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NEWS

WJ Approves the Extradition of the Accused and Convicts Bill

Mr. Habibullah Ghalib, Minister of Justice and Dr. Homayon Aziz, Minister of Parliamentary Affairs resubmitted the Extradition of Suspects, the Accused and Convicts Bill to the Wolesi Jirga (WJ) on 30 July. The proposed legislation governs the mechanism and procedures of exchanging suspects, the accused and convicts in light of bilateral or multilateral treaties and international conventions.

The proposed bill had originally been submitted to the WJ during Parliament's last term but the National Assembly did not consider it due to procedural issues. As a result the legislation was sent back to the government.

On 30 July, Mr. Haji Muhammad Muhaqeq (Kabul), chairman of the WJ's Justice and Judiciary Affairs Committee announced that 21 proposed amendments were made after extensive deliberations on the draft law. The most significant amendment proposed was to omit the extradition of suspects from this legislation. "We can't just hand over someone based on suspicions," argued Mr. Muhaqeq. He further informed the house that the entire set of proposed amendments was unanimously agreed upon by all the Lower House committees. "I would like to request the speaker of WJ to put the bill to a vote as all legal procedures have been completed," said Mr. Muhaqeq.

The amended legislation was then passed by an overwhelming majority of 122 out of 126 votes cast. The Extradition of the Accused and Convicts Bill will now be sent to the Meshrano Jirga for consideration.

"I Hold the Key for Peace" Claims MP

Ghazni province Member of Parliament, Ms. Huma Sultani, claims that she has met with the Taliban leader, Mullah Mohammad Omar and that he has authorized her to negotiate on his behalf – a claim some members in both houses of the National Assembly (NA) find extraordinary. Although she has made similar claims to the local media, she raised a few eyebrows in the Wolesi Jirga (WJ) when she proclaimed she has met with Mr. Omar in an undisclosed location in Afghanistan.

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Speaking in the plenary of 30 July Ms. Sultani advised members that Mullah Omar is ready for reconciliation. “He [Mullah Omar] wants peace and if the government does not negotiate with him, the responsibility of all death and destruction caused by fighting ultimately lies with the government,” she said, adding; “I hold the key for peace, only if the government listens to me. We could bring peace to our country.”

Responding to Ms. Sultani proclamations, Nader Khan Katawazai (Paktika) called her claim “a significant development” that needs further exploration. “Her assertion that Mullah Mohammad Omar is in Afghanistan and not in Pakistan, and that he operates independently from the Inter Service Intelligence (ISI) of Pakistan is very significant,” said Mr. Katawazai. “If true, I suggest that the WJ Speaker forms a delegation, including a few other MPs with her to talk to Mullah Omar. I am ready to go with her.” continued Mr. Katawazai.

Some MPs, notably Mr. Shir Wali Wardak (Kabul) questioned the authenticity of Ms. Sultani’s claim. “This is nothing more than a gimmick by intelligence agencies of our neighboring countries,” Mr. Wardak said. He further suggested the Lower House should make efforts to prove Ms. Sultani’s claim. “If what she says is true, then my proposal is that you send a delegation of five members to take the message of peace to him [Mullah Omar]. But if he is outside our country, it proves that the claim is a product of intelligence agencies of our neighbors, we must put an end to this discussion inside the WJ.” argued Mr. Wardak.

Mr. Gholam Faruq Majroh (Herat) criticized Ms. Sultani for turning the lower house into a “defense platform of the atrocities of the Taliban and their leader.”

Meanwhile, the Meshrano Jirga plenary of 2 August also discussed Ms. Sultani’s claim to have met Mullah Omar. Senators were divided on the matter. Some called on the upper house leadership to invite Ms. Sultani to discuss details of the meetings she claims to have had with Mullah Omar arguing this could be a breakthrough for the peace process. For others including Senator. Abdul Hanan Haqwayoon (Paktia), the claim was just a figment of Ms. Sultana’s imagination. “I am 100% sure that Ms. Sultana’s claim was nothing more than a drama and that it is not possible for Mullah Omar to stay at her home.” Senator. Noor Mohammad Kafeel, (Kapisa) concurred adding Ms. Sultani was trying to undermine the High Peace Council. “Some elements want to prove that the High Peace Council is useless and they want to play a bigger role for the peace process themselves.”

Senators Continue Focusing on Security

Mr. Abdul Rahim Wardak, Minister of Defense attended the Meshrano Jirga (MJ) plenary session on 2 August to brief senators on the security situation in Afghanistan, the transition process and recent assassinations. Mr. Wardak was invited to the plenary together with Mr. Bismilah Mohammadi, Minister of Interior, but the latter could not attend the plenary session due to “prior commitments”.

Mr. Wardak was upbeat about the trend of security situation in Afghanistan but also admitted that the security forces had a long way to go.

Mr. Rafiullah Haidari (Kunar) asked the Minister to respond to allegations that the Afghan National Army (ANA) has not responded sufficiently to cross border shelling by the Pakistani military. “Pakistan has continued with its rocket attacks for more than two months, but we have not seen any reaction from the Afghan government.” In response, Minister Wardak explained that the ANA has not been well equipped to retaliate with comparable artillery fire.

Mr. Abdul Hanan Haqwayoon (Paktika) agreed with Mr. Wardak about lack of heavy artillery for the ANA, but asked why the international community was reluctant to help. “You [Minister of Defense] should be frank in admitting that foreigners are interfering in your affairs. We are proud of our army but it is not well equipped,” argued Mr. Haqwayoon. “If the US does not want to equip our army we will talk to Russia and I am sure Russia will do it.”

Mr. Zalmi Zabuli (Zabul), however, blamed the leadership of the ANA for the lack of modern hardware. “Why isn’t the international community helping the Afghan government to strengthen its Air Force? They have not given the latest hardware to us arguing that Afghanistan does not need the latest technology. I think the leadership of the Ministry of Defense is weak in this regard,” argued Mr. Zabuli.

Mr. Wardak admitted that there were issues within the ANA but he assured the Senators that the Ministry of Defense under his leadership will do everything at their disposal to defend the country against the enemies.

Acronyms

MJ Meshrano Jirga
NA National Assembly
WJ Wolesi Jirga