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NEWS:

MJ Committees Activity Reports

Four Meshrano Jirga (MJ) commissions presented their oversight reports to the 6 September plenary session. The commissions, which included Complaints, International Affairs, Public Welfare, Natural Resources and Environment and National Economy and Budget updated Senators on the state of certain detention centers and oversight inquiries the commissions conducted at the end of August 2011.

MJ Speaker H.E Fazel Hadi Muslimyar opened the session expressing hope that the deadlock in the Wolessi Jirga (WJ) has concluded. Eight of the nine new WJ members proclaimed winners by the Independent Election Commission (IEC) last month, replaced previously seated legislators in the WJ on 3 September. The swearing in ceremony was held under tight security and only witnessed by 45 lawmakers, while more than one hundred members of the Protectors of Law Coalition demonstrated outside Parliament with their unseated colleagues. “We hope WJ members are now satisfied with the replacement of nine new MPs so they can continue their normal duties,” Speaker Muslimyar said.

H.E Muslimyar also called on the media not to use the word “parliament” when referencing only the WJ. The Speaker explained that Parliament consists of two houses and the WJ does not represent both houses. “WJ and Parliament are never the same terms. Sometimes the media and MPs refer to Mr. Ibrahimi as the Speaker of Parliament which is not correct,” he said.

Chairperson of the Complaints Commission, Mr. Zalmai Zabuli (Zabul) presented his commission’s report on a visit to Pul-e-Charkhi Detention Center. Mr. Zabuli highlighted that there are 645 prisoners in Pul-e-Charkhi Detention Center who, according to his report, are in good health and have all the necessary supplies. He, however, noted problems with prisoners facing drug trafficking charges. “There were prisoners accused of drug trafficking. Most of them were released by their supporters while the rest who do not have outside supporters are in prison for years. There were also prisoners who, despite being legally released by the courts, are still in the detention centre because they do not have guarantors as required by the Supreme Court,” Mr Zabuli said.

The Complaints Commission Chair also said that his commission had received various complaints involving different entities. These included a range of taxes on Afghan industries and the implementation of the tax system on foreign companies. “After our meetings with Finance and Economic ministries, the ministers concurred with the MJ’s idea regarding the foreigners’ tax payment which will amount to \$7-8 million,” he said.

Responding to the Complaints Commission report, First Deputy Speaker, Mr. Mohammad Alam Izedyar (Panjshir) said there are foreign nationals working for SUPREME without valid work permits. “The number of such foreigners brought by SUPREME is 1,700 people and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs sent

a letter to the Ministry of Interior asking the ministry to pursue these people. The Interior Ministry has not acted on the request by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs,” said Mr Izedyar.

Mrs. Khairunisa Ghamay (Nimroz), Chairperson of the Women Affairs Commission, briefed Senators on Badam Bagh Women Detention Center where 193 women are in custody. According to her, although positive steps have been taken to solve problems of women detainees, some of their rights are not being upheld. “One of the problems is no one follows cases through. Some cases have been closed and yet no one has pursued them, while their files remain open,” she added.

Mr. Ahmad Basher Samim (Badakhshan) and Mr. Khaleqdad Balaghi (Kabul) also briefed the plenary on the Child Care Center in Kabul, the police 200-bed hospital as well as Daud Khan’s 4,000-bed hospital. Mr. Balaghi informed further informed members that his commission (public welfare and environment) received several requests to help drug addicts living under bridges in Kabul city. “There are a number of drug addicts in Kabul who live under the bridges and no government agency is looking after them. People asked us to save their lives,” he said.

Senators Call for Fight Against Drug Trafficking

The Meshrano Jirga (MJ) has stressed the need to enlist the cooperation of Afghan government officials and the countries in the region to prevent drug trafficking to other countries. This follows a 2 September meeting between Afghanistan, Pakistan, Tajikistan and Russia in which the four nations agreed to work closely to combat terrorism, drug trafficking and organized crime.

Speaking in the 6 September MJ plenary session, Senators claimed that high ranking Afghan officials are involved in smuggling and usurpation of government land. “The government has not taken serious measures to prevent usurpation of lands and drug smuggling. Even some government officials are supporting this mafia,” said Mr. Abdul Wahab Irfan (Takhar). He further called upon the government to disclose names of the people involved in drug trafficking and usurpation of government lands. Echoing Mr. Irfan’s comments, Mr. Daud Ghafari (Ghor) alleged “The government is behind the cultivation of narcotics.”

A number of Senators believe that neighboring countries are also involved in the production and smuggling of narcotics. “If Afghans are cultivating narcotics, the foreigners are smuggling (them). They are providing transport facilities and chemicals,” said Mr. Hajji Nazar Mohammad (Baghlan). Supporting Mr Mohammad’s argument, Mr. Habib Rahman (Baghlan) said; “I totally agree, foreigners are also involved in drug smuggling”

Some of the Senators were of the view that Afghanistan is not yet ready for democracy. According to them the Afghan government is very weak and not in a position to track officials involved in the usurpation of lands and drug smuggling. Mr. Hidayatullah Rahayee (Bamyan) said, “Afghanistan needs a dictatorial government in order to track smugglers and land mafia.” Another Senator called for the implementation of Sharia law. “The only solution for these problems is to enforce Islamic Laws,” said, Mr. Abdul Hanan Haqwayoon (Paktia).

MJ Speaker H.E. Fazel Hadi Muslimyar stated that over the last ten years, the international community and the Afghan government have struggled to reduce cultivation and trafficking of narcotics. He said: “Governmental lands are national wealth but powerful authorities illegally usurped lands. The government

has failed in countering narcotics and protecting the nation's wealth." Mr. Muslimyar added that the MJ, nation and government have the responsibility to protect lands from being looted, "The MJ is ready to cooperate with the nation and the government in order to prevent usurpation of government lands and to fight the smugglers," Mr. Muslimyar said.

The House decided to summon the Minister of Counter Narcotics, Deputy Minister of Counter Narcotics MOI, Minister of Public Health and Attorney of Counter Narcotics and Minister of Urban Development, Kabul Mayor and Minister of Agriculture in order to update the House regarding measures taken to eliminate cultivation of narcotics and usurpation of government lands.

MPs Call for End to Disputes over WJ elections

The Wolesi Jirga's (WJ) 7 September plenary session called for an end to the election crisis, claiming that if the issue continues, the current political crisis will stoke more tensions. The prolonged crisis over the WJ elections and the decision of the Independent Election Commission (IEC) to replace nine members has divided the House into two groups- the Protectors of Law Coalition (Coalition) and the Parliamentary Reformists Group (PRG). The Coalition staged a demonstration against the swearing in of the new nine members and boycotted WJ.

Mr. Habib Afghan (Kuchi) who belongs to the PRG said, "The WJ crisis has exhausted the nation and we shall end it." According to him, President Karzai openly told the Ministers Council that no changes will occur in the WJ. "People should avoid negative statements." Senator Afghan added that the country needs a law to govern refugees who seek asylum in Afghanistan.

Agreeing with Mr. Afghan, Mr. Abdul Hai Akhondzada (Helmand) said that there are several important issues that require serious attention by the WJ. "We have not performed any task during the past eight months in the interest of the nation. I urge all MPs to end the crisis and focus on more important issues such as the Traditional Loya Jirga, Second Bonn Conference and Strategic Agreement with United States." A number of MPs sought to reconcile with their protesting colleagues. Mr. Sher Wali Wardak (Kabul) said, "The WJ is the House of the nation and it should defend national interests. The MPs currently on strike should come back to deal with these political issues inside parliament." He further suggested that the WJ should constitute a delegation to meet with President Karzai to discuss the fate of the nine disqualified MPs. "The government should give them good jobs in order to restore their dignity," Mr. Wardak added.

Ms. Shukria Barakzai (Kabul) criticized her colleagues saying the current WJ crisis was a conflict instigated by those who had sold themselves for foreign currencies. "We are the source of the nation's problems and we could not solve the problems of the nation. The current crisis is not a turmoil of MPs . . . We turned the WJ into Buzkashee (horse racing) ground and yet we should protect the prestige of the parliament," she said.

Mr. Wardak, Maulawee Tarakhel (Kabul) concurred adding; "I am agreeing with Mr. Wardak to form a delegation to meet the President in order to restore the dignity of the removed MPs and award them good posts within government institutions." He further added that the WJ should also establish a delegation to meet the Coalition and bring them back to the House.

Most of the MPs supported the idea of setting up a delegation to seek a solution to the WJ electoral dispute, so that the House can carry out its legislation, oversight and representation responsibilities in earnest.

Meanwhile, during the plenary WJ members expressed sympathy with the family of a Jihadi commander Mr. Hajji Sabar Lal, who was killed by American forces in Nangarhar province. Informing the MPs of the incident Mr. Maulawee Shahzada Shahed (Kunar), read the slain commander's background and said, "American forces killed him brutally. I and the people of Kunar denounce his killing and I urge the WJ to investigate this incident and track the perpetrators."

Expressing his sympathy to the families of martyrs, Mr. Abdul Rahim Ayoubi (Kandahar) asserted that the incident is not the first one in which foreigners have killed innocent people. "The WJ should start its routine activities in order to protect our prestige. The Speaker should control the sessions of the WJ, Afghanistan cannot tolerate such circumstances," he said.