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News

MPs Ask for Clarification of British General's Comments

In a break from committee workplan discussions, members of the Wolesi Jirga International Affairs Committee raised on August 11 British General David Richards' comments regarding the country's long-term presence in Afghanistan.

Richards told the media last week that Britain's involvement in Afghanistan could last another 30 to 40 years. This commitment could include development, governance, and security, according to the official.

Committee Deputy Chairman Sayed Ishaq Gilani (Paktika) called the statement vague and pledged to request the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to seek an explanation.

The committee discussion came after a demonstration in Laghman province, where, in response to the general's comments, hundreds of residents chanted opposition to the long-term presence of British forces in Afghanistan and in support of bolstering the Afghan army's role.

MPs Discuss Refugees' Participation in Elections

On August 11, the Wolesi Jirga Tribes, Nomads, Refugees and Displaced Persons Committee condemned the lack of measures taken to facilitate participation of Afghan refugees in the August 20 elections. Committee members see the situation as a breach of the Article 33 of the Constitution, which states: "The citizens of Afghanistan shall have the right to elect and be elected. The conditions of exercising this right shall be regulated by law." Participation of all Afghan citizens is the duty of the government and Independent Elections Commission (IEC), according to committee members.

The criticism comes in light of what members claim were pledges by the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Interior, Refugees and Repatriation, the IEC, United Nation High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), and United Nations Assistance Mission to Afghanistan (UNAMA) in prior committee meetings to make an effort to ensure the refugee vote.

MP Haji Parea Kuchi (Khost) told APAP: "A large number of Pakistan and Iran-based Afghan refugees and displaced people are disappointed that they may not participate in the coming presidential and provincial council elections."

The IEC has said in the past that the difficulty in obtaining the estimated 50 million USD required for refugee voting is prohibitive.

Committee Pushes Government to Implement Salary Law

On August 12, the Meshrano Jirga Legislative Committee convened the Deputy Ministers of Finance, Parliamentary Affairs, and the director of legislation at the Ministry of Justice. Committee members questioned the officials on the government's apparent delay in publishing and implementing the Law on Salaries of High Ranking Government Officials. The Wolesi Jirga had previously overridden, with a two-thirds majority, a presidential veto of the draft. The officials assured the committee that the law will be implemented and published after they receive the Supreme Court's interpretation of several sections. The law determines the salaries of high ranking officials, including the president, chief justice, ministers, members of Parliament, etc.

Committee Hears Border Complaints

The Meshrano Jirga Tribal Affairs and Boundaries Committee last week heard complaints of Toori tribe members from the Kurram Tribal Agency in Pakistan, which borders Afghanistan's Paktika Province, about the closure of cross-border routes by Afghan security forces. The committee pledged to discuss the issue with the Ministers of Boundaries and Tribal Affairs, Interior, and the head of intelligence in the presence of Toori tribe representatives.

Legislation

Justice Committee Sets Priorities

The Wolesi Jirga Justice and Judiciary Committee has designated the Extradition Law, Government Structure Law, and Organization and Jurisdiction of Courts Law as legislative priorities for this session. All are among government priorities as listed in the August 3 *Legislative Newsletter*.

There was no other significant activity on legislation last week.