



Progress in Parwan



Left photo: Dr. Sahiq, National Provincial Training Coordinator, JEMBS Parwan Provincial Office. Charikar, Parwan. June 1st, 2005.

Right photo: Left to right: Mr. Parwani, National Public Outreach Officer; Ms. Irene-Maria Eich, International Provincial Electoral Officer; Dr. Sahiq, National Provincial Training Coordinator; Mrs. Suraya, National Public Outreach Officer; Mr. Farooq Shah, National Provincial Electoral Officer and Mr. Moshtuba, Interpreter. JEMBS Parwan Provincial Office. Charikar, Parwan. June 1st, 2005.

Concerned about the relatively low number of candidates that had come in to nominate at the Parwan provincial office after the first week of the period, Provincial Electoral Officer Irene-Maria Eich and her staff organized three large events sponsored by the Small Grants Program that targeted three distinctively different audiences. The first event was directed at district leaders and representatives, the second at women, and the third targeted religious leaders.

The first two events far exceeded Eich's expectations and passed without incident. She anticipated that the meeting with the religious community would proceed accordingly; however, neither Eich nor her staff could have foreseen the events about to unfold that threatened to bring Candidate Nomination in Parwan to a grinding halt.

The American news magazine Newsweek printed a story some days earlier with allegations that soldiers at the prison in Guantanamo Bay had desecrated the Koran.

On the morning of 14 May, 160 religious leaders from all over the Parwan province were invited to the Charikar police compound to learn more about the Candidate Nomination process. Following on the heels of demonstrations the previous day, the atmosphere was thick with tension.

"I was advised not to attend the meeting myself," said Eich. "For security reasons, the location of the venue was shifted from the municipal hall to the police station. An additional 35 armed policemen and guards were patrolling the vicinity of the gathering."

Dr. Sahiq, the National Provincial Training Coordinator in the Parwan province, a respected senior member of the

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provincial Mullah community and former delegate to the Emergency Loya Jirga, addressed the stirring crowd, urging the Mullahs to channel their emotions in a letter of petition to President Karzai, pressing him to ask US President George Bush for an explanation on the recent events at Guantanamo Bay prison.

"We were able to diffuse tension," Dr. Sahiq said. "I just told them that after a few decades of war, it is time for peace and prosperity. And everyone agreed with me. After that things began to calm down."

"We were able to diffuse tension because I know the religious community quite well," Dr. Sahiq said. "I just told them that after a few decades of war, it is time for peace and prosperity. And everyone agreed with me. After that things began to calm down."

Parwan provincial staff members Farooq Shah, National Provincial Election Officer, Mr. Parwani and Mrs. Suraya Abadi, National Public Outreach Officers were joined by the Governor of the Parwan province, Mr. Taqwa, as they urged religious leaders not to jeopardize the electoral process for the sake of allegations and unsubstantiated charges.

The situation stabilised a few hours later. The Mullahs agreed with Dr. Sahiq - they would take their anger and transform it into positive action. This issue was set aside briefly so that focus could shift to its intended topic - elections. Questions poured forth about the electoral process and education materials were distributed. The local media was on hand to record the dialogue, broadcasting it later for the benefit of a broader audience.

As the session ran into the afternoon, Dr. Sahiq and the Mullahs discussed the importance of establishing an informal commission consisting of ten selected representatives. The group will meet every fortnight to discuss election related issues, thereby creating a common platform for an initial exchange of views, and subsequently allowing for consolidated reflective action to be taken.

In the late afternoon the gathering dispersed and Mr. Shah and Dr. Sahiq returned to the Parwan JEMBS office. "They came back to inform me about the final outcome of the day," said Eich. "After confirming the highlights of the day, Dr. Sahiq produced the signed letter to President Karzai and Mr. Shah was going to translate it for me."

The translation of this letter, though Eich didn't realize it at the time, would have a lasting effect on the working relationship of the staff members at the JEMBS Parwan office.

"The mutual efforts that were made," Eich explained, "on one side in trying to convey to me in the simplest English the content of the petition; and on the other side in me trying to grasp the political weight of the message, broke the ice and brought us together, as crisis often

does. It was a very moving moment when we expressed our mutual respect and appreciation. Dr. Sahiq spoke for the first time in English to me." Since that evening, Eich says, the group has transformed into a real team.

"Since I was new to the Parwan office, I didn't really know my colleagues very well at the time," said Eich. "After this experience, I was accepted by them. We have a warm and honest working relationship also marked by friendship, trust and respect. This bond has not gone unnoticed by other local staff and as had very positive repercussions on our work." ■

Small Grants

Recent Small Grants Program events have included one women's gathering in the Shamali Plain and a theatrical performance and poetry recital at a local girls' school in Rich Khor in the southern outskirts of Kabul.

In the Shamali Plain, 250 women were in attendance for the area's first public women's meeting in 23 years. This successful SGP event was held to discuss the elections and was supplemented with informative banners and posters

The SGP event in Rich Khor had three hundred 11th and 12th grade female and male students in attendance as elections messages, special poems, and student-performed theatrical sketches were presented. The walls were covered with elections materials in the form of encouraging and colorful banners and posters. Despite some technical problems with the sound system, the audience showed great attentiveness and enthusiasm. ■



Audience members look on as election messages are conveyed through student-presented theatrical sketches and poetry recitals at the Rich Khor School in the outer limits of Kabul City. June 1st, 2005.



Meet the Press...

PRESS CONFERENCE SUMMARY • MAY 29 2005

CANDIDATE NOMINATION REVIEW

Questions:

- Q. What if not enough women nominate themselves as candidates?
- A. Seats allocated for women will remain vacant. BUT this is only a reality in 5 provinces for the Provincial Council; in all other provinces for the Wolesi Jirga, we have more than enough female candidates.
- Q. What is the JEMB doing to provide security to candidates?
- A. ISAF will assist with security during the official campaign period, but in general, security is the domain of the Afghan government.
- Q. Will the JEMB give financial assistance to candidates?
- A. No the JEMB is not providing financial assistance to any candidates.
- Q. The people of Paktika say they have not been given enough seats (including women's seats), why is this so?
- A. Seats were allocated in direct proportion to the population estimates as provided by the government.
- Q. What guarantees can JEMB make against fraud?
- A. We are taking a number of precautions against electoral fraud on polling day. There will be a number of different precautions which will range from security features of the ballot, to inking the finger, and the marking of the voter registration card.
- Q. Will it be a problem for voters if ballot booklets are used in provinces with high numbers of candidates?
- A. Producing a booklet is just one possibility. Sample ballots, either large sheets or booklets, will be assessed by focus groups throughout Afghanistan (rural and urban areas alike). The resulting feedback will be used to make the final decision on which type of ballot to use.

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CONCLUSION OF CANDIDATE NOMINATIONS

Candidate Nominations for the 2005 Wolesi Jirga and Provincial Council elections have concluded with more than 6,000 Afghan men and women coming forward to run for office.

"The first and most important phase of Afghanistan's 2005 electoral process met enormous enthusiasm from Afghans interested in representing their people and building democratic law-making institutions," said Joint Electoral Management Body Commissioner Najla Ayubi, one of 13 Commissioners on the JEMB. Between April 30th and May 26th, around 6,085 Afghan citizens nominated themselves as Candidates for the Wolesi Jirga (Lower House of the National Assembly) and Provincial Councils. Elections for these bodies will be held concurrently on September 18th.

Around 2,915 Afghans stepped forward as Candidates for the Wolesi Jirga, including 347 women.

Seventy of the Wolesi Jirga candidates are from the Kuchi (nomad) community, including seven women. Around 3,170 nominations were received for the Provincial Council elections, including 279 nominations from women. These figures are preliminary. Final figures may vary after central cross checking and reduction due to withdrawals.

"This is a very positive outcome, achieved in a short time frame, and under challenging security conditions," said Commissioner Ayubi. "The turnout of women, who make up slightly more than 10 percent of candidates, is extremely favourable. The JEMB welcomes our sisters who have taken up the challenge to make sure the voices of Afghan women are heard."

In eight provinces more than 100 people are running for Wolesi Jirga seats, including Kabul where more than 400 candidates have come forward. In 11 provinces more than 100 people are running for Provincial Council seats. Preliminary candidate lists and final nomination statistics will be released on June 4 for the six-day display period. During these six days, anyone with a legitimate interest in the electoral process may challenge candidates on the preliminary list if they believe a candidate does not meet the eligibility criteria.

Exclusions will be made public between July 2nd and 7th. Excluded candidates have until July 7th to respond. The final candidate list will be published on July 12th.

For more information on the Wolesi Jirga and Provincial Council elections, go to www.jemb.org

News in Brief...

- The JEMB has appointed Provincial Electoral Commissions (PECs) in roughly half of the provinces. It expects to have appointed all 34 PECs by the end of the first week in June.

- The JEMB has finalized the terms of reference for Kuchi Liaison Officers, who will serve as links between the JEMB and the Kuchi community. The JEMB plans to meet with representatives of Kuchi shuras to discuss recruitment for these positions.

- The number of individuals who nominated themselves for the Wolesi Jirga seats during the first week was 283, an average of 47 people each day. During the second week, that number rose to 614, an average of 102 people each day; during the third week, the number more than doubled and reached 1,616, an average of 269 people per day.

- Nominees for the Provincial Council followed suit: 87 nominees or 15 people per day during the first week; 378 nominees or 63 people per day during the second week; 1,933 or 322 people per day during the third week. During the first two weeks, a total of 465 individuals nominated themselves for the Provincial Council, an average of 39 individuals per day. However during the last nine days of nomination (the last week and the extension period), 2,637 individuals came forward - an average of 293 people per day.

- Although preliminary reports show that the process did not produce an adequate number of female Provincial Council candidates in four provinces (Zabul, Uruzgan, Nangarhar and Nuristan), the recruitment and nomination of ample numbers of female candidates in 30 other provinces indicates the process was ultimately a success. Indeed, the number of women that nominated themselves for Provincial Council seats and thus will play a role in local governance was undoubtedly one of the most positive aspects of the nomination process.

- Preliminary figures show that during the candidate nomination period 6,085 Afghans came forward to nominate themselves for either the Wolesi Jirga or Provincial Council. A total of 2,845 nominated for seats in the Wolesi Jirga; 3,170 candidates came forward for the Provincial Council. Seventy Kuchi candidates nominated themselves, including seven women.

- During the extension period (21-23 May), 311 potential candidates came forward for Wolesi Jirga seats and 704 individuals nominated for the Provincial Council - of the 279 female Provincial Council candidates, 130 came forward during the extension period. In Nangarhar province, where the nomination period was extended until 26 May, a total of 90 candidates came forward from 24-26 May.

- "Who needs to register" is the theme of a new Public

Service Announcement (PSA) produced by the Public Outreach Department. It is being dispersed to radio stations nationwide.

- The collection of applications for national counterparts for senior staff positions ended on 22 May. Interviews will soon be scheduled and conducted with the assistance of the JEMB Commissioners.

National Assembly Elections: Financial Status as of:
May 26, 2005

Received (funds transferred to UNDP)	
DONOR	AMOUNT USD
USA	12,000,000
Greece committed in 2004 transferred in 2005	678,426
Switzerland committed in 2004 for 2005	1,754,386
Netherlands (carry over from CLJ)	844,712
Australia (exchange gains from 2004)	35,190
New Zealand (exchange gains from 2004)	48,616
Netherlands	5,284,015
UK	2,873,563
Denmark	2,000,000
New Zealand	729,927
Switzerland	1,000,000
DfID	4,961,832
Norway 1	793,651
Australia	1,550,388
Total received to date	34,554,706

Committed (agreement signed)	
DONOR	AMOUNT USD
Finland	2,600,000
Total committed	2,600,000

Pledged (letter received)	
DONOR	AMOUNT (USD)
EC	11,050,000
Italy	5,200,000
USAID	20,000,000
Belgium	1,000,000
Germany	3,900,000
Norway 2	1,120,000
Spain	1,250,000
Total pledged	43,520,000

Total Project Budget	148,665,087
Effective Carry Over from 2004	16,027,851
Total Received 2005	34,554,706
Total Committed (agreement signed)	2,600,000
UNFUNDED	95,482,530

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

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