

Mr. President:

On September 24th last, Mr. Eduard Shevardnadze, Foreign Secretary of the Soviet Union addressed this Assembly. In the course of his remarks, to which all of us listened respectfully, he said - quote - "The time has come to learn to call things by their own names. With regard to Afghanistan, a national democratic revolution has taken place there" - end quote.

He was immediately followed to this podium by Sir Geoffrey Howe, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the United Kingdom speaking on behalf of the European Community. At the point in his remarks when Sir Geoffrey was dealing with the question of Afghanistan, he departed abruptly and spontaneously from his text, fixed his eyes on the seats of the delegates from the Soviet Union and said, quote - "I cannot refrain from observing that... the Foreign Minister of the Soviet Union said that 'The time has come to learn to call things by their proper names'. I cannot refrain from expressing my astonishment and dismay that the facts which I have just described - the events which have taken place in the past six years in Afghanistan - were described by the Soviet Foreign Minister as 'a national, democratic revolution'. If that be their view, then it is not a view that can be shared by the rest of the world" - end quote.

Sir Geoffrey Howe then returned to his text. And I remember sitting in the Canadian delegation and thinking that it was one of those rare, fleeting moments when the issue was joined with simple, irrefutable clarity.

To call what has happened in Afghanistan 'a national democratic revolution' is to take language and subject it to a kind of Orwellian mutation, so that words are rendered meaningless. It is a linguistic mask designed to hide the brute face of oppression.

And we all know it. The United Kingdom knows it, Canada knows it, the vast majority of nations in this chamber know it. But nothing changes.

And that's the suffocating dilemma of this debate Mr. President. What can be said that has not been said before, by all of us, year after year in elaborate and angry repetition? How do we get these speeches to diminish the tragedy? How do we make of this United Nations forum a crucible where progress is real?

Canada last year - and indeed, in the five consecutive years before - put its feelings of concern, frustration and rage unequivocally on the record. We could do so, in similar terms, again. But perhaps there is a way of coming at the subject