



JEMB UPDATE

Edition 001/E • 3 April 2005

Islamic Republic of Afghanistan

Joint Electoral Management Body



New Year. New Beginnings.



Wolesi Jirga and Provincial Council Elections are scheduled to take place 18 September 2005. Elections will occur in all 34 provinces of Afghanistan. The newly established Joint Electoral Management Body (JEMB) will administer, regulate and oversee the electoral process during the transitional period.

This period of Nowroz initiates the beginning of the Afghan New Year. Similarly, the launch of this inaugural issue of the JEMB newsletter will initiate a semi-monthly update on the regular developments and happenings in the JEMB and JEMB Secretariat (JEMBS) at headquarters, regional and provincial offices.

This issue focuses on the Northern Region, where Nowroz is celebrated with tabla players and traditional song, as well as pilgrimage to the holy Mazar-Ali shrine in Mazar-i-Sharif. National Provincial Logistic Coordinators in Bahlk, Sar-i-Pul and Jawzjan provinces assess the achievements and the challenges facing electoral staff in their preparations for the September elections.

Ahmad Jawid, National Provincial Logistic Coordinator, Sar-i-Pul

Ahmad Jawid joined the staff of the UN Office for Project Services in January

2004, when he assisted with the opening of the field office there. At the time of the office's inception, Jawid helped coordinate all aspects of the operation - from logistics, to administration, training, fleet management and transport. He currently serves as the National Provincial Logistics Coordinator (NPLC) for the 2005 electoral project. As such, Jawid, with his international counterpart, oversees all logistical operations - mechanics, guards, radio operations, office support, construction and maintenance, etc.

"I find it particularly rewarding to work for the 2005 election project," Jawid said, adding that he voted in the 2004 Presidential election and encouraged all the women in his family to do the same. "Elections are a very valuable tool for advancing society."

Following the wrap-up of the 2004 elections, Jawid has been preparing for the next election period. This means readying the small provincial office for incoming national and international staff, and constructing a new guest house which will accommodate more than ten electoral staff members and guests. This task has been made exceedingly difficult due to the fact that materials are scarce in Sar-i-Pul and procuring supplies often means a three-and-a-half hour journey into Mazar-i-Sharif. *Continued on page 2*

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From the Chair

Once the construction of the new office is complete, office renovations are finished and the supplies for new staff are in place, Jawid and other logistics staff will focus on assisting the JEMBS staff - trainers and civic educators with public education campaigns and electoral staff with preparations for polling day. "There is much to prepare - transporting materials and staff, ballots and ballot boxes, setting up polling centres. We are ready for any task that Kabul sends our way."

Jawid believes that this year's elections, though logistically more complex, will be easier to facilitate - firstly, because of the experience and knowledge that returning staff have gained during last year's activities and secondly, due to the fact that the JEMBS and UNOPS have now streamlined their procedures. "Last year was difficult because there were a number of different agencies working on elections. This made communication difficult and slowed things down. I believe things will be different this year - the coordination will be better, more efficient."

"Now that I have been here for over a year and worked on one election, I have a better understanding of what the job requires. This means that I am more efficient - so is our team. I am also able to give input on last year's staff - so that we re-hire only the best."

Zabiullah Hussiani, National Provincial Logistics Coordinator, Sheberghan, Jawzjan Province

Zabiullah Hussiani, or Zabi as he is known by his colleagues, joined the UNOPS staff two months ago and brings with him almost four years of experience in the logistics field with various international NGOs in the northern region such as Action Contre le Faim, GOAL, and Save the Children.

Though he notes that there is an element of risk involved in field work with the elections project, Zabi is committed to the work he is doing. "Every work comes with some risk - I prefer elections because I really feel like I am giving something back."

As a NPLC, Zabi has worked on administrative and financial issues, transportation and fuel management, security, and construction. Everything is now in place for the new staff who will be arriving in the next month. "Once staff are in place, we will be ready to assist them with all of their needs - whatever they are." ■

Regional Logistics Coordinator Yury Ozerov and Regional Security Officer Chris Farrell meet provincial staff members including Zabiullah Hussiani, NPLC in Sheberghan (far left in left photo), and Ahmad Jawid, NPLC in Sar-i-Pul (third from right in center photo). Civic Education messages cover the JEMB jeeps (right photo).



Joint Electoral Management Body (JEMB) Chairman Besmillah Besmill remembers the first time he cast a ballot in a provincial election. "It was in my home province of Herat in 1965," Mr. Besmill recalls. "I was voting for my provincial representative to the Wolesi Jirga under King Zahir Shah."

Besmillah Besmill accepted the presidential appointment as Chairman of the JEMB for the 2005 Wolesi Jirga and Provincial Council elections in December 2004.

"Each candidate had his picture on a ballot box," said Mr. Besmill of the 1965 election. "Then you could go and put a piece of paper in the box of the candidate for whom you wished to vote. There were a total of 218 representatives to the Wolesi Jirga at that time."

Though the Wolesi Jirga structure and electoral systems are familiar, the method of voting is radically different.

"There were only 10 - 15 candidates to choose from when I voted the first time," Mr. Besmill said. "And only 18 candidates running in last year's Presidential election. But this year, we anticipate between 5,000 - 10,000 will run."

This is not the only difference Mr. Besmill sees between the 2005 Wolesi Jirga and Provincial Council elections and others.

"After 23 years of constant conflict in Afghanistan, the environment here in which these elections will be conducted is extremely different from others," said Mr. Besmillah. "The result of this violence and instability has had a devastating affect on the Afghan population. These elections will continue to complete the government envisioned by the 2001 Bonn Agreement. Provincial representatives will address the issues of their constituencies that have been born of past conflicts - such as security, human rights and economic development."

Chairman Besmill was appointed Vice-Chairman of the Kabul Teacher Training Center and Director of Education in Herat in 1978. During the Taliban regime, he was dismissed from this post; he was reappointed following the departure of the regime. In April 2004, he accepted appointment as the Minister of Aviation and Tourism. He relinquished this post in December 2004 to accept the position of Chairman with the Independent Election Commission. *Continued on page 4*



Besmillah Besmil, Chairman of the Independent Election Commission: Please see article on preceding page, "From the Chair."



General Ayub Assil, Vice Chairman of the Independent Election Commission: General Ayub Assil received his Master's degree in Police and Justice in Egypt in 1973. He studied Criminal Justice Administration and Human Rights in Japan and France. He taught at the Faculty of Justice at Kabul University and served as Senior Director of Operations against Drugs.



Mohammad Nazari, Member of the Independent Election Commission: Mohammad Nazari S/O Eshan Qul received his Masters degree in Journalism from Tashkent State University. He worked as a Field Coordinator during the interim Loya Jirga in Samangan province and as a Regional Coordinator and Counting Manager at the Constitutional Loya Jirga in the north.



Najla Ayubi, Member of the Independent Election Commission: Najla Ayubi D/O Ayob Shah Ayobi graduated from the Dushanbe State University with a Masters in Justice and Political Science. Ms. Ayubi worked as a judge at the Afghan Court of Prosecution and at the court of Parwan province. Most recently, she served as a Public Outreach Officer with the Joint Electoral Management Body Secretariat.



Mastora Estanikzai, Member of the Independent Election Commission: Mastora Estanikzai D/O Senator Noor Ahmad graduated from the Faculty of Education of Kabul University in 1975. Ms. Mastora represented Afghan refugees in Iran as a delegate to the Constitutional Loya Jirga. Most recently, she worked in the office of Primary School Pedagogy at the Ministry of Education.



Abdul Hakim Murad, Member of the Independent Election Commission: Abdul Hakim Murad received his Masters in Management from Preston University in Peshawar. He worked as the Co-Regional Coordinator of the Joint Electoral Management Body in Kabul until the beginning of 2005.



Keshan Seng (Honaryar), Member of the Independent Election Commission: Keshan Seng (Honaryar) S/O Devram received his Masters from the Faculty of Chemistry of the Polytechnic Institute. Mr. Seng worked with different governmental organizations for 29 years. Most recently, he served as the Chief Advisor at the Ministry of Mine and Industries.



Samayullah Taza, Member of the Independent Election Commission: Samayullah Taza S/O Taza Gul Khan graduated from the Faculty of Journalism in 1976. From June - November 2004, he assisted the JEMB with preparations for the Presidential election. Most recently, he served as the Head of Kunir and Nooristan field offices at MADIRA International.



Momina Yari, Member of the Independent Election Commission: Momina Yari D/O Haji Sulyman Yari graduated from the Faculty of Justice at Peshawar University. She worked at the Human Rights Independent Commission and was a delegate to the interim Loya Jirga and the Constitutional Loya Jirga. Ms. Yari was distinguished for being the first woman appointed to work with constitutional committees.



Ray Kennedy, International Member of the JEMB: member of the Joint Electoral Management Body in October 2003 after five months as an international expert with UNDP/Mexico. From 2000 to 2002, he was deputy to the Chief Electoral Officer in UNTAET. He also coordinated IFES' technical election assistance in Haiti (1990-1991) and Guyana (1991-1992) and conferences on civic education (Nicaragua, 1991) and electoral reform (Argentina, 1991).



Noor Mohammad, International Member of the JEMB: Noor Mohammad has worked for the Electoral Commission of India since 1994. He has run the electoral administration of the Commission and dealt with the preparation for and the conduct of Presidential elections, Parliamentary elections, and elections to the State Legislatures in India.



Alison Redford, International Member of the JEMB: Alison Redford is a human rights lawyer with 14 years experience in public-sector capacity building and policy reform efforts, participatory capacity assessment, and community mediation in post-conflict situations. She has worked as a program manager internationally for USAID, CIDA, the EU and the Commonwealth, among others, managing, monitoring, and providing technical expertise on international governance projects.



Julian Type, International Member of the JEMB: Julian Type has 21 years of practice in electoral administration with the Australian Electoral Commission, electoral districting expertise from secondment to the Tasmanian Department of Justice, and a strong foundation in electoral systems. His international electoral experience includes periods in Cambodia (1993), Indonesia (1999), Timor L'Este (2001-02) and Afghanistan (2004-current).

Peter Erben, CEO, is a non-voting International Member of the JEMB.

With his background in Education, Mr. Besmill recognizes the importance of civic education campaigns. "We need to educate the people about the electoral process - it has been a very long time since most Afghans have participated in a democratic exercise like this," said Mr. Besmill. "For young people, it is completely foreign."

It is also a new concept for many women - who made up 40 percent of the overall voter turnout in the 2004 Presidential election. "When I was Chief of Education in Herat province, 200,000 girls participated in civic education programs. It is extremely important to encourage women to participate in this election - as candidates and as eligible voters." ■



Small Grants

The Small Grants Program of the Public Outreach Department kicked off activities by supporting a project in celebration of International Women's Day. The event was held in the mainly Hazara district of Kote-Sangi, near Qarte-3 in Kabul. Nearly 300 women came to hear speeches on the importance of women's participation in the parliamentary process by JEMB Commissioner Najla Ayubi and the Ms. Sirat, representative of the sponsoring organization.

The meeting was punctuated with poetry recitations and performances by a traditional music group and a comedic actor who generated a festive atmosphere in an otherwise formal gathering. The audience's appreciation was evident in their enthusiastic applause and laughter. Some women came with their children, alone, or in small groups of friends. Mothers or teenagers, alternatively wearing traditional burkas, black Iranian-style tchadris, light falling scarves or stylish trousers, represented different areas and backgrounds. Some men also attended (including men from the SGP team) but kept a rather low profile in the back of the meeting room.

Although the Minister of Justice was unavailable, two TV stations recorded the event which concluded with a lunch for all attendants. The SGP's support of this project facilitated the lunch and the hiring of the hotel and artists. ■

Peter Erben



Peter Erben, Chief Electoral Officer for the 2005 Afghan election operation, specializes in the management of electoral projects in emerging democracies. He has continuously been engaged in key positions in major electoral processes over the last ten years.

Mr. Erben is no stranger to the Afghan democratic process. In 2002, he acted as the Senior Election Advisor to the Afghan Emergency Loya Jirga Commission. Later, he was seconded to the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) as the Director of the Out-of-Country Voting Program in Pakistan and Iran for the October 2004 Afghan Presidential election.

"Having been part of the arranging of the elections at Emergency Loya Jirga, I was deeply attracted to the possibility of making a further small contribution to a future democratic Afghanistan," Erben said. "After being given another opportunity with out-of-country voting in Pakistan and Iran 2004, it was obvious that I had to accept the challenge of joining the in-country team for the 2005 elections."

Mr. Erben has continuously been engaged in challenging elections over the years; amongst others, he served in the management of the first four post-conflict elections in Bosnia and Herzegovina between 1996 and 2000 and as Associate Director and Director of Elections in Kosovo in 2000 and 2001, respectively. Regardless, the Afghan elections will pose a significant new challenge, Erben stated.

"The 2005 Afghan elections will be some of the most complex to ever be held in a post-conflict environment. Two levels of elections will be contested in 34 constituencies - the means almost 70 ballots with an estimated 5,000 - 10,000 candidates," said Erben. "Furthermore, the logistical reality, the security situation and an extremely tight timeline of less than six months makes this an immense challenge - definitely one of the most challenging elections of which I have ever been a part."

Having held the position of Director of Out-of-Country voting for the January 2005 Iraqi National Assembly elections for IOM, Mr. Erben is thoroughly acquainted with what is at stake in this type of election.

"The 2005 elections are critical to the future of democracy in Afghanistan," Erben said. "The stability of this country is completely dependent on competent national institutions which are legitimately elected in the eyes of the people." ■

For further information about the JEMB Update please contact: Jiffer Bourguignon at jifferb@unops.org.af or visit our website www.jemb.org.