

Violations of the Right to Food by all Parties to the Conflict in Afghanistan

Letter to the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

10 December 2001

Prof. Jean Ziegler
Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food

Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

Palais des Nations

CH-1211 Geneva 10

Switzerland

Re: Violations of the Right to Food by all Parties to the Conflict in Afghanistan

Dear Prof. Ziegler:

We, the undersigned human rights and humanitarian organizations, write to express grave concern about widespread violations of the Afghan people's right to food as a result of the ongoing war and the militarization of food aid. The right to food and the related rights of humanitarian access and independence in conflict situations are well established in international law and practice. The parties to the conflict in Afghanistan are blatantly violating these rights, with tragic consequences for the civilian population.

The recent military collapse of the Taliban has created a misperception in the Western media and public that the humanitarian crisis has eased. In fact, it has reached a critical stage. Growing lawlessness and factionalism among Northern Alliance forces is preventing life-saving aid from reaching millions of at-risk civilians, especially in remote areas. Neighboring countries are continuing to seal their borders, restrict access to humanitarian agencies and deny basic rights to refugees and internally displaced persons. The exclusive focus of the United States-led Coalition on military action is undermining the impartiality of humanitarian agencies and impeding their aid operations. Unless all parties to the armed conflict prioritize an urgent humanitarian response, thousands of Afghans will die of hunger and exposure during the winter months.

We therefore respectfully request that you use your office as the United Nations-recognized expert on the right to food to call upon all parties to the conflict, and all organs of the United Nations, to take immediate measures to protect the rights of at-risk

civilians and prevent further violations of international human rights and humanitarian law.