

Will no free voice speak for Afghanistan?

The scene was at once surreal and profoundly melancholy. In a small dormitory room, set among the peaceful surroundings of a suburban Toronto campus, I met for an exclusive, secret interview with Prof. Barhannuddin Rabbani, leader of the largest and best-organized Afghan guerrilla group, the Jamiat Islami.

With Rabbani were four other guerrilla leaders from the new coalition of Afghans fighting for the freedom of their land from Soviet occupation. Thin, bearded mountain warriors who, with their turbans, sandals and Afghan dress, looked like men from an age long past — the men who were challenging the numerical and technological might of the Soviet Union.

Prof. Rabbani, with the face of a Sufi poet and the delicate hands of a surgeon, spoke quietly, urgently, his eyes filled with a sorrow that no Canadians, safe in our peaceful land, could understand.

"I appeal," said Rabbani, "to the Canadian people and government to condemn the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan; to condemn the massive genocide being committed against us."

Confirming Rabbani's charges of Soviet genocide in Afghanistan, the normally do-nothing United Nations that rarely speaks harshly of the East Bloc, has just issued a major report on Soviet brutality in Afghanistan. The UN documents mass killing, terror bombing of civilians, destruction of food supplies, torture and atrocities. In short, the report corroborates what we have been long hearing: The Soviets, who cannot conquer the brave Afghans, are now relentlessly exterminating them — Moscow's final solution.

"Three million of our people are refugees in Pakistan," Rabbani told me. "Less well known, there are



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four million starving refugees inside Afghanistan, driven from their homes by Soviet terror bombing. This is half the population of Afghanistan.

Sickness, particularly TB, is rampant among the Afghan refugees and freedom fighters; there are no medications for napalm burns, shattered limbs or festering wounds. Everything is lacking, from shoes to antibiotics. The trickle of arms and supplies coming north into Afghanistan from Pakistan is just not enough.

With particular sadness, Rabbani twice told me how tens of thousands of Afghan children are being snatched away from their families and taken into the Soviet Union for indoctrination as communists and atheists. "Help us save our children! Help us!" he told me, his voice breaking with emotion.

Help we must. Canada, self-proclaimed champion of human rights, has done almost nothing about the greatest violation of such rights in the world today. While the Soviets slaughter Afghanistan's people and occupy their land, using poison gas, forbidden weapons and explosive toys, Canada has turned its back; Joe Clark has \$5 million for black South Africans, but nothing for the savaged people of Afghanistan.

We do not see this terrible suffering or heroic

resistance because the Soviets bar all reporters from Afghanistan — the world's greatest atrocity goes on in secret. There is no TV to produce an Ethiopian-style response, no *We are the World* for Afghan children burned by Russian napalm.

The Afghans desperately need food, clothing, blankets, medicines and doctors. Surely our rich land could spare clothing and food for the Afghans? We simply cannot turn our backs on this tragedy and forget. If we will not send arms to the freedom fighters at least let us prevent their families from starving.

Canadian immigration authorities would not allow in other Afghan resistance fighters. The same thing happened two years ago when I tried to bring up a group of freedom fighters from New York. I was told by external affairs that the visit might "embarrass our relations with the Soviets." How shameful. We don't have the guts to welcome a few Afghan patriots, men fighting almost bare-handed against the entire Soviet empire.

Brian Mulroney, Joe Clark and Canada should heed Rabbani's plea. Remaining silent and inert before Soviet barbarity and genocide in Afghanistan makes us accomplices. This is not what Canada is about and I do not think that Canadians, if they knew the truth, would accept our government's disgraceful silence.

Where are the voices of our human right's advocates, our churches and Catholic bishops, our unions and elected officials? Can — or dare — they ever speak again about rights or morality if they remain mute while an entire people is exterminated before their eyes?