

day and night to contact the 1,000 Canadians living in that country, provide for the safety and security of Canadian staff and their dependants, and process numerous visa applications for spouses of Canadians holding dual citizenship who wanted to go to Canada. The diplomats also assisted Canadian journalists arriving in Pakistan with the intent of entering Afghanistan, many of whom experienced problems. One journalist was kidnapped but later released through the efforts of the High Commission. Workload demands mounted as the situation worsened, and on October 9—two days after the start of bombing in Afghanistan—a dozen Canadian employees and their families were evacuated to Ottawa.

The crisis arose almost as soon as Konrad Sigurdson arrived in Islamabad to take up his duties as High Commissioner. “My first full day of work at the mission was September 10,” he recalls. “In fact, I had two days to prepare because the time difference meant that the first attack in New York happened after 5:30 P.M. on September 11, Pakistan time. A number of us were still in the office and watched in

disbelief and horror as events unfolded. The full impact and realization that Afghanistan was going to be the new centre of world attention became evident over the next few days—and consequently that the situation in Pakistan, whose financial and political stability was already tenuous, was about to shift.”

The High Commission in Islamabad handles Canadian concerns in Afghanistan, positioning it on the front lines given Canada’s involvement in the U.S.-led military campaign. “We were already into a fire-hall readiness stage on October 7 when the air strikes began,” notes Gerry Lisk, Counsellor (Administration). After a tremendous effort to implement the emergency contingency plan and adapt it to the September 11 situation, High Commission staff were ready to act quickly in the event of military action. Within hours of the first air strikes, over a third of the Canadian employees and their families were on their way back to Canada.



In December 2001, Afghan refugees cross the border into Pakistan to escape from the heavy fighting around the southern Afghan city of Kandahar.

photo: Canadian Press CP