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## Gap splits Afghans, Oregonians

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It's too soon to tell whether the U.S. attacks Sunday on terrorists and their supporters will make life worse for the millions of refugees in Afghanistan.

However, the misery is likely to spread, according to a spokesman for Portland-based Mercy Corps, a nonprofit global relief organization that assists Afghan refugees.

"Whether the Afghans leave their country or stay there, they are in desperate need of humanitarian aid," said Matthew De Galan, Mercy's chief development officer.

"The longer there is a conflict and the longer aid groups are unable to reach people, the greater the needs are going to be. There are reports of people eating insects and grass."

It's tough to comprehend how horrible life must be in Afghanistan. One can get a glimpse by comparing life in Oregon

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CAPITOL WATCH



versus Afghanistan before U.S. military action:

□ Oregon's infant mortality rate is one of the lowest in the United States — 5.8 deaths per 1,000 births, compared with 147.02 deaths per 1,000 births in Afghanistan. That's one of the highest rates in the world.

□ The death rates — 8.9 per 1,000 people here versus 17.72 deaths per 1,000 population there.

□ Our life expectancy is 78 years compared with 46.2 years there.

Oregon has 3.4 million people, compared with 26.8 million in Afghanistan, but we have far more economic clout. Our gross domestic product per capita is \$33,080; theirs is \$800.

### How to help

Mercy Corps is a nonprofit, global relief organization with headquarters in Portland.

Since 1979, Mercy Corps has provided more than \$550 million in aid to 73 nations. Using a mix of government funds, grants and private donations, it operates in and helps more than 25 countries. It provides food, clothing, medical care and shelter to refugees and other poor people.

To make a donation, call (800) 852-2100 or go online to: [www.mercycorps.org](http://www.mercycorps.org)

And we had \$9.4 billion in exports last year, compared with less than \$100 million in Afghanistan.

Other disparities were revealed in two reports released last week.

Children First for Oregon, a nonprofit, nonpartisan group, reported that the status of Oregon's children has improved in the past five years.

More Oregon children have health insurance and more are getting immunized against diseases. There also have been reductions in teen pregnancy and smoking, the report said.

However, Children First gave Oregon an overall grade of B-minus, noting several areas of concern: an estimated 13 percent of children live in poverty; affordable housing for many poor families is scarce; and one in three kids failed to meet state standards in reading and math.

In addition, if the economic slowdown worsens, "working families who turn to the safety net are going to find fewer resources available," said Marie Hoeven, executive director of Children First.

Still, parents in Afghanistan can only dream of

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### AGUIRRE

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such problems. About 6 million people are refugees and one in four children dies before age 5, mainly from preventable diseases.

Until late last month, Mercy Corps had an office in Afghanistan to coordinate the distribution of food, clothing, medical care and shelter.

Mark Pont, the Mercy Corps director in Afghanistan and Pakistan, reported Thursday that 20

years of violence, four years of severe drought and the refugee crisis are making life "extraordinarily difficult" for people in Afghanistan.

With winter approaching, the suffering will deepen.

"The refugees and displaced persons living in open tents are the ones that are particularly hard hit as the temperatures fall, sometimes well below zero," Pont told Mercy Corps by telephone from Islamabad, Pakistan, where the organization's international staff was forced to relocate.

Mercy Corps is working with the United Nations and other international relief agencies to plan for the distribution of fuel, shelter and blankets for families in Afghanistan.

However, Pont is worried.

"These people themselves prior to our starting our work four years ago were in a very desperate situation, which is why we selected them," Pont said. "Now that our work is not continuing fully, they will have quite a degree of hardship, especially this winter."

De Galan said Sunday that

Mercy Corps will use new donations to ease the hardships.

"If people want to help, it's wonderful and it will make a difference," he said. "This is one of those situations where no one knows how it's going to end or how massive the need is going to be for the refugees."

"Their plight is one of misery and has been for years in Afghanistan. It's going to get worse in the days ahead."

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