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## AFGHANISTAN PARLIAMENTARY ASSISTANCE PROJECT

3 August 2009 Vol. 2, No. 20

# Legislative Newsletter

## News

### **Wolesi Jirga Postpones Plenary Sitzings until after Elections**

Wolesi Jirga Speaker Mohammad Yonus Qanooni announced on 29 July that the Committee of Chairs has decided to postpone lower house plenary sittings until after the 20 August presidential and provincial council elections. All other Wolesi Jirga business will proceed as usual, according to the Speaker.

The National Assembly returned from summer recess on 23 July, but due to ongoing election campaigns, the Wolesi Jirga was unable to establish a quorum – a majority of members – last week.

Wolesi Jirga First Secretary Abdul Satar Khawasi (Parwan) pointed out that, “According to the Wolesi Jirga internal Rules, the Committee of Chairs has the power to postpone plenary sittings for a specific time and continue to work in the committees.”<sup>1</sup> The leader added that during the postponement of the plenary sittings, the committees will continue work, including review of development reports from the provinces for use in considering the mid-year budget.

The committees will not formally process new bills as they cannot begin deliberations on a proposed law until it has been referred to the committee by the plenary. Bills already in the committees can be considered.

Of the situation, MP Aziz Ahmad Nadim (Herat) said: “The committees have a lot of work to do. Some bills have been rejected by the government, and a number of new legislative decrees have been passed by the President during the recess. At the same time, the Wolesi Jirga has oversight duties, the issue of transportation needs to be solved, and Kabul municipality problems need to be addressed.”

Some MPs are unhappy with the Committee of Chairs’ decision to cancel the plenary meetings, but generally believe that there was no other option given the circumstances.

“It would have been better if the people’s representatives could start their work on time and campaign after hours. But if we are unable to establish a quorum, they

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<sup>1</sup> Article 41 of the lower house Rules of Procedure states: “Plenary sessions are held during specified time in accordance with the determination of the Committee of Chairs.”

should attend the committee meetings regularly,” said Mohammad Naim Farahi (Farah).

Several MPs defended the importance of campaigning and expressed concern that if the people’s representatives do not promote Afghanistan’s democratic institutions in the constituencies, the country risks destabilization. Mohammad Daud Sultanzoi (Ghazni) told APAP: “Campaigning is a legal right of the members of Parliament; they have the responsibility to convince their constituents to take part in elections and through the elections bring prosperity and democracy to their country.”

Because both houses are constitutionally obliged to hold their sessions concurrently, but separately (Article 104), it is assumed that the upper house will, like the Wolesi, formally continue its session. At the time of this writing, however, the Meshrano had not decided to either hold plenary meetings (when a quorum is established) or follow the Wolesi’s lead in cancelling all plenary sittings until after the elections.

### **Government Delivers List of Priority Bills**

The Ministry of Justice sent an official letter on 20 July to the Ministry of Parliamentarian Affairs indicating the government’s priority bills and requesting consideration by the National Assembly. Below is the list.

- Electoral Law
- Government Structure Law
- Counternarcotics Law
- Law on Local Governance
- Law on Medals and Badges
- Law on Private Security Companies
- Higher Education Law
- Law on Rights and Privileges of the Relatives of Martyrs and Missing
- Law on Rights and Privileges of the Disabled
- Organization and Jurisdiction of Courts Law
- Law on Firearms, Ammunition, and Explosives
- Independent Election Commission Structure Law
- Law on Regulating the Ethical Relations of the Three Powers of State
- Law on Financial Leases
- Law on Supporting Competition
- Expropriation Law
- Law on Planting Seeds
- Law on Chamber of Commerce and Industry
- Law on Transit
- Law on Personnel Affairs of ANA Sergeants
- Extradition Law

There was no significant activity on legislation last week.