



Legislative Newsletter

27 September 2010, Vol.4, No. 5

NEWS

Wolesi Jirga Begins Sitting: Election on Agenda

The Wolesi Jirga (WJ) resumed plenary sessions on 25 September. Speaker of the House Mohammad Younus Qanooni began by welcoming returning Members of Parliament (MPs) back to the WJ for the beginning of the lame duck session following national legislative elections on 18 September. While the sitting did not have an official agenda, some MPs used the opportunity to express their sentiments regarding the elections.

A series of MPs expressed frustration at supposed electoral fraud in their provinces, with some advocating that the WJ use its powers to monitor the work of the Independent Election Commission (IEC) and the Electoral Complaints Commission (ECC) while vote tallying continues. MP Abdul Kabir Ranjbar (Kabul) said, “We should put pressure on the ECC to make sure that electoral complaints are addressed properly.” He also stated that, “the House should put election-related issues on the agenda for Monday’s [Sept 27] session for discussion.”

However, some MPs responded that the WJ should allow the IEC and ECC to conduct their work and avoid giving the impression of interference. MP Abdulhadi Wahedi (Laghman) said: “We should avoid discussion of election-related issues; we should let the ECC address the complaints because it is an independent entity.” MP Ataullah Ludin (Nangarhar) concurred adding that the issue could divide MPs into rival camps.

Some MPs also raised allegations against government officials and foreign forces who they claimed interfered in the electoral process. For example, MP Farooq Meranai (Nangarhar) said: “My name is on the list of the leading candidates, but I have to say that there was fraud, irregularities and ballot stuffing in Nangarhar province, and that the Inter-Service Intelligence (ISI) of Pakistan and provincial government officials were involved in fraud on election day.”

In response, MP Asadullah Hematyar (Logar) said: “I heard that the United States distributed weapons to the Taliban to make the security situation worse, so that people couldn’t participate in the election...But for the sake of our national unity we should avoid discussion of election-related issues in the House because it will create problems.”

Fears were also raised by MP Noorul Haq Uloomi (Kandahar) regarding a rumored plan to partition Afghanistan, and he was scathing about election day conduct in Kandahar: “Only 2% of people participated in the election in Kandahar and the rest of the ballot boxes have been stuffed by powerful government officials.”

The session ended with Speaker Qanooni thanking the MPs for expressing their views and opinions on the election. Placing the election on the agenda for the following session, he said that the house should focus on the work of the IEC and ECC. He added that officials from the two electoral bodies could be called before WJ if necessary.

After three months of summer recess, the WJ is expected to continue working until the final results of the election are announced and new members are introduced to Parliament, expected mid-November. Due to uncertainty about the results and the absence of some MPs, the house has not drawn up a specific agenda for legislative business during the lame duck period.

Commission Established as Wolesi Jirga tells ECC to Deal Seriously with Fraud

Meeting on 27 September, the Wolesi Jirga (WJ) called on the Independent Election Commission (IEC) and the Electoral Complaints Commission (ECC) to deal seriously with cases of fraud arising from the election of 18 September.

During open discussion, Speaker of the House Mohammad Younus Qanooni praised the participation of voters despite the threats of the Taliban, but he explained that allegations of election fraud have caused serious concern about the next Parliament. “We all know that fraud and irregularities happened on election day,” he said. “Now we want to discuss what is to be done to separate the fake ballots from the valid ballots.”

Some MPs echoed the Speaker’s sentiments about electoral fraud during their first day in session following the elections, while other MPs argued that the IEC and ECC should be allowed to get on with their work independently.

A number of incumbent legislators who ran for re-election speculated that a decrease in public participation in the election was due to security concerns and the government’s failure to investigate fraud in last year’s Presidential elections. “The IEC and ECC did not properly investigate the allegations of fraud during the Presidential election—that could be a reason why a number of people lost their trust in the commissions and did not leave their homes to vote,” MP Mawlawee Sayed Rahman (Laghman) told APAP.

Kabir Ranjbar, an MP and candidate from Kabul, said, “In addition to the fraud, some ballots were filled out based on ethnic interest and money.” He further stated, “The ECC should investigate the electoral complaints properly and make sure that those people who have been involved in fraud or ballot stuffing are punished through the judicial system.”

At the end of the session, the house agreed with Nangarhar MP Atullah Ludin’s proposal to establish a commission to monitor the work of the IEC and ECC. Speaker Qanooni announced that it would be composed of seven outgoing MPs who did not stand for re-election. They are:

1. MP Mawlawi Ataulah Ludin (Nangarhar)
2. MP Sultan Mohammad Awrang (Badakhshan)
3. MP Habibullah Ramin (Baghlan)
4. MP Sayed Zaher Masroor (Balkh)
5. MP Ms. Sabrina Saqeb (Kabul)
6. MP Ms. Najiba Sharif (Kabul)
7. MP Mohammad Nayim Farahi (Farah)

The relevant standing committees for religion, education and the disabled were also asked to follow up on progress on the payment of increased salaries to teachers, the disabled and the relatives of martyrs, and to inform the WJ plenary of any achievements. The committees will report their findings in the Wednesday (29 September) plenary session.

Meshrano Jirga Members Commend Election

On 26 September the Meshrano Jirga (MJ) convened a plenary sitting chaired by First Deputy Speaker Fazal Hadi Muslimyar. During his opening speech, Muslimyar praised the security organizations for maintaining good security during the elections. He also commended Afghan voters for their participation.

The majority of the public comments offered by the MJ members during the session claimed this year's parliamentary elections were better than the 2009 Presidential elections. "Although the Taliban conducted strong propaganda and warned people not to participate in the parliamentary election, according to my observation the people participated in voting for the candidates they were interested in," Sefatullah Haqmal (Logar) said. "I think that this election was better than the last presidential and provincial council election."

Acronyms

APAP	Afghanistan Parliamentary Assistance Program
IEC	Independent Election Commission
ECC	Electoral Complaints Commission
MJ	Meshrano Jirga
NA	National Assembly
WJ	Wolesi Jirga