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# REFUGEES REFUGIES FLÜCHTLINGE REFUGIADOS

November 79/CFN

## REFUGEES FROM AFGHANISTAN

(For more than 18 months refugees have been fleeing Afghanistan. Most have sought refuge in Pakistan, with smaller numbers in Iran. In early October Mr. Arvid Ofstad, a staff member of Norwegian Church Aid, visited Pakistan to assess the needs among refugees from Afghanistan. Reproduced here, with permission, are extracts from his report, which is dated October 17, 1979.)

The very existence of refugees from Afghanistan in Pakistan and their many problems coping with survival in caves and tents or staying with relatives and friends in the frontier Provinces of Pakistan, are scarcely known to the outside world. The recent political and military developments and the current situation in Afghanistan, however, have to some extent been recorded in the world's mass media.

In April last year (1978) a squadron of tanks stormed president Mohammed Daud's palace in Kabul to launch a revolution. Mohammed Noor Taraki was placed in the president's chair, Hafizullah Amin was named Prime Minister, and former army commanders leading the coup against Daud achieved seats in the new Government. One of these former army commanders, Interior Minister Col. Aslam Vantayar, is already being spoken of as a potential future leader.

What lay behind the bloody street fighting in the Afghan capital on Sunday, August 5, 1979, no one yet knows. Press reports said hundreds died in the fighting, with Soviet-made helicopters firing rockets. The cause of the fighting was believed to be a mutiny by part of the Kabul army garrison. Although being explained as totally unexpected, there had for a couple of weeks been signs of trouble coming up. A cabinet reshuffle at the end of July may have been a move to forestall a possible coup. Prime Minister Amin took over the defense portfolio.

Another bloody fighting in Kabul on September 14 removed president Taraki and opened the way for Hafizullah Amin to take the president's seat. Taraki, believed to be seriously wounded during the fighting, died October 9.

The flow of refugees from Afghanistan to Pakistan started shortly after the coup in April 1978. During this year 25,000 Afghani sought refuge in Pakistan. The number of refugees increased during 1979 and UNHCR's (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) visiting mission reported in August/September more than 185,000 registered refugees. During eight months of 1979 this means an average of 20,000 per month. An unknown number of refugees, which have reached an estimated additional 200 - 300,000, have moved in with relatives and friends in Pakistan.

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Following the last coup of September 14 the flow of refugees has further increased. Newly arrived refugees report grave hostilities against the civilian population in Afghanistan. The civilians are exposed to military attacks on their villages (with napalm) as the authorities in power desperately seek to wipe out the guerillas opposing the self-constituted regime. Civilians are moreover faced with religious persecution as they are being killed for refusing to renounce their Moslem religion and their obedience to the Koran. Refugees have witnessed fellow villagers being lined up, shot with one shot and buried without knowingly being alive or dead. Religious belief is the main motivation for Afghanis to seek refuge in Pakistan (and Iran).

The government of Pakistan has taken serious interest in caring for the refugees. It provides Rupees 4.-\* per adult refugee and one-half that amount for children for daily food requirements. Tents are supplied to shelter the refugees who have entered Pakistan with very little means for self-reliance. Only nomads are able to care for themselves, having crossed the border to Pakistan with their families, household, equipment and cattle. Finding a place, however, for the nomads and their cattle creates problems as the border districts are very dry and lack grazing land. The Pakistan Red Crescent Society has arranged to give first aid medical assistance to most of the camps. A separate tent with some medical equipment is included in the camp organization, and a mobile Red Crescent team visits the camps at irregular intervals.

The majority of Afghani refugees have entered into North West Frontier Province (NWFP) of Pakistan. NWFP is a restricted area divided into Political Agencies (Districts) governed by appointed Political Agents. The Agency's health authority is the Agency Surgeon. As of October 10 the total number of refugees had passed 200,000 of which more than 150,000 are registered in camps in Baluchistan Province. There are 13 concentrations of refugees in NWFP. Only three of these are officially recorded as camps (organized settlements), namely Gandaf, Warzak and Chitral. Most of the refugees in these camps live in sturdy houses originally built for workers and their families engaged in the local dam projects. As the construction of the dams more or less is completed, the houses are vacated and made available for refugees.

With written permission from the Commissioner for Refugees, I visited the Warzak Camp. In addition to lodging the refugees in the dam project's living quarters, the Government had provided tents for some refugee families until more permanent houses can be made available. In a separate partition of the Camp 850 single men are being kept--they are idle as there is no employment opportunity for them in the area. Meals are being prepared for the men in the camp. The families arrange for their own food with the daily allowance received from the Pakistani Government. The refugees in Warzak Camp seemed to be in relatively good shape. They had no serious complaint except being inactive and their mutual grief for having been forced to flee their country and having lost one or more relatives during military attacks on their villages. They were all devoted Moslems strictly attending regular hours of prayer.

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In Peshawar I met with Dr. Helmandi, "Spokesman for Afghan Refugees in Pakistan", who in August contacted Norwegian Church Aid from London about the actual refugee problem. He reported that many refugees are living in caves in the mountains of the border areas of NWFP. The great majority of these refugees are in dire need of assistance in the forms of shelter, warm clothing and medicines. Inquiries made with Caritas and the local Protestant Hospitals in NWFP revealed that through cooperation with the various Political Agents in the District, safe distribution plans may be carried out even to the most remote and wayless areas. In order to care better for the refugees' health, a medical team from outside and preferably one or more lady doctors would be appropriate.

Baluchistan Province is host to some 50,000 refugees from Afghanistan. They live in 34 camps in the four districts of the Province: Quetta, Pishin, Zhob and Chagai. The refugee camps are well organized. Most of the refugees live in tents provided by the Pakistan Government. These tents, however, will not give sufficient shelter against the cold wind which dominates the province during the winter season starting in a few weeks' time.

Jalogir Camp on the road between Bustan and Kuchlac is a new camp of newly-arrived refugees. Their condition was desperate, especially among the families not yet having received tents. These families lived in small shacks put together by branches covered by small rugs.

In the city of Pishin a more permanent camp of mud-houses had been destroyed by the local people, the reason being that the refugees represented a threat of insecurity among the original inhabitants. The 3,500 refugees had been shifted to Surkhab Camp. Health conditions were poor, especially among the children. During a three-month period 120 babies had died from measles.

The Camp of Muslimbagh situated on a plateau at 8,000 feet (2,600m) was feared to be unbearable for the refugees during the cold winds sweeping through the area in the nearing winter. The refugees had already strengthened their tents by walls of mud. However, as the wind will force the temperature to minus 5-10 degrees Celsius, the tents will give very little protection. The Camp Officer was planning to move the camp to lower altitude.

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It is almost unbelievable that the presence of more than 200,000 refugees in Pakistan is a secret to world opinion. There seems to have been no interest whatsoever to reveal the suffering of the Afghan people. It is quite evident that Pakistan alone cannot cope with this refugee problem. The government of Pakistan is therefore inviting international organizations to assist in the caring for the refugees.

Norwegian Church Aid received confirmation that the assistance offered could be channelled through the Karachi based ecumenical Inter-Aid Committee. (NCA later remitted US\$100,000.)

As UN agencies concentrate on shelter and medicines and WFP will provide food, the NCA and other volags should supply clothing and quilts which are direly needed by the refugees in the nearing winter. Used clothing may be bought locally for the following prices: Sweaters

Rupees 2.- to Rupees 3.-, Jackets Rupees 5.- to Rupees 6.-, Blankets Rupees 20.- to Rupees 60.- (depending on size). Quilts are made locally and may be purchased for Rupees 80.-. However, as the refugees themselves are used to making their own quilts, fluffy cotton and cotton cloth may be provided for the refugees.

The Inter-Aid Committee meeting in Karachi on September 25 discussed details for the implementation of the assistance offered by the Christian community. Consultants to the Inter-Aid Committee are resident representatives of Church World Service, Catholic Relief Services and Caritas. Voluntary personnel assist in sorting and packing of the clothing. Transportation is arranged with responsible and safe trucking companies. At distribution points church and mission personnel are engaged in cooperation with local authority.

The Church World Service resident representative would look into the possibilities of recruiting a medical team from overseas including medicines and medical equipment. Norwegian Church Aid was urged to find a lady doctor who, with assistance from nurses of local mission hospitals, could visit the camps and treat children and feminine adults among the refugees.

Viewing the political situation in Afghanistan, there is little doubt that the number of refugees will increase. Although Pakistan would hope that the unfortunate refugees could soon make a safe return to their homeland, even the most optimistic judgements are for a long, though temporary, situation and an insecure future for the Afghan refugees and their host country. Consequently, the relief work will have to adapt to long-term assistance.

