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**AFGHANISTAN
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Legislative Newsletter

Calendar

- Wolesi Jirga (Lower House):
 - Discussion on the cultural appropriateness of certain television programs may continue this week
 - The Committee of Chairs is discussing its April calendar
 - The Law on Rights and Privileges of the Disabled and the Law on Rights and Privileges of the Relatives of Martyrs and Missing remain on the plenary agenda
 - Electoral Law is on the plenary agenda
 - IEC Structure Law
 - Law on Rights and Privileges of the Relatives of Martyrs and Missing
 - Communication Law is pending discussion in an integrated committee
 - Higher Education Law is under review
 - Government Employment Law
- Meshrano Jirga (Upper House):
 - Road Toll Law
 - The Minister of Agriculture and head of the Natural Disasters Department are summoned to report in the April 6th plenary on preparations for a possible drought
 - Medicine Law is in the committees
- Joint Committees
 - Joint Wolesi/Meshrano committee will tentatively discuss an amended Cooperatives Law draft
 - Law on Gatherings, Protests, and Demonstrations
 - Political Parties Law is pending approval by a joint committee

National Assembly weekly meeting schedule:

- Sundays and Tuesdays: Wolesi Jirga committees and Meshrano Jirga plenary
- Saturdays, Mondays, and Wednesdays: Meshrano Jirga committees and Wolesi Jirga plenary

Legislation

Electoral Law

In the April 2nd Wolesi Jirga plenary, it was decided that committees would continue their electoral law discussion in consultation with the Wolesi Jirga Electoral Law Subcommittee headed by Honorable Registani. During the plenary review, MPs voted to include political party affiliation on the ballot, but voted against designating 100 seats to parties as called for in Honorable Registani's amendments. Political parties will be allowed to support candidates, but funding sources must be transparent. The detailed review will continue this week.

The law establishes the electoral system and will regulate electoral issues, including voting centers/polling stations, observers, election campaigns, candidacy, and counting.

The Independent Election Commission (IEC) Structure Law

The Wolesi Jirga Legislative Affairs and Justice and Judiciary Committees are proposing amendments to require the Wolesi Jirga's approval of the IEC Chairman. The Legislative Affairs Committee has reviewed articles 4-10. Further changes are expected.

The law will outline the funding mechanism, structure, duties, authorities, procedures, and staffing of the body.

Law on Rights and Privileges of the Disabled

The Wolesi Jirga Communication and Transportation, and Women's Affairs Committees considered the law last week.

The law aims to integrate and support the disabled economically.

Law on Rights and Privileges of the Relatives of Martyrs and Missing

The Wolesi Jirga committees continued their discussion of the draft law last week. The law is pending consideration by a Wolesi Jirga integrated committee this week.

The law will regulate the special rights and privileges of families of the martyred and missing. The draft addresses the social, economic, and political needs of the families, including housing and employment benefits.

Communication Law

The law is in the Wolesi Jirga committees for comments and amendments. An integrated committee meeting is tentatively scheduled for April 8th to consolidate the draft before sending it to the plenary.

The draft addresses rules and regulations for the telecommunication companies, including the number of operators in the country, and control of communication services.

Statistics Law

Tentatively included in the Meshrano Jirga's agenda. Further consideration is pending a Meshrano Jirga quorum.

The Statistic Law addresses the duties, authorities, and organization of the Independent Central Statistics Department. The law establishes a central office for coordination and integration of all statistical activities at the country level.

Higher Education Law

On April 1st, the Wolesi Jirga Legislative Affairs Committee discussed articles 1-13 and suggested amendments. The Religion, Culture, Education and Higher Education Committee also continued its discussion last week. Kabul University professors and Ministry of Higher Education officials attended the meeting. Further review is scheduled.

The law will regulate the activities of public and private higher education institutions in Afghanistan. The law addresses student rights and faculty benefits.

Medicine Law

The Medicine Law is under review by the Meshrano Jirga Committees. The Public Welfare and Environment Committee discussed the draft with Ministry of Public Health Pharmacy Department representatives on April 1st.

The Medicine Law regulates the production, import, stocking, and distribution of medicine and medical equipment.

Law on Gatherings, Protests, and Demonstrations

Correction to last week's newsletter: the draft is pending review by a joint Meshrano-Wolesi Jirga committee and has not yet been sent to President Karzai.

The law addresses management of gatherings, protests, and demonstrations.

Cooperatives Law

Last week's tentatively scheduled joint Meshrano-Wolesi committee meeting is pending introduction of the Wolesi Jirga members.

The Cooperatives Law aims to regulate creation, registration, organization, and development of non-governmental and non-political cooperatives and cooperative unions with economic, social, cultural, and other goals.

Political Parties Law

On April 1st, the Meshrano Jirga reviewed and approved the draft law with amendments, which include raising the party founder/leader minimum age from 18 to 35 years. Membership age would remain 18. The Meshrano draft also raised the membership threshold for registration from 5,000 to 10,000. A joint committee of both houses will now review the draft.

The law will regulate political parties' creation, activities, and rights and responsibilities.

Government Employment Law

The law is in Wolesi Jirga committees for comments and amendments. The bill may reach the plenary this week.

The Government Employment Law outlines measures to: promote effective Government agencies; make administrative corrections in the government system; clarify job descriptions for Government employees; improve education standards of Government employees; improve employee talent and work ethic; and provide housing and employment benefits to employees.

Road Toll Law

The draft law was on the Meshrano Jirga's agenda last week but other priorities delayed discussions. Further discussion is tentatively scheduled within two weeks.

The Road Toll Law will regulate taxation of vehicles using national highways. Vehicles moving out of the cities will be required to pay the road toll. The revenues collected will fund construction of new and maintenance of existing highways.

News

Cartoon and Film Controversy

On March 27th, Wolesi Jirga members continued their discussion of the film by Dutch MP, Geert Wilders, which is widely considered offensive to Muslims. The Wolesi Members assigned the International Affairs Committee to follow up with the Afghanistan Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) and the Embassy of the Netherlands to seek action against Mr. Wilders based on Article 20 of the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights, which states, (1) "any propaganda for war shall be prohibited by law," and (2) "any advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence shall be prohibited by law."

On March 31st, Honorable Joyenda reported for the International Affairs Committee that the MoFA Deputy Minister for Political Affairs, Mohammad Kabir Farahi, told the Committee that President Karzai met with Dutch officials on the issue while in Switzerland and that the MoFA had met with the Dutch Ambassador in Kabul and

issued warning letter about the potential consequences of broadcasting the film. The MoFA has reportedly approached the Organization of The Islamic Conference (OIC) about possible legal action against the Dutch MP.

Television Broadcasts

Parliament spent considerable time last week in often heated discussion on the appropriateness of broadcasting culturally insensitive material. Wolesi Jirga MPs were divided over Tolo TV's broadcast of women and men dancing together during a recent awards ceremony. During the March 31st plenary, Honorable Sayaf expressed disappointment that the Constitution has been disregarded many times in the last year as television stations broadcasted sensitive material without discretion. Honorable Ranjbar argued that by trying to forbid boys and girls dancing together, the Assembly would be supporting a Taliban-style government. Honorable Barakzai pointed out that the issue of abused boys and girls used to entertain at parties of some influential citizens should be given priority over dancing on television. Honorable Karlokhail questioned the importance of discussing songs while the issue of rapes of young children has been frequently proposed as an agenda item but never included in the debate. Honorable Sayaf also cited un-Islamic advertisements and banks charging interest as problems the Assembly is obligated to address.

The Wolesi Jirga joint committee established to address these issues has called for: commercials advertising bank interest to be banned; dance artists not to be invited to Afghanistan; television programs deemed noncompliant with Islamic standards to be banned; and legal action to be taken against Tolo Television.

The Wolesi Jirga Religion, Culture, Education and Higher Education Commission has reportedly asked the Ministry of Information and Culture to take appropriate steps to ban Indian programs which advertise Buddhism and Hinduism.

Public Space

Honorable Ranjbar, Chairman of the Central Audit and Oversight Committee of the Wolesi Jirga, this period began to call for relocation of foreign military bases to outside Kabul city center and a halt to international patrols within the city. Like Honorable Ranjbar's calls last week for removal of security barriers from public land, the measures aim to ease traffic congestion.

Disabled and Martyred

The Disabled, Martyred, Gender, and Civil Society Committee questioned the Deputy Minister for Martyred and Disabled on April 2nd with regards to underuse of the Ministry's 1386 budget; a 1387 spending strategy; government job placement for the disabled; and allocation of UAE-built housing to the disabled. The Committee was satisfied with the Deputy's responses but will continue its monitoring duties throughout the year.

Search of MP Residence

Abdul Khaliq Mujahid, MP from Urozgan, complained this week that international forces damaged his residence during a four hour search. The third such search, the MP says. Speaker Qanooni instructed the First Deputy of the Wolesi Jirga to follow up through the National Security Directorate and Ministries of Defense and Interior.

Speaker Meets United Nations Envoy

Wolesi Jirga Speaker Qanooni held a meeting with the newly appointed UN Special Representative of the Secretary General, Kai Eide. Speaker Qanooni, while congratulating Eide on his appointment, stressed UN contributions towards making Afghanistan an independent country. In turn, the Special Representative assured Speaker Qanooni of the UN's continued support.

Meshrano Addresses Senators' Attendance

In a Committee of Chairs meeting on March 30th, Speaker Mujadadi expressed concern over Senators' poor attendance and proposed that a rule be established to prohibit absences. On April 1st, it was proposed that attendance be taken at 10am when the weather is cold and 9am when it is warm and that unacceptable absences be announced in the plenary and provided to media for broadcasting. The attendance debate is taking place during the Meshrano's update of its internal rules.

International Affairs

On April 1st, the National Assembly's application to an international inter-parliamentary friendship union of 26 parliaments was discussed.

Condemnation of Property for Hospital

The Meshrano Jirga Complaint Committee reviewed the reports of Kabul University professors regarding the sale of their Government-provided residences. The Agha Khan Foundation plans to purchase the land to build a hospital. The Complaint Committee will follow up the issue with the Ministries of Higher Education, Public Health and Kabul Municipality.