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## AFGHANISTAN PARLIAMENTARY ASSISTANCE PROJECT

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# Legislative Newsletter

## News

### **Senators ‘puzzled’ by polling centre closures in secure areas**

Afghanistan’s Parliamentary Elections are scheduled for September 18, but some Senators are already crying foul at the IEC’s decision to close some polling centers in some of the secure areas of the country. Senators say the IEC’s decision is confusing and they fear it might prove to ‘their’ disadvantage. The IEC announced on August 18 that, after consultations with Afghan security institutions and ISAF, they are not going to open all 6835 polling centers in the country. A total of 938 polling centers are going to be shut due to security concerns.

The Meshrano Jirga (MJ) invited Fazel Ahmad Manawee, the chairman of IEC, to the general plenary on August 24 to seek details on polling center closures. In an upset to the Senators, Mr. Manawee did not show up. To some Senators, even more disconcerting and problematic was the closure of polling sites in some of the secure districts. “Some centers in Jaghori [a district in Ghazni province] have been closed, just because sites in other parts of the Ghazni province can’t open,” said Khaliqdad Balaghi (Kabul).

Senator Balaghi, highlighted Ghazni province because it has an ethnically mixed population. Ghazni province is made up of Pashtoons, Hazaras and Tajiks. Jaghori district is a predominantly Hazara dominated area considered to have fairly good security. Other districts of Ghazni province, particularly those dominated by Pashtoons, are very volatile. Senators fear that the decision to close some polling centers may have been taken to balance the number of Hazara and non-Hazara MPs in the province.

The IEC flatly rejects this claim and assert that their decision was taken after consultations with security institutions. Mr. Manawee stated that the decision to close some polling stations in secure provinces was based on their assessment of the 2009 Presidential election. “All the stations in the secure provinces that have been closed, did not have more than 100 voters during the 2009 elections, so we decided to close them.” said Mr. Manawee. The IEC maintains that the majority of the 938 centers were closed because of security concerns.

## **Senators question security official on Kuchi – Hazara clashes**

The decision by the Wolesi Jirga (WJ) to remain on recess as its members focus on the campaign for the September 18 plebiscite has resulted in no legislative activity in the National Assembly. The Meshrano Jirga (MJ) at the beginning of its current session resolved not to focus on legislative activities, but on the oversight and representation functions until the WJ resumes sittings.

On August 23, the Defense Affairs and Internal Security Committee (DAISC) met to discuss various security related issues. The Operational Deputy of the National Directorate of Security (NDS), Mohammad Nayeem, attended the committee hearing to address Senators security concerns.

Issues for discussion included the progress made in ongoing investigations with regard to recent Hazara- Kuchi (nomads) conflicts in Kabul. The Kuchi – Hazara clashes in Dasht e Barchi (western part of capital Kabul), on August 13, reports of which could not be independently verified, suggest that at least eight people lost their lives. Senators were keen to learn about the progress of enquiry. “We have identified the culprits, we are only waiting for the right time to arrest them.” said Mr. Nayeem. Owing to the sensitive nature of the enquiry, Mr. Nayeem couldn’t provide the Senators with any specific names. Mr. Shir Mohammad Akhundzadah (Helmand), the chairman of the DAISC welcomed the ‘good’ news and added: “The Senators have always been keen to help the NDS, we have always argued the case for the expansion of your department [NDS].”

The DAISC has taken the Hazara-Kochi conflict very seriously because of the potential for ethnic based clashes to implode. Kuchis are Sunni Muslims while the Hazaras are Shia Muslims. Some Senators believe that this conflict has the potential to permanently damage the relations between two ethnic groups. In Afghanistan, Hazara – Kuchi conflicts have a history that dates back many years. In another recent incident, on May 13 2010, the Kuchis and Hazaras clashed in Behsud district of Maidan Wardak province. Fifty MPs and Senators had then walked out of the National Assembly, protesting for many days and asking the government to take serious action to stop the fighting.

## **Legislation**

No activity to report for the period.