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AFGHANISTAN (1)

FACSIMILE MESSAGE

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Subject: Information concerning recruitment by the Talibans

Dear Louise,

In response to your fax dated 18.09.98 concerning forcible recruitment in Afghanistan, we have received the following information from our colleagues at OCM Afghanistan (through our Headquarters) which might be of use to you.

Recruitment in Afghanistan: There is, indeed, something like a policy by which the Taliban approach village elders (in Pashtun areas in the Eastern, Southern and partly Western region of Afghanistan) requesting them to provide a certain number of recruits (depending on the size of the village) and/or money. It is up to the village to decide whom to send for military service and the families, whose sons are sent, will receive compensation from the non-affected families in cash.

This policy was apparently adopted as the Taliban - when trying to recruit individually - faced problems with the villagers (in Paktia, villagers even fought back when approached). Therefore, they now approach the entire community and leave any decision on recruits to them.

As far as the office of the Chief of Mission for Afghanistan (currently located in Pakistan) (hereafter OCM) knows, this recruitment "policy" mainly concerns Pashtuns and not other ethnic groups. However, it is not excluded that persons of other ethnic groups are "recruited". When the Taliban captured Tajik areas (e.g. Shomali valley) North of Kabul as well as some Hazara areas, there were many

reports that male adolescents and men were forced to join the Taliban to walk ahead of advances for "mine-clearance" and as a shield. Such reports have now reached us in the context of the military build-up at the Afghan-Iranian border. We are, however, unable to confirm such reports but their frequency on different occasions suggests that they are not entirely made up.

Following discussions here, we are at the same time rather reluctant to believe that the Taliban would recruit someone into their armed forces whose background cannot be entirely trusted given the person's ethnic origin or background. It is far too easy to switch sides in the conflict and therefore rather unlikely that the Taliban would run such a risk.

Recruitment in Pakistan: The OCM believes that currently, there is no recruitment by force from Pakistan but reports of madrassa students (with the respective ideological predisposition through their education) volunteering to join the Taliban and their fight inside Afghanistan. Such reports were last in the press, when the Taliban made their first advances in the North beginning of August 1998.

Duration of military services: The OCM is not aware of any specific duration of this kind of recruitment/conscription but would doubt it is, since the whole policy seems rather unorganised and spontaneous. The Taliban haven't consistently recruited since they had enough volunteers and only did so from time to time, it seems, in preparation of major military advances or following lost battles.

Regards.