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United States Department of State

Washington, D.C. 20520

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INFORMATION MEMORANDUM

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APR 27 2001

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TO: The Secretary

FROM: SA - Gary S. Usrey, Acting
PRM - Alan J. Kreczko, Acting

4-30-01
clw

SUBJECT: Preventing an Afghan Humanitarian Situation crisis

SA will convene a high level interagency meeting next week to coordinate a U.S. response to the looming humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan. The country is on the verge of a widespread and precipitous famine, according to a joint USAID/PRM humanitarian assessment team which returned from a nine-day visit to western and northern Afghanistan (Tab 1). This assessment confirms UN, NGO, and media reports that the situation has deteriorated severely in the past few months and is heading towards a catastrophe. The USAID/PRM team concluded that, unless immediate action is taken, the situation may deteriorate into one that is irreversible. Meanwhile, the World Food Program (WFP), the primary distributor of food aid in Afghanistan, is faced with reducing food distributions as the crisis worsens (Tab 2).

The Afghan humanitarian crisis is the result of over 20 years of civil war -- intensified as both sides have acquired the capacity to fight all year around -- and now exacerbated dramatically by Afghanistan's worst drought in history. The situation is further complicated by the administrative incompetence of the Taliban. The United Nations estimates that there are 3.8 million people within Afghanistan at risk from famine. An estimated 500,000 have left their homes for urban centers and about 200,000 have fled to Pakistan and Iran, swelling the Afghan refugee population in these countries to over 2.6 million. In some regions, mortality rates, particularly for children under five, are at emergency levels.

We have pledged about \$75 million in aid to date this year; the response from other countries is disappointing. Our meeting next week will consider what more the United States can do -- including adding more resources -- and how we can stimulate the international community to provide more assistance. Enhanced international response inside Afghanistan is also key to securing better treatment of refugees in Pakistan and Iran.

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Attachments:

- Tab 1 - Islamabad 2282: Afghanistan Trip Report
- Tab 2 - Islamabad 2316: Afghanistan Faces Famine

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