

Afghan loathes Taliban rulers

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

BRIGHTON — There may be people in the Muslim world demonstrating on behalf of the Afghanistan's Taliban rulers. But most of them have one thing in common, according to Mohammad Shinwari, an Afghan refugee living here.

They have never lived in Afghanistan. And if they had, many of those demonstrators might have had second thoughts about taking to their respective nations' streets on behalf of the Taliban and the Saudi Arabian terrorist it shelters, Osama bin Laden, Shinwari said.

"These protesters don't know the real situation between the terrorists and the Afghan people," Shinwari said, citing a litany of human rights abuses he attributed to Taliban members.

The 34-year-old served as a diplomat to Pakistan for Afghanistan's short-lived coalition government that was established in the early 1990s after the Soviet Union had left

the country it occupied from 1979-89. Throughout the 1990s, Afghanistan suffered civil strife of varying degrees and, at this moment, is still the desired prize of several groups, including, most notably, the Northern Alliance, which has sought U.S. aid in the current U.S.-led war against the Taliban.

After refusing to work for the Taliban, an extremist Islamic group that took over most of Afghanistan in 1996, Shinwari was forced to flee for his life to neighboring Pakistan, where he worked with the Afghanistan National Liberation Front, a moderate group opposed to the Taliban.

The front is headed by Dr. Sebghatullah Mujadeddi, who briefly served as Afghanistan's president in 1992. The party is opposed to the radical Islamist ideology espoused by the Taliban. Although he supports the Northern Alliance's attempts to oust the Taliban, Shinwari said he wants a post-Taliban Afghanistan to have a democratic government, not one dominated by only one faction like the Northern Alliance.

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Andrea Dixon/Staff photographer

Mohammad Shinwari, a refugee from Afghanistan, in his home in Brighton Oct. 11.

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THE SOCIETY OF ST. VINCENT DE PAUL

Even though the Society of St. Vincent de Paul emphasizes person-to-person ministry, many beneficiaries never learn the names of the society members who assist them.

"There's an old Jewish saying that the greatest form of giving is when the giver and the receiver don't know each other," explained Tom Tripiciano, spiritual adviser for the St. Vincent de Paul conference at Rochester's St. Andrew/St. Philip Neri parishes.

The society has traditionally performed such services as visits to residents of prisons, hospitals and health-care facilities; establishment of thrift stores, food pantries and soup kitchens; counseling; and financial aid for people in emergency situations.

Yet for all the behind-the-scenes activity, some members in the Rochester Diocese are now openly publicizing the volunteer organization in hopes of starting more conferences, or chapters. Although the international organization has existed for more than 150 years in the United States, only five of 4,000 conferences nationwide are in this diocese.

"We're not purposely neglected. People are just not aware of us," Tripiciano said. "The only reason we're asking for publicity is because we want to get more conferences."

Along those lines, an informational session Oct. 13 brought together parish representatives interested in the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. The meeting was held at St. Andrew School in



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Rochester.

Ray Sickinger of Providence, R.I., northeast regional director for the society's national order, was on hand to answer questions. Sickinger's goal, he said prior to the meeting, is "to make the society more visible without changing the nature of it."

Marylee Wilk, secretary and treasurer for the St. Andrew/St. Philip Neri Conference, said there's apparently a growing need for such organizations. Her parish's conference assisted 219 people in the first six months of 2001 — a significant rise from 59 clients for the same period in 2000.

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