

News of serious breaches of international humanitarian law by the Taliban emerged in August 1998 soon after the Taliban captured **Mazar-I-Sharif**. Reports surfaced of mass killings of civilians, particularly of male members of the Hazara (Shia), Tajik and Uzbek communities. Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch have indicated that as many as 2,000 civilians may have been killed in the days following the takeover. Also killed were eight Iranian officials at the Iranian consulate and an Iranian journalist. It is believed that the killings were in retaliation for the massacre by thousands of Hazaras when the Taliban were driven out of Mazar-I-Sharif in 1997. The Taliban have agreed to allow an International Commission of Inquiry to investigate the August 1998 killings.

Consensus resolutions on Afghanistan are regularly adopted at both the **UN Commission on Human Rights** and the **UN General Assembly**. The mandate of the UN Special Rapporteur on the human rights situation in Afghanistan was extended by CHR in 1998. In March 1998, the Canadian delegation to the **UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW)** worked to ensure strong language in the first-ever USA-led resolution on the situation of women and girls in Afghanistan and co-sponsored that resolution. In December 1998, the UNGA resolution on human rights in Afghanistan led by Germany and co-sponsored by Canada was adopted. The resolution condemned the mass killings and systematic human rights violations against civilians and prisoners of war and called upon the Taliban to fulfil their stated commitment to cooperate in investigations of these crimes. It urged all the Afghan parties to extend their cooperation to the Commission on Human Rights and its Special Rapporteur on Afghanistan.

CANADIAN POSITION

A lasting peace settlement is a necessary precondition for ending Afghanistan's human tragedy. Canada has not had diplomatic relations with any regime in Kabul since the Soviet invasion in 1979, and our direct influence in Afghanistan is limited. Nevertheless, the Canadian Government, through its **High Commission in Islamabad**, closely monitors the situation, and consults with the UN Special Envoy, the UN Special Mission, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and other organizations with respect to the promotion of a peaceful settlement and the alleviation of the human rights situation. We view the UN Special Envoy and the Special Mission as the best mechanisms for achieving peace.

The Canadian Government is deeply troubled by the serious human rights violations in Afghanistan, especially the grave deterioration in women's rights in areas under Taliban control. Canada strongly supports the actions by the **UN** and its agencies to persuade the Taliban authorities to respect Afghanistan's international obligations on human rights. In this regard, Canada worked - in close cooperation with like-minded countries - on a strategic framework for development assistance activities to ensure that the delivery of assistance conforms to international human rights standards.

Canada continues to be one of the major donors supporting relief operations in Afghanistan. From 1990/91 to the present, Canada has provided C\$110 million in humanitarian assistance and food aid with a substantial component of our assistance being directed to vulnerable women. The principal activities, undertaken through UN agencies (such as UNICEF, UNHCR, WFP, UNOCHA, and ICRC), Canadian NGOs (Aga Khan Foundation, CARE - Canada, Doctors Without Borders - Canada), and through the Canada Fund for local initiatives, are demining, health programs, assistance to displaced persons and repatriation, and food aid. In 1998, CIDA contracted with CARE International to provide CDN\$3 million in food aid directly to 11,000 war widows and female-headed households in Kabul. In addition, CIDA contributed CDN\$2.9 million to ICRC's programming in Afghanistan, plus \$1.0 million to UNOCHA for demining activities.