

STATEMENT DISCOURS

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86/04

Remarks by the Secretary of
State for External Affairs,
the Right Honourable Joe Clark,
on the occasion of a visit to
an Afghan refugee camp in
Peshawar, Pakistan
on December 20, 1985

January 20, 1986.

I have come to this place, which you have been forced to make your home, from a country, Canada, that is very far away. I have brought with me five members of our Parliament, our Jirga, as you might call it, to learn for ourselves about your people's plight. We have all been deeply moved by what we have just heard.

Canadians have heard a great deal in recent years about your homeland, Afghanistan. It is a proud nation, that has been occupied by the armies of its powerful neighbour. Most nations in the world have condemned the occupation of your homeland. Our Government and Parliament, whom we represent here today, have consistently condemned the injustice that have been inflicted upon you.

Coming here today, and hearing your story told in your own words, has reinforced our understanding of the human consequences of the tragedy that has befallen you. After hearing your heart-breaking stories, I think we Canadians can better appreciate what it has meant to the people of Afghanistan to have your flocks scattered, your homes burned, your children injured, your relatives killed, and your families forced to flee across a distant border to seek refuge in another land.

Canada is a long way from Afghanistan. There is little we can do to assist directly your countrymen who are still struggling in Afghanistan to maintain their dignity, livelihood and independence. For those of you forced to flee from your homes we can offer some assistance.

We have been impressed by the generosity and determination of the Pakistani government and of the many international agencies in responding to your plight. Through these channels we have provided over 80 million dollars in Canadian wheat, Canadian cooking oil and Canadian financial aid to help feed and shelter your families while you are living in exile. I can guarantee that in the coming year, we will continue to provide assistance. Your need for a decent livelihood outside your homeland commands our continued support.

Your right to return to your homeland is undeniable. Equally, you have a right to a homeland free from foreign domination. The injustices visited upon you cannot be ignored. You are a symbol of resistance to tyranny and have earned the respect of free people everywhere. We hope and pray that you will all be able to return in peace, with freedom and dignity to your homeland".