



Department of Justice

ADDRESS

OF

THE HONORABLE EDWIN MEESE III
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF THE UNITED STATES

BEFORE

THE AFGHAN REFUGEES CAMP

ISLAMABAD, PAKISTAN

MARCH 26, 1986

NOTE: Because Mr. Meese often speaks from notes, the speech as delivered may vary from this text. However, he stands behind this text as printed.

More than two centuries ago, the American people declared to the world that they would wage a battle for freedom against one of the strongest nations of the world. Since then, through days of conflict and care, we have navigated by the light of liberty. And just as others came to us in our time of need, so, too, we have gone to the aid of those seeking to stay the hand of arbitrary power.

America has stood for freedom through two world wars, and we are no less determined today. For evidence, one need only look to recent events in Grenada, Haiti and the Philippines. We stand with freedom-loving men and women around the world, in Nicaragua, Angola, Mozambique -- and, particularly, in Afghanistan.

I have come here on behalf of my president to promise you, the Afghan people, that we, the people of the United States, will continue to support your heroic struggle against the Soviet empire. In the words of our President, the time has come for America "to resume its historic role as a leader of the Free World.... We must stand by all our democratic allies. And we must not break faith with those who are risking their lives -- on every continent, from Afghanistan to Nicaragua -- to defy Soviet-supported aggression and secure rights which have been ours since birth."

The President has given voice to an idea as natural and self-evident as the principles stated in the Declaration of Independence that marked the beginning of our American republic in 1776. Today, the Afghanistan people seek no less for

Afghanistan than we Americans sought for themselves. Life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness is the birthright of people everywhere. Our challenge is to make it a reality for all.

I stand here today in Pakistan, which has very kindly received me, because I cannot go to Afghanistan. The Soviets there would not welcome me. But I don't need to travel to Afghanistan to see the tragic consequences of Soviet domination. Here, ten miles from the border, I can see it in the faces of refugees. We learn from you of the physical and mental scars of torture, rape and toxic gas, of famine, scorched earth and genocide. I can see the fingers and hands missing from Afghan children who picked up Soviet anti-personnel mines disguised as toys, watches and pens. Yes, I can see Afghanistan all too clearly from where I stand.

The truth is here for all to see. Though the Soviets jail and murder journalists to keep them quiet, the news still comes out. For there are those willing to risk their lives to report their dirty war. One such journalist was Dr. Charles Thornton. He was killed in ambush by a Soviet helicopter gunship while on his way to cover the work of another heroic group in Afghanistan -- the volunteer doctors, whom your people desperately need.

Yes, the truth is here for the world to see. And these are events that cannot, should not, and will not be explained away.

Only 46 years ago, the world was learning about another unspeakable holocaust. The stench of cremated bodies hung heavy over the town of Dachau in Nazi Germany. And yet the world

simply wanted to look the other way. But events would not let us. Shaken by what we saw, we swore we would never let it happen again.

Today, seven years after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, one half of the population of Afghanistan has been effectively destroyed by the Soviets -- either by direct casualties, war-related famine, disease and hardship or flight as refugees.

And the world must ask itself, "What is the reason for this attempted annihilation of the Afghan nation?" It is all too simple. The Afghan people possess strategic lands that the Soviets want. But you will not submit. You prefer freedom and self-government to the dictates of Marxist-Leninist strongmen. They cannot believe you resist so fiercely. Despite brute force and their attempt to grind you under the boot of totalitarian rule, they cannot break your spirit.

Your children stand with their fathers who stand with their fathers -- all fighting to keep your rugged land free. Americans understand something about your sacrifice. In fact, our own revolutionary forefathers had a defiant motto that has echoed down through the decades and which I can hear in this camp. It is this: "Live Free or Die."

Today, I wish to say to the refugees in this camp, to all Afghans, that the American people are opening their eyes to the holocaust in Afghanistan.

I know that other Americans have stood near this border and said similar things in the past, but you, the Afghan people, were left to carry the awful burden of resistance largely alone

against an enemy with vastly greater resources. Sadly there are still some who are unsympathetic to your valiant cause. But they do not represent the great mainstream of America. No, the great majority of Americans believe in your cause. They identify with you. They empathize with you. And now, I believe, they are ready to do more than just send you their best wishes.

Afghanistan is vitally important to the security of America itself. For the Soviets are not simply mad. They have not committed their most elite troops, their most sophisticated weapons, their most advanced biological and chemical arsenals against peace-loving Afghans because of an irrational hatred. No, the Soviets have made a cold and rational, if brutal, calculation. For them, Afghanistan is the key to encirclement of the Persian Gulf and Asia.

There is no escaping the moral challenge that has been placed before us all. Today, the air is heavy with death and degradation in Afghanistan, and what we do, or don't do, about it will say a great deal about us as a people. Genocide -- the deliberate, systematic extermination of Afghans -- is not a matter of right or left, it is a matter of right and wrong.

The hour is approaching, as it did during the Jewish holocaust, when the world can no longer look the other way. We cannot continue, as Jean-Francois Revel has written, "to spare ourselves from seeing it, in order to excuse ourselves from having to oppose it." For it is in you, the people of Afghanistan, that those who love freedom must face their own dreams and their own future.

God bless the Afghan people. And may God preserve us all.
Thank you.