



**U.S. AGENCY FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT  
BUREAU FOR HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE (BHR)  
OFFICE OF U.S. FOREIGN DISASTER ASSISTANCE (OFDA)**

**AFGHANISTAN – Complex Emergency**

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**Background**

Afghanistan's long-running civil conflict began with the December 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. The invasion sparked a series of conflicts that spanned most of the next two decades and turned Afghanistan into the world's largest source of refugees and displaced persons. At the height of the war during the 1980s, more than 6 million Afghans—nearly a third of the country's total population—fled the country. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), during this period there were some 3.5 million Afghan refugees in Pakistan and another 2 million in Iran. Between 2 and 3 million Afghans were displaced within Afghanistan's borders during this time, and internally displaced persons (IDPs) swelled the population of Kabul, the capital, from 600,000 to more than 2 million. Soviet troops withdrew in 1989, although the Communist regime they left in place did not fall until 1992. The opposition *mujaheddin*, which had been united in its fight against the Soviets, fragmented into rival groups fighting for power. Since then, warfare between the groups has often included aerial bombing, cannon and rocket fire, anti-tank and anti-personnel landmines, and frequent sieges, all with little regard for civilians caught in the middle.

The Taliban movement, which espouses an ultraconservative philosophy based on a blend of Islamic fundamentalism and traditional Pashtun custom, became internationally known following a successful military drive in Afghanistan's southwestern Kandahar province in the autumn of 1994. The Taliban rapidly made tremendous gains, filling a vacuum of power and spreading out from their base with little serious resistance. By 1996, the Taliban had seized three quarters of the country, including Kabul. Since then, the Taliban has gained control over ninety percent of the country, with the remaining tenth under the control of a collection of opposition groups known as the Northern Alliance. The Taliban takeover brought relative stability to the predominately ethnic Pashtun areas under their control, although non-Pashtun minorities have fared less well. The toll of two decades of war, in a country that was already impoverished, has meant a continuing humanitarian crisis even for populations not directly affected by continued fighting. Government infrastructure, including the ability to deliver the most basic health, education, and other social services, has completely collapsed. Most resources are directed to the war effort. Severe Taliban restrictions, including a restriction on women working outside the home, have added to the crushing impact of poverty, particularly on the many households lacking able-bodied adult men.

**Numbers Affected**

Afghanistan's total population is estimated at nearly 26 million. An estimated 2.6 million registered refugees remain outside Afghanistan's borders in neighboring countries, according to UNHCR. More than four million refugees have repatriated since 1988. As of October, 96,584 Afghan refugees had returned from Iran during 2000 under a joint Iranian Government/UNHCR program. The total number of IDPs is unknown, but estimates range as high as one million. Estimates of the total death toll for the conflict are in the millions. Land mines have killed or injured an estimated 400,000 people over the past ten years, according to the Mine Action Program for Afghanistan (MAPA). The regional drought that has affected Afghanistan throughout 2000 has affected an estimated 2.5 million farmers of rain-fed wheat and some 80,000 nomadic livestock owners (*kuchis*). The U.N. World Food Program (WFP) and Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) have predicted that the burgeoning crisis will affect at least half of Afghanistan's population by the summer of 2001. The combined effects of civil strife and drought have displaced an estimated 200,000 people during the last four months, according to WFP.

**Current Situation**

A Taliban offensive that began in August led to major territorial gains against the Northern Alliance. On September 6, the Taliban captured Taloqan, a critical gain both because it was a Northern Alliance stronghold as well as serving as the provincial capital of Takhar, and because the town sits along an important supply route from Tajikistan to the strategically important Panjshir valley. Following the capture of Taloqan, the Taliban attacked northwards, gaining additional territory and leaving Badakshan the only province remaining under full Northern Alliance control. In mid-October, the Northern Alliance launched a counterattack that met with initial success, regaining some lost territory. As of late November, Taloqan was reportedly under heavy attack by opposition forces as they sought to wrest control back from the Taliban.

The fighting in the northeast has displaced tens of thousands to Rostaq, Dasht-e-Qala, Khoja Bahauddin, Keshem, Faizabad, and Yangi Qala, according to the U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) and non-governmental organization (NGO) assessments. Some 10,000 IDPs have become stranded on islands in the Pyandj River along the border, but Tajikistan has kept the border closed to refugees and to date has there have been few reported crossings. An estimated 30,000 new refugees have arrived in Pakistan since the fighting began, according to UNHCR. Most of these are women and children.

In addition to those newly displaced by this year's fighting, substantial numbers of people remain displaced from prior offensives. Some 200,000 people were displaced during fighting in the late summer and fall of 1999. Many of these people were displaced from Shomali, north of Kabul, to the Panjshir valley and Kabul City. Some 12,000 IDPs displaced in 1999 remain in the former Soviet Embassy compound in Kabul. An estimated 60,000 IDPs remain in Panjshir valley. Shomali remains a battlefield, making substantial IDP returns unlikely in the near future.

### **Drought**

The worst drought to afflict Afghanistan since 1971 has greatly worsened an already difficult situation. As the epicenter of a larger region-wide drought affecting vast areas of Central and South Asia, the drought caused severe losses to crops and livestock throughout Afghanistan, with particularly severe impact on the northwest, west, and southwest parts of the country. The drought also affected urban dwellers, particularly because it coincided with a precipitous fall in the Taliban-controlled Afghani currency, further contributing to an already sharp rise in food prices. The drought followed two successive years of low rainfall and snowfall levels that caused the water table to fall and rivers and lakes to shrink. Low rainfall in the preceding year forced most households in the country's most sensitive agricultural areas to sell more than 50 percent of their livestock in order to buy wheat last season, according to UNOCHA. Since then, livestock sales have increased still further, rapidly depleting household herds. At the same time, prices of livestock have fallen, diminishing income from these sales.

A December 2000 WFP report warned that nutrition indicators were beginning to show alarmingly high global malnutrition rates in some drought-affected areas. In one district of Badghis, an NGO working in the area warned that the combined moderate and severe malnutrition rate had risen to 23 percent. Global malnutrition rates above ten percent are considered an emergency situation. Afghanistan is currently in its post-harvest period, when nutrition levels normally should be highest.

### **Humanitarian Constraints**

Afghanistan's status as one of the world's most isolated countries has hindered the delivery of humanitarian assistance. Despite the Taliban's *de facto* control of most of the country's territory, it has not gained international recognition as Afghanistan's legitimate government. The Taliban's harboring of indicted terrorist Osama Bin Laden has further increased Afghanistan's isolation, and led to the imposition of U.N. sanctions in 1999. The U.N. Security Council adopted additional sanctions on December 19, 2000. Within the country, fighting, land mines, harassment of relief organizations, poor or nonexistent roads, weak local capacity, and harsh terrain inhibit humanitarian efforts. Harassment of NGOs and U.N. staff by both the Taliban and the Northern Alliance has ranged from property theft and arbitrary "taxes" on humanitarian goods to beatings, detention, and killings. In August 1998, a U.N. representative was murdered in Kabul, leading to the evacuation of expatriate staff of U.N. and NGOs from the country. The U.N. began returning gradually in March 1999. In April 2000, the U.N. temporarily withdrew from Kandahar after armed Taliban forces raided and damaged U.N. offices while searching for an escaped opposition leader. On August 5, 2000, seven people were killed when unknown assailants fired on a convoy of UNOCHA mine action workers in Badghis Province and then set their vehicles on fire. In December 2000, the U.N. evacuated all expatriate personnel in anticipation of possible unrest following the imposition of new sanctions. Several U.N. offices were attacked in 1999 following the first imposition of sanctions.

In July 2000, the Taliban issued an edict prohibiting women from working for U.N. agencies and international and national relief agencies in fields other than health. The edict has adversely affected a variety of humanitarian programs that depend on female staff in order to gain access to women and children in need of assistance, in addition to threatening the livelihoods of hundreds of women employed in such positions. Enforcement has been sporadic, however: on August 16, the Taliban ordered WFP, which supports 24 women-run bakeries in Kabul employing 360 women, to comply with the edict. A day later, the Taliban reversed its decision, allowing the bakeries, which provide subsidized bread to 7,200 female-headed households, to re-open. Enforcement of the edict was reportedly also less vigorous outside Kabul. A U.N. task force is continuing to investigate the effects of the edict.

The complications of cross-front line aid operations have hampered relief efforts in some parts of the country. With difficulty, the U.N. was able to negotiate one such operation to provide assistance to IDPs in the Panjshir valley in December 1999, but to date has been unable to do so again this year. The U.N. has experienced similar difficulties

in delivering assistance to drought and conflict-affected communities in northern Hazarajat this year, resorting to donkey caravans to get even minimal supplies into areas around Dara-I Souf.

### **Health, Water, and Sanitation**

Medical facilities are scarce in Afghanistan, with less than one physician per 10,000 persons. Inadequate health care contributes greatly to the country's dismal average life expectancy. Afghanistan's maternal mortality rate is the second highest in the world, according to the World Health Organization (WHO), and 250 of 1,000 children die before age five. Tuberculosis, polio, leish-maniasis, and measles are widespread problems. By March of this year, measles outbreaks had been reported in the northern, western, northeastern, central, and southeastern regions of the country, according to the U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA). WHO reported that the springtime measles epidemic killed an estimated 1,000 children. According to WHO, acute respiratory infection (ARI) is a growing problem, accounting for roughly 25 percent of all deaths of children five years old and younger. According to WHO, vaccination levels are below 40 percent for all childhood vaccines. A massive effort in May to vaccinate children against polio was a success: on May 5, UNOCHA reported that the campaign, which required a five-day cease fire that both sides respected, succeeded in reaching nearly all of Afghanistan's 4.5 million children under age five. A similar effort was repeated in November. Nevertheless, polio is widespread. Cholera, driven by the lack of clean water and proper sanitation, is endemic, with outbreaks occurring on a yearly basis, according to WHO. Clean water reaches only 12 percent of the population.

### **U.S. Government (USG) Assistance FY 2000**

On October 1, 1999, Karl F. Inderfurth, Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs, re-declared a complex humanitarian disaster in Afghanistan for FY 2000 to respond to the needs of the victims of the humanitarian crisis. Assistant Secretary Inderfurth issued a second disaster declaration on May 4, 2000, specifically addressing the drought crisis.

All USG humanitarian assistance for Afghanistan for FY 2000 was channeled through NGOs and international organizations. USG humanitarian assistance provided by USAID/OFDA, USAID/Food for Peace (FFP), USDA, the Department of State's Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (State/PRM), and Humanitarian Demining Program (State/HDP) totaled \$102,707,901 for FY 2000. USAID/OFDA responded with humanitarian assistance channeled through grants to address humanitarian needs in the areas of health, water and sanitation, shelter, infrastructure, winterization, and livelihoods. In health, USAID/OFDA provided a grant to Action Contre la Faim (ACF) for a program to benefit 530,000 people in Kabul and surrounding areas for the treatment of malnutrition, maternal and child health care, and education for mothers and children. To address humanitarian needs in water and sanitation, USAID/OFDA funded CARE's emergency water supply program to combat disease by providing potable water to 35,000 households in Kabul.

In shelter, infrastructure, and winterization, USAID/OFDA supported ACTED's winter emergency program for IDPs, including heating, shelter, and road repair activities. USAID/OFDA provided ACTED with an in-kind donation of 10,000 blankets and 480,000 sq. ft. of plastic sheeting plus transport for emergency shelter. USAID/OFDA supported Shelter Now International's program to benefit 2,500 households through rehabilitation and relief activities for houses destroyed by October 1999 fighting in Takhar Province. USAID/OFDA also supported the SCF/US program to provide supplemental heating to five hospitals in Kabul City and Maidan Shahr, benefiting 40,000 people, and a heating project to benefit 2,300 IDP families in Kabul. To address humanitarian needs stemming from chronic poverty, USAID/OFDA supported livelihoods programs with a grant to the Cooperative Center for Afghanistan for agricultural infrastructure rehabilitation benefiting eight villages in Bamiyan Province, and to Physiotherapy and Rehabilitation Support for Afghanistan (PARSA) for projects in Kabul benefiting an estimated 6,700 people with electrical, plumbing, accounting, and other vocational training as well as home schooling for girls.

In response to drought, USAID/OFDA provided \$25,000 through the U.S. Embassy in Islamabad to support an MCI livelihoods program. In addition, USAID/OFDA provided CARE with \$700,000 for an agriculture and livestock project in the Hazarajat region; UNICEF and UN/Habitat with \$250,000 each for emergency potable water projects for severely drought-affected populations in various locations; MCI with \$930,000 for potable water and livelihoods support for farmers and displaced nomads in Kandahar Province; and SNI with \$310,000 for an irrigation project in northern Afghanistan.

In FY 2000, additional USG humanitarian assistance was provided by USAID/FFP, which provided 26,870 MT of P.L. 480 emergency Title II food commodities through WFP and the Aga Khan Foundation at a cost of \$13,977,900. USDA provided 135,000 MT of wheat to WFP at an estimated cost of \$58,762,385. State/PRM provided UNHCR with \$7.4 million for regional programs benefiting Afghan refugees and returnees in Iran,

Pakistan, and Afghanistan. State/PRM provided \$6.1 million for NGOs addressing Afghan refugee needs in Pakistan, and provided \$75,000 to support the administrative costs of WFP Afghanistan programs. State/PRM provided ICRC with \$6.63 million for Afghanistan programs as part of a \$9.9 million contribution to ICRC's South Asia appeal. State/PRM also provided UNCHR with \$4.1 million in unearmarked funds for UNHCR's general program for South Asia, a substantial portion of which benefited Afghan refugees. State/HDP allocated \$3 million for humanitarian demining in Afghanistan, of which \$1.1 million was provided to HALO Trust, a British demining organization, and the remainder was provided to support UNOCHA's demining operations.

USAID/BHR/OFDA.....	\$6,693,713
USAID/BHR/FFP .....	\$13,977,900
USDA .....	\$58,762,385
State/PRM.....	\$20,273,903
State/HDP .....	\$3,000,000
<b>Total USG Assistance FY 2000 .....</b>	<b>\$102,707,901</b>

**USG Assistance FY 2001**

On September 22, 2000, Assistant Secretary Inderfurth re-declared a complex humanitarian disaster in Afghanistan for FY 2001. To date, FY 2001 USG humanitarian assistance provided by USAID/OFDA and USAID/Food for Peace (FFP) totals \$12,371,241. To assist drought-displaced families Ghor Province, USAID/OFDA provided 30,000 blankets from its stockpile to ICRC at a cost of \$250,841 including transport. USAID/OFDA provided SNI with \$320,400 for food and nonfood assistance to support host families sheltering war-affected IDPs in the Rostaq area. In addition, USAID/OFDA modified an FY 2000 Taloqan shelter grant to SNI to redirect \$77,000 in unspent funds to the same activities. USAID/OFDA also modified an FY 2000 heating and shelter grant to ACTED with \$100,000 in unspent funds to support food and nonfood distributions for IDPs in the Rostaq area.

Additional humanitarian assistance for FY 2001 will be provided by USAID/FFP, which has committed 30,000 MT of P.L. 480 Title II wheat to WFP to meet the urgent food needs of drought-affected Afghans. The estimated value of the contribution is \$11.8 million.

USAID/BHR/OFDA.....	\$571,241
USAID/BHR/FFP .....	\$11,800,000
<b>Total USG Assistance FY 2001 (to date) .....</b>	<b>\$12,371,241</b>

*NOTE: USAID/OFDA bulletins can be obtained from the USAID web site at [http://www.usaid.gov/hum\\_response/ofda/situation.html](http://www.usaid.gov/hum_response/ofda/situation.html)*