorry human saga of invasion, depredation and tyranny, the numbers recorded in these reports seem relatively low. For example, in the little field hospital in Peshawar during the month of July, there were 199 war-wounded admitted, 478 surgical operations performed, and 962 patients otherwise treated. But you take those figures, and you multiply them by the network of field hospitals and mobile emergency stations in Pakistan and Iran, as well as the tens of thousands of casualties dealt with in Afghanistan itself; and you further multiply them by 12 months in the year, and by a war which has raged with unrelieved ferocity for almost six years, and then you note the constant references to