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STATEMENTS AND SPEECHES

The Situation in Afghanistan
and its Implications
for International Peace and Security

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to the Plenary of the 41st Session
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Canada

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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

slightly differently; perhaps in brief recapitulation, it is possible to achieve a slightly different synthesis.

To begin with, let us be clear and precise in the use of language. Let us not engage in verbal defoliation.

Yesterday, the Soviet Union characterized the events of the last seven years as an "armed intervention" against the sovereign state of Afghanistan. The mere use of that phrase sets the mind reeling. Whose armed intervention? The Afghan people, the Afghan rebels have engaged in no intervention. You cannot take history and stand it on its head; it is an insult to every country in this chamber. When we speak of "armed intervention" we're talking about December, 1979, when the Soviet military juggernaut rolled into Kabul to instal a puppet fiefdom and subdue an entire people.

Yesterday, as well, we were told that mere discussions of Afghanistan constituted a violation of the UN Charter and the rules and principles of international law. I suppose, Mr. President, that that is meant to mean interference in the internal affairs of a member state. It's exactly the kind of argument which South Africa makes. But we don't give it any credence in that case; why should we give it any credence in this case?

We're talking about a premeditated act of military subjugation. How does that harmonize with international law, or with the words in the Charter which instruct member states to - quote - "refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or independence of any state...?" The Charter, when last read by Canada, had no chapter on territorial amalgamation by force of arms.

And yesterday again, to take this question of strangled language but one step further, it was argued that this debate is designed to destroy the fruits which the Revolution has brought to the Afghan people. That, Mr. President, was the very phrase: "The fruits".

Well Canada doesn't know what the Soviet Union has in mind; but for us, as for so many other nations, the fruits of the Revolution mean one million Afghans dead. And we must ask, with anguished desperation, for what crime? By what right? What is the end that justifies such means? What revolutionary fruitfulness transforms an entire country into a killing-field?

I guess, Mr. President, that's what makes such an overwhelming majority of nation-states so frantic about the horror of Afghanistan. The liquidation of the country and its

people knows no end. Every year the situation deteriorates; every year the chronicle grows more grim.

Let me explain.

Last year at this time, we knew of the use of booby-trap bombs, shaped as butterflies, and the terrible mutilation they inflicted, primarily on children. One year later, we have documentary evidence of these devices concealed in pens, cakes of soap, snuff-boxes, match-boxes, even a bundle of bank notes. It is almost inconceivable that in 1986, any invading army, no matter what the circumstances, no matter what the provocation, would use such weapons against innocent children. But it's being done. It suggests a sickness equivalent to depravity.

Last year at this time, we had a report from our Special Rapporteur on Human Rights violations in Afghanistan which was a profoundly distressing document, but still tentative in parts. One year later we have a report which is uniformly appalling. At paragraph 78, the Special Rapporteur concludes that the armed conflict "has given rise to so much human suffering that every effort must be made to end it". And at paragraph 124, as others have pointed out, the Special Rapporteur comes to the opinion that a continuation of the military solution "will lead inevitably to a situation approaching genocide". Mr. President, Canada cannot think of another report on human rights violations in any individual country which raises the spectre of genocide.

Last year at this time we had rumours and impressions of the use of torture. One year later, we have from the UN Special Rapporteur concrete evidence of the torture of women in ways which make the blood run cold.

Last year at this time, I quoted from Red Cross reports to give a sense of how savage was the military conflict. One year later, the little Red Cross hospitals at Peshawar and Quetta, just inside the Pakistan border, have shown themselves consistently packed with the dying, the wounded, the permanently-maimed. Peshawar is only 100 beds; Quetta only 60. Yet, they've been the sites for literally thousands of surgical operations, not to mention servicing some 50 to 70 thousand out-patients.

Last year at this time, we had heard of the practice of transporting young children - including orphans - abroad for what was appropriately-termed ideological education. Now, one year later, we know, categorically, that at least a thousand children a year, probably more, are sent to the Soviet Union for various periods of time. There is every reason to believe that this is frequently done without either the knowledge or

consent of the parents, where parents there are. More than that, the UN Special Rapporteur has established to his satisfaction that much of the education provided in those areas of Afghanistan within the control of Soviet and government forces, rejects traditional religious, cultural and moral values. As such, it is an explicit and dreadful violation of international human rights Covenants.

Last year at this time, all of us had seen and read the extraordinary, if despairing, Helsinki Watch publication entitled "Tears, Blood and Cries": Human Rights in Afghanistan Since The Invasion". One year later, in the interim, we have seen the supplementary volume entitled "To Die In Afghanistan", containing a remarkable number of eye witness accounts all of which attest, unanswerably, to an ugly, inhuman war... a war which has indiscriminately devastated the countryside, decimated the population, and driven thousands more each month out of their own land into Pakistan or Iran. We now know that the day is fast approaching when the numbers of refugees outside Afghanistan, and the numbers of uprooted and dispossessed inside Afghanistan, will total more than 50 percent of the entire population at the time of the invasion. Mr. President, it is beyond human comprehension.

Last year at this time, we knew that Pakistan's borders were intermittently violated by selective acts of infiltration and aggression. One year later, we know that the pattern has escalated dramatically, as documented in the eloquent speech of the Foreign Minister of Pakistan when he yesterday opened this debate. Canada, along with so many others, expresses full solidarity with Pakistan, as well as our enormous admiration for the humanitarian response to millions of refugees and the stoic resistance to intimidation and subversion.

Last year at this time there was no talk of troop withdrawal. One year later, we have witnessed the departure of six Soviet Regiments as announced in the July speech of General Secretary Gorbachev. It matters little whether this is an elaborate military sleight of hand, or an adroit reshuffling of tanks, or the actual removal of men and machines whose presence in Afghanistan may or may not have been useful. What matters is that over 110,000 men, and all of their collective apparatus of war, remain behind for the systematic purpose of pacification. The world needs more than tokens as evidence of good faith.

Finally, Mr. President, last year at this time, the negotiations conducted by Mr. Diego Cordovez, under the aegis of the Secretary-General of the United Nations, had not yet reached the moment of truth: the precise question of troop withdrawal. But in the intervening year, with a magnificent

and gifted tenacity which we honour and support, the United Nations team focussed the parties on the issue. And what happened? Despite the completion of most of the details of the other items of negotiation, the Soviet Union would not give a reasonable time-frame for troop withdrawal.

Mr. President, it took them only 72 hours to get in. It need take no more than a week or two to get out. But if the political will is absent, then the military might remains.

The Afghanistan tragedy is one of othe most difficult and gloomy realities of contemporary international politics. When you look at it, year over year, it presents an unbroken facade of intractability.

In Canada, a joint committee of the House of Commons and Senate, representative of all three political parties, recently issued a report on International Relations. In the section devoted to Afghanistan there appears the following unanimous paragraph - quote

"This wholesale destruction of a people is being carried out by the Soviet Union and its puppet regime in Kabul for no other reason than crude geopolitical ambition. The Soviet Union has dispatched over 100,000 of its troops with the immediate aim of violent repression and the longer-term objective of reducing Afghanistan to a Soviet colony. As has happened so often in the history of colonialism, the imperial power failed to reckon with the national spirit and independence of the people. Despite the terrible slaughter, the Afghan people have not been subjugated. They are continuing to fight."

It is the heroism of that fight Mr. President, which brings us to this resolution and our imminent vote.

There are two tests confronting the General Assembly. One is for the Soviet Union. When the new General Secretary of the Soviet Union came to power, we all wanted to believe, and he wanted all of us to believe that there would be a new face on Soviet foreign policy. Afghanistan scars the countenance.

The Soviet Union would do itself an enormous favour and do the international community an incalculable boon were it to accept the reasonable contents of this resolution, the

precepts of the Charter, the clamour of nation-states, the cries of the people of Afghanistan, and get out of that country.

The second test, however, is for the rest of us. If we can do no more in this arena than to keep the issue alive, to keep the pressure on and to keep the Soviet Union aware of the monumental ignominy of its position until one day that position is changed, then at least let us continue to do it overwhelmingly.

There are few issues in this world which unite virtually all of us. South Africa is one of them; Afghanistan should be another. Even those in nominal ideological alliance with the Soviet Union should on Afghanistan break ranks. It probably will not happen, but it should happen.

We're talking about a relatively small country, a terribly vulnerable country, a country which, given any chance, would return to the solidarity of the non-aligned. It is also a country in agony... in agony for no reason, conceivable or defensible, that has ever been plausibly advanced in this Assembly.

During the course of our intervention last year, I said on behalf of Canada that if we were back again, same time, this year, it is because the Soviet Union continues to believe that nihilism is preferable to negotiation; that butchery is preferable to bargaining.

Harsh words, I concede. But we're back again.

Thank you, Mr. President.