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AFGHANISTAN DAY

Statement by
The Secretary of State for External Affairs

The Honourable Mark MacGuigan, Secretary of State for External Affairs, issued the following statement today to mark the observance of Afghanistan Day, this Sunday, March 21.

The people of Afghanistan have traditionally celebrated the beginning of a new year on March 21. As that date approaches, the Government of Canada wishes to restate its deep concern about the situation in Afghanistan and the tragic conditions that have been brought about there by the actions of the Soviet Union. Many legislative bodies in the Free World, including the European Parliament and the American Congress, have passed resolutions designating March 21 as Afghanistan Day in their countries.

We have now entered the third year since the Soviet invasion and occupation of Afghanistan, an invasion condemned by the Government of Canada as a breach of the principles of the United Nations Charter and a violation of the sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence of a UN member.

The Soviet Union has consistently refused to respond to international efforts directed at achieving a just solution to the situation in Afghanistan. Not only have the three resolutions passed by an overwhelming majority at the United Nations General Assembly been ignored, but all other initiatives aimed at achieving a just settlement have been rejected.

The current régime in Afghanistan, which was installed by the Soviet Union, is opposed by the vast majority of the Afghan people. In spite of the presence of almost 100,000 Soviet troops, the Afghan resistance movement controls most of the countryside and has mounted an effective opposition to the Soviet occupation. The Government of Canada is deeply concerned by the suffering and hardship which the Afghan people are experiencing under foreign occupation, including the bombing of innocent civilian populations, and the destruction of the homes and means of livelihood of these people.

The most stark indication of the severe conditions imposed on the Afghan people is the exodus of approximately three million refugees from their homeland. It is now estimated that at least one Afghan in seven lives in a refugee camp outside the borders of his country. Canada has contributed over 13 million dollars toward the support of refugees and further assistance is to be provided. This assistance, however, meets only an immediate need. What the refugees need most is to be able to return to their farms and villages in safety and honour under a settlement which restores freedom to Afghanistan.

A solution of the Afghanistan situation can only be brought about by the withdrawal of Soviet forces and by allowing the Afghan people to choose freely how and by whom they will be governed.

The Government of Canada wishes to ask again that the Soviet Union respond positively to the international efforts aimed at achieving a solution which encompasses the withdrawal of Soviet troops and the restoration of a fully independent, non-aligned Afghanistan.