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Foreign and Commonwealth Office
London SW1A 2AH

19 January 1983

Dear John,

Call by a Group of Afghans

I attach a background note for the Prime Minister for the meeting which I understand she may have later today with a group of Afghans who have witnessed Soviet atrocities in Afghanistan.

Our information about the Afghans' visit here has come mainly from Mr Winston Churchill MP, who has been making the arrangements for interviews and press conferences. We have not been officially involved, except to expedite the issue of visas to the Afghans by our Embassy in Paris. Their call on the Prime Minister should help to ensure good publicity, which we would of course welcome. There is no particular point which we need to make to them, other than to stress our continued opposition to the Soviet occupation and our concern for the sufferings of the Afghan people.

Yours ever

J E Holmes

(J E Holmes)
Private Secretary

A J Coles Esq
10 Downing Street

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VISIT TO UK BY WITNESSES OF SOVIET ATROCITIES IN AFGHANISTAN

1. The Russell Tribunal in Paris has been holding a series of hearings as part of its investigations into Soviet atrocities in Afghanistan.

2. A group of six Afghans, who have been giving evidence to the Tribunal, have been invited to visit this country under the auspices of Radio Free Kabul and other organisations to give a series of interviews and press conferences. Three of the group claim to have witnessed an incident at Padkhwab-e-Shana, a village in Logar province south of Kabul, in which 105 Afghans were burned to death in an underground water channel by Soviet soldiers. The others claim to be witnesses to other Soviet atrocities in Afghanistan.

3. We understand that the members of the group are:
Mr Habib-ur-Rahman Hashemi, the Mayor of Padkhwab-e-Shana;
Mr Sayyed Mortaza, the village mullah;
Mr Gol Muhammad, the village elder
Mr Omar Babrakzai, a former Supreme Court judge;
Mr Ghafur Yusufzai, a young commander from one of the north-east provinces of Afghanistan;
Farida Ahmadi, a woman who was tortured by security police in Kabul.

4. The massacre at Padkhwab-e-Shana was first reported in the press in December when Mr Michael Barry, an American working with the Russell Tribunal, returned to Pakistan from a fact-finding visit to Afghanistan. Apparently, the Afghan villagers took shelter in an underground canal from Soviet forces, who blocked up the entrance to the canal, poured in an inflammable liquid and then set fire to it. All 105 villagers, including old men, women and children, were killed. During his visit to the village, Mr Barry interviewed eye witnesses (including, we gather, the ^{four} three mentioned above),

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took photographs and inspected the canal.

5. At the time, our Embassy in Islamabad also reported Mr Barry's findings. Although we have no independent evidence to confirm the story, there seems no reason to doubt its authenticity or the testimony of the witnesses.

6. Mr Barry was himself to have accompanied the group of Afghans to London but he had to remain in Paris because of a personal problem. The arrangements for the group's reception in London have been made by Mr Winston Churchill MP (Radio Free Kabul) and Lord Chalfont; the Afghanistan Support Committee (Chairman, Lord Cranborne MP) are also involved. The US Government helped with the arrangements to bring the group to Paris and the US Embassy was approached by Lord Chalfont to help in getting them over here.

7. We have so far made no statement on the incident. However, in answer to a PQ on 30 November, the Prime Minister expressed sympathy for the suffering people in Afghanistan. Attached is a proposed press line in answer to any inquiries.

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VISIT BY WITNESSES OF SOVIET ATROCITIES IN AFGHANISTAN

PROPOSED PRESS LINE TO TAKE

1. HMG has noted with horror reports of atrocities committed by the Soviet occupying forces in Afghanistan. The Prime Minister made clear our sympathy for the suffering people of Afghanistan on 30 November 1982 in answer to a Parliamentary Question on HMG's policy on Afghanistan.

Massacre in Logar Province

2. We have no reason to doubt the authenticity of these reports.

Visiting Afghans' Status (Defensive)

3. The Afghans are visiting the UK under the auspices of Radio Free Kabul, and not as guests of HMG.



11 9 JUN 1955



Alan CF.

John Coles

MR WINSTON S CHURCHIL MP - AFGHANISTAN

Mr Coles.

*He is not - He is
dreadful. el.*

1. WSC is a hero.
2. 105 Afghans were murdered by the Russians in an irrigation tunnel on 13th September 1982.
3. Six Afghans, including a survivor of the massacre, a priest, a Supreme Court Judge, and one of the Village Elders of the village to which those murdered belonged, are coming to London on the evening of Wednesday, 19th January.
4. Will you allow the Prime Minister to shake the hands of these valiant fighters for freedom and friends of the martyrs, in her room at the House at 3.35 p.m. on Thursday, 20th January, literally for 10 minutes only?
5. I suppose that the Foreign Office will say that this will upset the Russians - so what.

14.1.83

IAN GOW

cc. ✓ Caroline Stephens

15 JAN 1983

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MEMORANDUM FOR THE DIRECTOR

TO: DIRECTOR

FROM: [Illegible]

SUBJECT: [Illegible]

[Illegible text]

[Illegible text]

DATE: [Illegible]

BY: [Illegible]

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