



Islamic Republic of Afghanistan  
Joint Electoral Management Body Secretariat

JEMBS

## Background Briefing

# ***Wolesi Jirga* and Provincial Council Elections 2005**

The Joint Electoral Management Body (JEMB) was first established by Presidential Decree (No 40, 26 July 2003). It is now composed of nine Afghan Commissioners from the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) appointed by President Karzai and four international Commissioners appointed by the Special Representative to the Secretary General (SRSG), Jean Arnault.

The JEMB Secretariat (JEMBS) is the executive arm of the JEMB, responsible for the implementation of the electoral operation. The Secretariat is headed by the Chief Electoral Officer, who is also a non-voting member of the JEMB. The JEMBS has approximately 6000 Afghan and 425 international core staff active in 8 regional and 34 provincial offices. The JEMB and its Secretariat are located in the electoral headquarters on Jalalabad Road in Kabul.

The JEMB has set the date for the *Wolesi Jirga* and Provincial Council Elections for 18 September 2005. These elections will build on the success of the 2004 Presidential Election and be a vital step in the establishment of a fully representative government in Afghanistan, as envisioned by the Bonn Agreement of December 2001.

### **Institutions to be elected**

The 249 members of the *Wolesi Jirga*, or Lower House of the National Assembly (the House of People), are directly elected by the voters. Each province represents a constituency of the *Wolesi Jirga* and elects a minimum of two members to it. The exact number of representatives elected from each province is based on population data for the provinces. The population figures were provided to the JEMB by the Central Statistics Office. The seat distribution was determined by the JEMB according to these population figures and calculated using the formula established in the 2005 Electoral Law. Between nine and 29 members, depending on a province's population, will be elected in each province to serve on the Provincial Councils. Once elected, each Provincial Council will elect one of its members to sit in the *Meshrano Jirga*, the Upper House of the National Assembly (House of Elders). Under the Constitution, 34 representatives of the *Meshrano Jirga* are also indirectly elected by District Councils and 34 representatives are appointed by the President, equalling a total of 102 members in the *Meshrano Jirga*.

District Council elections were originally scheduled to take place at the same time as the *Wolesi Jirga* and Provincial Council elections; however, it will not be possible to hold District Council elections within a September 2005 timeframe since district numbers, boundaries and population figures are yet to be determined. District Council elections have therefore been postponed. The National Assembly, once constituted, will be tasked by the President to resolve the district issues. As a result, District Councils will not be able to elect their representatives to the *Meshrano Jirga* at this time. In order to maintain the balance between indirectly elected members and presidential appointees, it is anticipated that the President will only appoint half of his representatives to the *Meshrano Jirga*, that is, 17 representatives; the *Meshrano Jirga* will therefore sit with 51 members until the District Council elections take place.

According to the Electoral Law, the electoral system that will be used to elect members to the *Wolesi Jirga* and Provincial Councils is the Single Non-Transferable Vote (SNTV). Under this electoral system, each voter casts one vote for one candidate of a range of candidates on the ballot from one constituency. The candidates receiving the most votes are elected to sit in the *Wolesi Jirga* or Provincial Council.

The Constitution and Electoral Law include provisions that guarantee the representation of women in the *Wolesi Jirga* and in Provincial Councils. At least 68 women will be elected to the *Wolesi Jirga* and at least two will be elected to each Provincial Council. However, it is important to note that, if female candidates are well supported in one constituency, more women could be elected to these institutions.

The JEMB Secretariat has developed an operational concept that was presented to responsible institutions as the blueprint for the 2005 electoral operation. The following paragraphs outline the operation detailed in the concept. It should be noted that variables remain that are subject to decisions of the JEMB.

## **Phase I: Candidate Nomination**

The first significant task that the JEMB Secretariat conducted as part of preparations for the 2005 Elections was the receipt and processing of candidate nominations. Each candidate was required to submit nomination papers in person at the JEMBS Candidate Nominations Office in the province in which they wished to run. A digital photograph was taken for use on the ballot paper and an electronic copy of the photograph given to the candidate for campaign purposes. Candidates were also expected to submit a list of registered voters who support their candidacy and to sign a statement acknowledging their compliance with the candidate eligibility criteria (defined in the Constitution and in the Election Law) and the Code of Conduct for Candidates.

Despite many obstacles and challenges, including an extremely ambitious electoral timeline, difficulties with communications and technology, the limitations of the public outreach campaign, legal and procedural issues, and unforeseen security-related incidents, the Joint Electoral Management Body and its Secretariat facilitated a successful Candidate Nomination process in all provinces. At the close of nominations on 26 May, a total of 6,103 Afghan men and women had filed nomination papers to stand as candidates for the *Wolesi Jirga* and Provincial Council elections. Out of 34 provinces, only three did not witness sufficient female candidates nominating themselves for the Provincial Council election – Nangarhar, Zabul and Uruzgan.

The JEMB published the preliminary list of candidates to allow challenges to be made against candidates who are not believed to be eligible or qualified to stand for election. An Electoral Complaints Commission (ECC), with the capacity to receive complaints in all 34 provinces, was established according to electoral law to process these challenges, notify candidates of a disqualification, and allow time to respond before the final candidates' list is published on 12 July.

The Joint Secretariat of the Commission on Disarmament and Reintegration advised the ECC on whether candidates fully complied with disarmament requirements and severed all links to non-official military forces or armed groups. Upon recommendation by the ECC, the JEMB certified a final candidate list that excluded 11 nominees for commanding or belonging to an unofficial military force or armed group; one for not resigning from specified public office; and five for having insufficient valid signatures in support of nomination. At the end of the nomination period and after all candidates had been given the opportunity to withdraw, 5800 candidates remained. A total of 2,775 people nominated themselves as *Wolesi Jirga* candidates, including 328 women and 68 Kuchis, of which 7 are women. A total of 3,025 Afghans came forward as candidates for Provincial Councils, including 247 women.

## **Phase II: Voter Registration Update Period**

A comprehensive voter registration exercise was conducted prior to the 2004 Afghan Presidential Election, and around 11 million Afghans registered to vote. Despite the extensive registration exercise, there was a need to re-open registration facilities prior to the *Wolesi Jirga* and Provincial Council Elections to allow a number of different groups of people to register: those who have attained the age of 18 or returned to Afghanistan since the last registration period, those who chose not to participate in the registration exercise previously (particularly women in some regions), those who have lost their Voter Registration Card, and those living in areas where insufficient registration facilities were provided.

In addition, voters were allowed to make changes to the information on their Voter Registration Card if the information was incorrect—particularly if the province stated on their card is different from where they now reside. This is important as it decides the constituency for which they can later vote.

This Voter Registration Update Period was conducted over the course of one month, from June 25 to July 21. In support of this process, the JEMBS undertook a number of activities. A comprehensive assessment and selection of voter registration sites was completed along with the recruitment of over 6,000 registration staff who were trained and monitored throughout. An extensive and comprehensive public outreach campaign was undertaken and a detailed security plan was developed and

implemented. Nearly all registration sites opened on time to offer registration services and all registration materials were distributed and have now been retrieved for data entry in Kabul.

The process went smoothly, with few procedural complications to report. A total of 1,052 registration sites were able to open for at least a portion of the period throughout the country; three remained unopened throughout the process due to security and political challenges. Several security incidents briefly interrupted registration services at a few sites, but order was quickly re-established and no significant disruptions occurred.

Approximately 1.7 million Afghans visited registration facilities in order to obtain new cards or correct existing ones. Of the total number of new registrants, men account for 56 percent, while women account for 44 percent. Kuchis made up eight percent of the total number of registrants. The percentage of women registering this year is higher nationally than the percentage that registered last year, and the number of women registering in more traditional areas of Afghanistan was considerably higher, particularly in the South and Southeastern regions.

Ninety percent of those who registered did so for the first time, increasing the percentage of registered voters in Afghanistan by approximately 13.9 percent. Nine percent of registrants replaced missing cards and one percent of registrants corrected the information on their Voter Registration Cards.

### **Phase III: Election Day**

All Afghans over 18 years of age and in possession of a Voter Registration Card will be able to vote on Election Day. Voters will be able to cast their ballot at any polling station in the province of residence stated on their Voter Registration Cards, and will have their fingers marked with indelible ink to prevent multiple voting.

The electoral process, including but not limited to voting, will be entirely open to observation by political entity representatives, the media and independent election observer missions, both national and international. To date, nearly 85,000 observers, agents and media representatives have been accredited.

Polling will take place on 18 September in an estimated 26,240 polling stations dispersed in 6,270 locations throughout Afghanistan. Afghans will vote in exclusively male or female polling stations staffed by 160,000 polling staff and 60,000 security officials.

In preparation for Election Day, election materials are being distributed safely and securely to every polling station nationwide via 18 cargo planes, nine helicopters, 1,200 cargo-truck deliveries, 1,247 donkeys, 306 horses and 24 camels. Forty million ballot papers of 69 different configurations were printed in Germany, Austria and the United Kingdom; over the course of three weeks, 1,200 tons of ballots were flown into Kabul. Other materials being distributed for polling day include 5,000 training kits, 34,000 polling kits, 150,000 ballot boxes, 120,000 bottles of indelible ink, 150,000 voting screens and 1,000 tons of furniture for polling stations.

Well-rehearsed contingency plans are in place with enough surplus materials to ensure successful elections. The security, logistical and contingency plans have been integrated for every phase of the process, in coordination with the Afghan National Army, the Afghan National Police, Afghan intelligence organizations and the International Military Forces to ensure the safety and security of voters and sensitive election materials.

### **Public Outreach**

A series of comprehensive public outreach campaigns are being conducted through a combination of mass media, localised media, print media and face-to-face public outreach activities. These campaigns informed voters about the possibility of and process for standing as a candidate and the voter registration process, and are continuing to disseminate messages about the institutions that will be elected and the process of electing these institutions. Special efforts have been and will continue to be made to encourage the involvement of women and to inform other special groups, such as nomads and returnees, of their right to participate in the electoral process.

On the ground, a network of over 1,800 National Civic Educators has been employed to conduct meetings with communities throughout Afghanistan, and have successfully reached over 8.3 million voters, or 68% of the voting population.

This public outreach campaign is supplemented by a Small Grants Program that supports grassroots community work related to the electoral process. The program has a budget of US\$375,000 and

provides grants of between US\$50 and US\$1,000 to organizations that mobilize community gatherings to spread civic and voter education messages. Eight hundred and fifty programmes have been approved thus far, reaching over 300,000 people throughout the country.

Since May 2005, a total of over 17 million printed materials, including posters, leaflets, pamphlets and stickers, have been distributed, in addition to one million sample ballots and 200,000 mock ballots. Fifty-seven billboards, now featuring the second wave of messages on polling, have been placed throughout the country. For radio broadcasting, thirty-two Public Service Announcements (PSAs) have been developed and the election content has been placed in a wide variety of existing programmes and productions, including four weekly dramas, one roundtable discussion and a daily programme called *Your Answers to the Election*. For television broadcasting, three election-related films were produced and are being broadcast across the country. Six television advertisements were broadcast during the voter registry update period and an additional three more spots and an animation were produced for the polling period. Additional spots and animations will be produced for the counting period. Mobile radio, mobile theatre and mobile cinema teams are traveling to every province broadcasting election messages. Finally, a toll-free call-in Voter Information Centre was established to answer Afghans' questions about the elections. The Centre currently averages almost 3000 callers each day, with more than 86,500 questions answered so far by trained Afghan operators.

### **The Electoral Media Commission**

The JEMBS has provided support to the Electoral Media Commission (EMC), which has been established to monitor the media coverage of the electoral process and ensure that all media outlets follow all laws and codes of conduct pertaining to the media coverage of the elections. A media monitoring unit, which is present in all regions, is providing analysis of national media for presentation to the Commission. In addition to its work as the primary enforcer of the Mass Media Code of Conduct, the Media Commission is implementing a sponsored advertising program that will ensure that candidates have equal access to broadcast media during the election campaign. With one week to go until Election Day, over 2,800 candidates had broadcast messages through this program.

### **Phase IV: Counting and Post-Election Processes**

After the elections, ballots will be collected and processed in counting centres. Where security permits, these centres are located at the provincial level. This means that ballots are likely to be counted in the province in which they have been cast, making it easier for candidates to observe their votes being counted and increasing the transparency of the electoral process.

It is estimated that the counting of ballots may take 2-3 weeks. During this period, the Electoral Complaints Commission will also have to deal with complaints that have been submitted regarding the conduct of the electoral process. Only after these have been addressed and the counting of the ballots has been completed can the results be announced.

Once election results have been announced, it will be possible for Provincial Councils to convene and commence their work. As one of its first tasks, the Provincial Councils will elect, from amongst their members, a representative to sit in the *Meshrano Jirga*. Following the election of these Provincial Council Representatives, all members of both houses of the National Assembly will be in place and able to convene.

A Post-Election Strategy Group has been established by the Afghan Independent Electoral Commission and UNAMA to develop a comprehensive post-election strategy for Afghanistan's electoral institution and the process for which this institution will be responsible. The group is coordinating the contributions made by all interested and relevant stakeholders toward the development and implementation of the strategy. It is also exploring all aspects of this strategy, including the political and legal framework, physical infrastructure, post-election administration, retention and capacity building of staff, involvement of donors and partners, operational concept and budgets. The group's preliminary report has been published and is available on the JEMB website. Frequent roundtable discussions are currently taking place with all relevant stakeholders in preparation for the final report and implementation plan due to be published in September.

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