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**AFGHANISTAN
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Legislative Newsletter

Calendar

- Wolesi Jirga (Lower House) Agenda:
 - Electoral Law
 - Independent Election Commission Structure Law
 - Law on Rights and Privileges of the Disabled
 - Law on Rights and Privileges of the Relatives of Martyrs and Missing
 - Communication Services Regulatory Law
 - Higher Education Law
 - Law on Social Behavior

- Meshrano Jirga (Upper House) Agenda:
 - Mining Materials Law
 - Statistics Law
 - Medicine Law
 - Law on Civil Servants
 - Law on Military Courts

- Joint Committees:
 - Law on Sale of Immoveable Property to Foreign Embassies and International Organizations
 - Law on Reform Commission of National Police Forces
 - Forensic Medicine Law
 - Law on Gatherings, Protests, and Demonstrations
 - Political Parties Law
 - Labor Law
 - Cooperatives Law

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

The status update and description of bills remaining inactive for several weeks have been removed. They will be reintroduced as the drafts become active. Bills on the official Assembly agendas will remain in the calendar above.

Electoral Law

The Kuchi seat detractors on the ad hoc electoral law committee have created two drafts of Article 9, which covers the nomads' seats. The drafts will tentatively be discussed with the entire committee on June 2nd.

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

Mining Materials Law

The Meshrano Jirga plenary will tentatively discuss the law on June 1st.

The law will regulate mine ownership and control, security, management, private investment, minerals, and other affairs related to mining.

Law on Personnel Affairs of ANA, ANP and NDC Sergeants

A joint committee of both houses approved the law on May 27th. The law will be sent to President Karzai next week.

The law will regulate personnel affairs (appointment, transfer, vacation, discipline, rewards, and retirement) of ANA, ANP and NDS sergeants.

Law on Rights and Privileges of the Disabled

The draft remains with the Wolesi Jirga Disables, Martyrs, and Widows Committee but was inactive 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 law saw no Wolesi plenary activity last 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 Services Regulatory Law

The law is pending further discussion in the Wolesi Jirga Communication, Transport, and Municipality Committee.

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

The law is included in next week's Meshrano Jirga agenda.

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.

Medicine Law

Last week's planned Meshrano plenary discussion was cancelled due to a walkout over selection of Paris Conference participants. The draft law is included in a special session of the Meshrano Jirga this week.

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

Higher Education Law

Wolesi plenary discussed the law on May 26th and 28th. A majority voted for the deans of public higher education institutions to be nominated by the boards of governors of universities and colleges. The Minister of Higher Education has requested that presidential confirmation of public university deans remains intact. Discussion of the law continued with approval of 39 articles.

The law will regulate the activities of public and private higher education institutions in Afghanistan. The Wolesi Jirga Legislative Affairs Committee has made several amendments to the bill.

Law on Civil Servants

Meshrano Jirga received the law on May 27th and has placed it this week's agenda.

The law addresses the salaries and ranks of civil service employees, and outlines measures to: make administrative corrections to Government systems; clarify job descriptions for Government employees; improve education standards of Government employees; improve employee talent and work ethic; and provide employee housing and benefits.

Political Parties Law

A joint committee of the houses was scheduled to review Meshrano Jirga's amendments on May 31st.

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

Law on Military Courts

The law is included in the Meshrano Jirga agenda for this week.

The Military Court Law will regulate the structure and responsibilities of military courts.

Road Toll Law

On May 26th a joint committee of the houses approved the Meshrano Jirga's amendments. The law will be sent for the President's approval this week.

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

Labor Law

Scheduled joint committee of Meshrano and Wolesi Jirga will discuss the law this week.

The Labor Law will regulate the rights, responsibilities, and benefits of employees.

Forensic Medicine Law

Scheduled joint committee of Meshrano and Wolesi Jirga will discuss the law this week.

The law aims to professionalize forensic medicine services during criminal investigations by the Afghan justice institutions.

Law on Sale of Immovable Property to Foreign Embassies and International Organizations

Scheduled joint committee of Meshrano and Wolesi Jirga will discuss the law this week.

The law will regulate the sale of immovable property to foreign embassies and international organizations.

Cooperatives Law

After initially accepting the Meshrano Jirga's amendments, the Wolesi Jirga has requested a joint committee meeting, which is scheduled for this week.

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.

News

US Congressional Delegation Visits Assembly

US Representatives Adam Schiff (CA-29) and Allyson Schwartz (PA-13), members of the House Democracy Assistance Commission (HDAC), visited the National Assembly on May 28th and 29th. The pair held peer-to-peer meetings with partner committees, including the Wolesi Jirga Defense Affairs and Territorial Integrity, Justice and Judiciary, Transportation and Communication, Budget and Finance, and National Economy committees. Other engagements included courtesy visits with the Secretary General, Speaker Qanooni, observation of the plenary gallery, and an official lunch hosted by Second Deputy Speaker Paiman and attended by seven committee chairs. On May 29th, the US Representatives, the USAID Head of Mission, the Wolesi Jirga Speaker and Deputy Speakers, Secretariat leadership, Minister for Higher Education, and other committee chairs were on hand to inaugurate the USAID-sponsored Afghanistan Parliamentary Institute (API) with a press conference and ribbon cutting. The US Representatives also presented books from HDAC to the library.

During its meeting with Representatives Schiff and Schwartz, members of the Wolesi Jirga Defense Committee raised concerns about the peace agreement signed between Pakistan and its border tribal factions and the pact's implications for Afghan stability. The Committee members also raised the issue of searches and collateral damage by international forces, appealing to their legislative counterparts to pursue accountability within the US military. Four of these committee members along with four members of the Internal Affairs, Borders and Local Administrations committee will visit Washington, DC in June for an APAP and HDAC sponsored consultation on security and defense matters. Other issues discussed in committee meetings include legislative-executive cooperation on oversight, and channeling of donor funds through the Afghan government.

During the API inauguration, USAID Mission Director Michael Yates said, "The idea to establish this institute originated in the Afghan Assembly and the United States Government is proud to support it. On behalf of the United States Government, I would like to reaffirm our commitment to provide assistance." The Institute will host the majority of training for MPs and staff from basic English and computer skills to legislative drafting.

Representative Schwartz followed with, "We stand here to partner with the Afghan Government in every way we can. We have supported the library of the National Assembly and we are proud to help with books, trainings and hopefully with a library of newspapers."

Wolesi Jirga Cracks Down on Absentee MPs

On May 24 Wolesi Jirga voted to reveal the names of habitually absent legislators. After the vote, Speaker Qanooni announced the decision with, "Lack of a quorum prevents Wolesi Jirga from approving the laws and delays our work" he said. "Those who are continuously absent must be punished" he added. The MPs voted to

publicize the names of absent MPs on a weekly and monthly basis and in an end of legislative session report. The first three MPs – none of whom had attended a session during the current legislative term – published included President Karzai’s brother, Honorable Qayoum Karzai. The MPs also voted to cut salaries for days missed. An average of 80-100 MPs have been absent in each plenary session, 60-70 without reason, a situation which makes regularly meeting quorum problematic.

Source: Wolesi Jirga DIPR

Language Debate

The Higher Education Law discussion last week included debate over Dari versus Pashtu use in official terminology. Some MPs argued for the inclusion of the Dari “danishgah” in place of or in addition to the pashtu “phohantoon” for “university.” Others argued that the Constitution forbids changing the national terminology. During the sensitive language debate Honorable Alami Balkhi pointed out, “Your Excellency Qanooni, you are allowing the debate to open and the flames of this issue to spread by each passing minute. Because of similar issues, the Wolesi faced a 46-day-long [electoral law boycott] crisis.” A committee has been assigned to work with academics to explore a solution.

Senators Boycott Meshrano Jirga Session

It had been decided that senators would select the Meshrano Jirga participants for the Paris Conference. So when Speaker Mujadidi introduced Parwan Province Senators Reeda Azimi and Dr. Mohammad Zalmai, Chairman of the Complaint Committee, a majority opposed his proposal. The senators accused the leadership of choosing government supporters and insisted on electing the participants. A majority argued that because economic issues will be prevalent on the conference agenda, participants should be elected from the National Economy and Budget Committee. The senators later left the Meshrano hall in sing of protest.

The Wolesi Jirga has elected two legislators for participation in Paris.

Kabul MP Removed from Wolesi Plenary

During questioning of the Executive-formed Natural Disaster Emergency Committee on May 27th, Speaker Qanooni ejected Honorable Ramazan Bashar Dost after the MP objected strongly to the absence of the Emergency Committee head and Second Vice President, Karim Khalili. Questioning why the Vice President could not be present in the Assembly, Honorable Bashar Dost said, “What other important issues do we have in Afghanistan compared to people eating grass which prevents the head of committee from answering to the people’s representatives?” Speaker Qanooni asked Honorable Bashar Dost not to interrupt the session as is his habit. When the MP persisted, Speaker Qanooni asked the security personnel to remove Honorable Bashar Dost. The outspoken MP departed on his own.