



JEMB UPDATE

Edition 008/E • 19 July 2005

Islamic Republic of Afghanistan

Joint Electoral Management Body



Interview with Masooda Jalal



Minister of Women's Affairs, Masooda Jalal, meets with JEMBS Senior Gender Focal Point Lina Abirafteh to discuss public messages about women's participation in the upcoming September elections.

There is an old adage that says that "a woman's place is in the home." Afghan Minister of Women's Affairs, Masooda Jalal, fully agrees.

"Men say that a woman's place is in the home. And I say they are right - their place is in the national home - that is the Wolesi Jirga." In the upcoming Wolesi Jirga and Provincial Council elections, Jalal said, women have been "given an opportunity to play a great role in House of People, like the important role they play at home."

Of the 249 representatives to the Wolesi Jirga, 25 percent, or one out of every four representatives, will be women. This ratio is impressive by any standard, much less in a country where women have not acted as popular representatives in their government for over 30 years.

While critics scoff at the high percentage, claiming that the international community should not impose what they cannot sustain themselves, Jalal feels that the quota is an

extremely important step toward putting women's issues in the spotlight.

"This will be the first time we have this number of women in parliament," Jalal said. "It will have an impact on women's lives in many ways."

Jalal believes that the future of Afghanistan will be eminently more peaceful and secure in part due to the participation of women in the political arena. "I foresee a country that is well reputed in the world; that is reconstructed and is a place where women and men enjoy life equally," she said. "I see a government that belongs to all people, and a society made of men and women, politically, culturally and socially. I want the future of my people to be healthy and happy."

Surveys have shown that Afghan men are divided on the issue of female candidates. Some believe that women are not capable of the same atrocities committed by men throughout their country's history and

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"Men say that a woman's place is in the home. And I say they are right - their place is in the national home - that is the Wolesi Jirga." In the upcoming Wolesi Jirga and Provincial Council elections, Jalal said, women have been "given an opportunity to play a great role in the House of People, like the important role they play at home."

therefore would prove to be more apt leaders, while others fear that female representatives will pursue an unbalanced agenda that discriminates against men. In a recent article in a local paper, a male candidate for the Wolesi Jirga claimed that women who hold political office will 'eat the rights of men.'

As Afghanistan's first female presidential candidate, Jalal understands attitudes like this all too well. She regularly encountered challenges from the population while on the campaign trail, such as claims that it is un-Islamic for women to run for office. Jalal would calmly compose her response; she had addressed this issue on numerous occasions.

"Men would question me while I was on the campaign trail," she recounted. "They asked, 'Isn't it contrary to Islam for a woman to run for political office?' I told them that Afghanistan is not the only Islamic country to have women in office. Pakistan had Benazir Bhutto - how is it possible for them to have a female leader if it is not Islamic? In Indonesia - the largest Muslim country by population - and also in Turkey there have been women in power. And what about wives of the Prophet? They led wars and ran their own businesses."

A total of 2,707 candidates will stand for the lower house, 68 Kuchi seats, 3,025 for provincial councils; of these, 328 women will stand for election to the Wolesi Jirga and 247 for the Provincial Council, totaling 582 women out of 5,800 candidates for both races. Conservatives have been angered by the automatic allocation of 25 percent of seats to women candidates that followed international pressure for greater representation of women.

Jalal acknowledges the importance of the support of female candidates' husbands and families throughout the campaign process and beyond. "Without support of their husbands or families, they cannot do this," Jalal said of female candidates.

"My husband often accompanied me to the provinces. I did not have guards so he acted as my security too. Sometimes, if I was at a gathering and I was tired after speaking so much, he would speak for me. He said, 'She is my wife; she has a lot of experience; she is capable.' This is the best endorsement - because he knows me well. Husbands and fathers should be supportive. They should help by going out to speak to male voters.

"Ours is a male-dominated society; men have the political power at the level of making decisions - whether in parliament or as head of the family. The best way to tackle the issues is to convince men to give freedom to women and daughters. Local *mullahs* are very influential. If we can secure the cooperation of the religious community, it will have a positive effect on opportunities for women."

In addition to family and spousal support, Jalal believes there are a number of obstacles that stand in the path of female candidates and voters, namely security concerns, campaign expenses for candidates, traditional beliefs and lack of awareness of the process due to illiteracy.

"Afghanistan is in a post-conflict phase. Security is a concern in remote areas, and these concerns may prevent women from going to the polls and potential threats may keep women candidates from coming forward. Of course,

traditional and cultural barriers are also factors."

To address the lack of public awareness regarding perceptions of female candidates and women voters, JEMBS Senior Gender Focal Point Lina Abirafeh and Minister Jalal met to discuss a radio program, currently in production by the JEMBS Gender Unit.

The Gender Unit at JEMBS believes that gender refers to both women and men. Gender addresses women and men in their social roles, meaning that the concept differs for different women and men across the country. There is no single gender message that will apply to all of Afghanistan. Therefore, taking the time to understand the dynamics in different areas will ensure that messages will be better received. Women's participation, as candidates and voters, needs special support, but an emphasis on all Afghans - men and women - is helpful in addressing the rights and responsibilities of all Afghans to the country.

"It is very important to target men," Jalal agreed. "The programmes should contain very primary messages and should encourage men and influentials to come forward and cooperate. It should be done with the target audience in mind, and should speak their language."

The JEMBS Gender Unit recently hired a male staff member to assist with the creation of the messages targeted at men and participate in other events that are largely attended by men. By targeting the male audience, the Unit hopes to clarify some of the myths that are commonly held by Afghan male voters with regard to women's participation and representation.

"I am sure that all of these women are powerful," Jalal said of the female candidates. "I am certain that, insh'allah, if people provide enough support, women could become a strong power and maybe one day a majority in parliament. In each and every law they will make sure that women's status is promoted and protected, so that women's issues are equally considered and women benefit equally." ■



Minister of Women's Affairs, Masooda Jalal

Commissioner Najla Ayubi

Najla Ayubi



JEMB Commissioner Najla Ayubi has always set about finding solutions to problems. This drive has resulted in an extraordinary education and career finding problems to solve in law, journalism, philosophy, the Afghan Constitution and Afghanistan's recent presidential and parliamentary elections.

Ms. Ayubi's family has always been a little unusual for her culture, encouraging its children to pursue their education before marriage or children. Her father was an English teacher who would bring home magazines and books for her and her three sisters and three brothers: she started reading at age eight and never stopped. At 16, she began attending courses in the Faculty of Law at Kabul University, and within six months was offered a scholarship to study in Tajikistan. "My family trusted me. People talked, of course. 'How can you let your daughter go alone?' But my father pushed us to continue our education."

In Tajikistan, she attended courses in law and politics during the day and courses in philosophy and journalism at night, graduating in six years with three diplomas and a dream of being a pilot in the Air Force. Every subject interested her, she says, and she wanted to be prepared to tackle anything that came her way.

Upon her return to Afghanistan, Ms. Ayubi left behind her pilot dream to take up a position as a Court Clerk in Parwan, earning her qualification as a judge within one year. She adjudicated criminal, commerce and family law, and says her gender was never a problem.

As a lawyer educated in Tajikistan and fluent in Russian, she raised suspicions among the Mujaheddin government who monitored her work closely. As a lawyer defending others' rights, she mourned the loss of her own.

At age 25, Ms. Ayubi heard the sound of a gunshot from her home, and started running down the street to find out what had happened. "My daughter, it is your father," cried a neighbour. The hole in his chest was the size of her finger, but all she could think about was getting medical help and keeping her family calm. "I didn't cry; I kept myself in control. I just kept thinking about a solution, about how we could solve this problem." When community members offered to find her father's killer, her family declined to meet him or to even consider

vengeance. His conscience was enough, she says: "We lost our father, but we cannot lose everyone. He was our greatest supporter and friend, but we cannot kill forever."

Under the Taliban, Ms. Ayubi's home in Parwan was destroyed, and she moved with her family to Kabul. For six years, her underground women's tailoring business was the only income for her family. Although she was grateful to have a skill that could support her family, she dearly missed being active in civil life: "It was so frustrating to have all these skills that I couldn't use."

When the Taliban fell, she was sitting in her house when she heard an announcement on the radio from the government encouraging all women to return to work. She put on a burqa - security was still poor at that point, and no one was sure what the norms were - and promptly went to the Ministry of Justice to apply for a job. She continued to wear the burqa for three more months - "In justice, it's so important to be able to look people in the eyes, and I couldn't!" - but all of her experience and knowledge came back to her easily as she started reviewing cases.

It was in Afghanistan's Constitution-making process that Ms. Ayubi began feeling useful and fully alive for the first time. She was hired as a Research, Public Consultation and Public Information Officer to talk to Afghans all over the country about what they wanted in a constitution, what the constitution would mean for them and the future of democracy in the country. She was particularly interested in helping improve women's rights and political participation. "I became so much stronger: I felt I can do something; I felt free." The outcome was a tremendous reward: "We really made people aware of the process, and we pushed through an article on women's rights. For me this was especially important: Afghan women have been suffering for so long."

In April 2004, Ms. Ayubi joined JEMBS as a Senior Public Outreach Officer, and in January 2005 President Karzai appointed her to the IAEC. After so many years, she says, she has finally found her field: "In criminal law, I can help 1,000 people. In politics, I can help all of Afghanistan." Her drive is a hybrid of her past: her family's trust and her early studies of philosophy have mixed with her love for and experience with justice and democracy to create a mind open to the world: "I have no discrimination against anybody. I'm thinking about everyone all the time, about how to compromise. You have to think of humanity above all." ■

Vox Pops

In order to develop messages on the importance of women's participation in the democratic process and direct these messages at the male population, members of the Gender Unit of the JEMB Secretariat took to the streets. Speaking to a number of male and female voters in Kabul, the Unit encountered open respondents who were supportive of a woman's right to vote and candidate - contrasting some of the opinions expressed in rural communities in other provinces ("Female Candidates" on page 5.) Women's thoughts on the role of men in the democratic process will follow up coming issues.

Q. Would you vote for a woman? Why or why not?

A. It is very good to vote for women, because women are very helpful and hard workers. Frankly if women won't help men then we would not be capable of doing things alone. It is women who help in different part of their life around the house, in offices, hospitals and schools. Finally, a woman is half part of men. It is possible to have a good society with the inclusion of women.

Q. Do you think it is important for women to vote? Why or why not?

A. As I mentioned before, women are half of the population of the society; therefore it is extremely necessary for women to vote and choose whom they want.

Q. Do you think there are different issues for men and women? What are they?

A. As far as I am concerned there is one big issue for women and it is illiteracy, or lack of education among women. They must learn a lot in order to carry their society from darkness.

Q. What are the obstacles for women candidates and voters? What can be done to address these obstacles?

A. To treat the obstacles for women we must assist our uneducated people, we must teach them how to behave and how to act especially with women, not to make trouble - especially those who are most respected. By that I mean women candidates.

Q. Do you feel that is important to have female representation in parliament? What are the benefits of female representation?

A. That is for sure, we all need to have female figures in parliament beside our males because society exists in two types of sex (male and female) and according to our holy Quran we are children of one man and one woman. Also this book mentions learning knowledge as a legal or moral obligation for all Muslims, so this means there is no discrimination between men and women, and in this case we must follow this right path.

Q. What are the main issues you would like to see addressed by the parliament?

A. The main issue that I would like to see addressed by parliament is strictly mandate of the law and good advantage of women.

Q. Would you vote for a woman? Why or why not?

A. Yes I would vote for a woman because a woman is a good mother and a good mother can raise her children in a better way. A woman is a good sister and a good sister is very kind and helpful with her brother and sister. I want to vote for a woman, because women should have rules in the government. Women have these rights to take discussion in their government.

Q. Do you think it is important for women to vote? Why or why not?

A. Yes, it is necessary that women participate in the procedure of voting to choose their accepted candidates.

Q. Do you think there are different issues for men and women? What are they?

A. There is one main and big issue and that is Afghan women who are under commandment of their husband.

Q. What are the obstacles for women candidates and voters? What can be done to address these obstacles?

A. There is not another obstacle except prohibition of their husbands, fathers, brothers, etc. To cure this problem, men should be informed in different ways.

Q. Do you feel that it is important to have female representation in parliament? What are the benefits of female representation?

A. Yes, this is absolutely necessary to have female delegation or representative in the parliament because they can easily receive other women's aspects and wishes, and they know much better each other's pain. And they can better support each other and treat themselves and each other.

Q. What are the main issues you would like to see addressed by the parliament?

A. The issue that I would like to see addressed by the parliament is 25% quota for Afghan women. This is such a big number in this situation and we are very proud of it.

Female Candidates of Herat

Of the 162 candidates who have been nominated for election to the Wolesi Jirga in Herat province, 18 of them, or 11 percent of the total, are women.

On a recent visit to Herat, we spoke with two of these women - who shared many similarities.

Twenty-six-year-old Ms. S.* is one of these candidates. Educated in Iran, where she grew up and her family now lives, Ms. S. worked in the local office of the Ministry of Women's Affairs in Herat Province and is familiar with women's issues, particularly in that area. "I will reflect my understanding of women's issues in this province in my work as a representative to the Wolesi Jirga," she said.

Having completed her education in Iran, Ms. S. realized that there were opportunities made available to her in this host country that were inaccessible in her native Afghanistan.

"When I compared Iran to Afghanistan, I would wish to be Iranian not Afghan, because my country was not developed in the same way and did not have so many opportunities," she said. "But then I thought 'Why?' I want to develop this country to reach the same level. I wanted to be proud of my Afghan nationality. Generations of women here have been deprived of their civil rights. If I am elected as a representative at the Wolesi Jirga, I would propose family courts and female judges in order to help restore the rights these women have missed. Afghanistan must develop enough to become independent, self-sufficient."

Ms. S. believes that a woman cannot be a candidate without the support of her family; she also claims that only an educated family would support their educated daughter, sister or spouse.

"I see this as a sort of insurance that female candidates will be educated, literate and progressive," she said, "because this is their background. It is what they have learned."



Students at a local High School near Herat gather to learn about voter registration during a Small Grants Program sponsored event.

Another female candidate in Herat, Ms. M., is in her late 30's. She, like Ms. S., has never married. In addition to a supportive family, Ms. M. believes that being unattached is advantageous to her candidacy.

"I have a few friends who considered running for office," Ms. M. said. "Some had supportive husbands and some did not. But in either case, these women did not know how it would be possible for them to move to Kabul to take their seat in the Wolesi Jirga. They could not go alone, and they couldn't uproot their entire family either. It is this issue that prevented them from running."

Women with unsupportive families could not even consider the possibility of nominating themselves for office. In one instance, she recounted, a friend was forbidden by her husband and brothers from submitting her candidacy because it would mean that her photograph would be publicly displayed.

"They told her that having her photograph taken, or allowing it to appear on posters or ballots, would bring shame to her family," Ms. M said.

The Women's Rights Officer at the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission, Ms. Palwasha Kakar, is well aware of these sorts of obstacles that face female candidates. And these are only the obstacles to getting on the ballot. Once this has been achieved, women face other obstacles at the polling station.

"While I was out in more rural areas of the province speaking to communities about voter registration, I heard strong opposition to women candidates," Ms. Kakar said. "One man told me he would rather cut off his own hand than vote for a woman. Some men laughed when he said this but several others agreed."

In order to overcome these attitudes, Ms. Kakar said it is necessary to go to the men directly. "Because they are the ones who control whether or not a woman will vote," she said. "I think it is very important to talk to *mullahs* and influential elders in the community. Without their endorsement, women will not run for office or vote. They control women's political rights."

According to many men she has spoken with, a resounding reason for this tight reign on women's rights is the perception that more rights for women is equivalent to the erosion of men's rights.

"Men who say that they will not vote for a woman believe that her entire platform will be based on taking rights away from men," she said. "This is obviously not the case. Female candidates I have spoken to favor the elimination of all forms of discrimination against all people. Women desire equality. This means that all groups have the same opportunities and rights, not that one group has less than another."

When asked about campaign tactics, both women admitted that they had not finalized their strategies yet; however, the women alluded to financial constraints that were being factored into their final decisions. Due to the cost of advertising, printing posters and hiring transport and other expenses, both women planned to focus on face-to-face activities such as visiting the constituency in person, speaking at public gatherings when possible

Meet the Press...

PRESS RELEASE • JULY 12 2005 JEMB CERTIFIES FINAL LIST OF CANDIDATES

The Joint Electoral Management Body on Tuesday certified the Final List of Candidates for the September 18 Wolesi Jirga and Provincial Council elections.

The Final List was approved after candidates were given the chance to withdraw, and after the Electoral Complaints Commission reviewed the responses of more than 200 candidates who had been provisionally excluded on July 2. The Final List incorporates more than 250 withdrawals and 17 final exclusions. Each JEMB Provincial Office has received a copy of the Final Candidate List for their province and will display it for public viewing.

The 17 candidates who have been excluded will find personalized letters waiting for them inside the JEMB Provincial Office where they enrolled as a candidate. These letters will outline the reason for their exclusion.

Of the 17 candidates excluded, 11 were identified by the Joint Secretariat of the Disarmament and Reintegration Commission as still linked to an unofficial armed group; five failed to provide a complete list of supporters' signature with their candidacy application; and one had failed to resign a senior government post as required under the Electoral Law. Their exclusion is final.

The JEMB now has a Final List of candidates for the upcoming legislative and Provincial Council elections and can proceed with printing the ballot papers. "The finalization of this list is a significant milestone in preparations for the September 18 elections," said JEMB Chairman Bissmillah Bissmil. "With the Final List in hand and the Voter Registry Update more than halfway through, we are well on our way to holding the polls on September 18 as planned, and concluding Afghanistan's transition to democracy."

PRESS RELEASE • JULY 12 2005 POLICY ON ELECTION CAMPAIGN ADVERTISEMENTS

The Joint Electoral Management Body has decided the following policy on Election Campaign Advertisements during the August 17-September 15 Official Campaign Period:

- 1) State-run and private television and radio stations shall not run any campaign-related advertisements, except for those that are included in the sponsored advertisement system supervised by the Electoral Media Commission.
- 2) Under the sponsored advertisement system:
 - a. Each Wolesi Jirga candidate will be allocated EITHER two five-minute advertising slots on radio, equaling a total of ten minutes radio airtime, OR two advertising slots on television totalling no more than five minutes.
 - b. Each Provincial Council candidate will receive one 4-

minute block of air time on radio OR one advertising slot on television of no more than two minutes.

3) Candidates may choose which broadcasters will run their sponsored advertisement from among a list of available television and radio stations in each province provided by the Electoral Media Commission.

4) State-run and private print media may publish advertisements by, or on behalf of, any candidate or political party relating to the electoral campaign, in accordance with applicable laws, JEMB Regulations and JEMB and Electoral Media Commission Decisions.

5) During the Electoral Campaign Period, no candidate shall have printed by themselves or on their behalf more than a maximum cumulative total of four (4) pages of campaign-related advertisements in any combination of private or State-run periodicals. All election-related advertising in all media -- private and State-run, print and broadcast -- is banned until August 17 when the Official Campaign Period begins.

PRESS RELEASE • JULY 17 2005 VOTER REGISTRATION FOR RETURNEES

The Joint Electoral Management Body on Sunday launched a seven-week Voter Registration for Afghan refugees who are returning with UNHCR assistance from neighbouring countries between July 17 and September 8, 2005.

Afghans over the age of 18, who do not yet have registration cards, must register if they wish to vote in the September 18 Wolesi Jirga and Provincial Council elections. Voters must have a registration card that states the province where they live and will vote.

Returnees who participated in IOM Out-of-Country Voting for Afghanistan's 2004 Presidential Elections in Pakistan or Iran will not be able to use their IOM Out-of-Country voter registration cards to vote in the 2005 Wolesi Jirga and Provincial Council elections.

Voters may only cast ballots in the province listed on their registration cards.

Refugees officially returning through UNHCR from July 17 will be able to register through six UNHCR encashment centres for the province where they will live and vote. The UNHCR encashment centres where refugees are returning through UNHCR can register are located in the cities of Herat, Cazerga (on Herat's outskirts), Kabul, Zaranj (Nimroz Province), Daman (Kandahar Province), and Muhmand Dara (Nangarhar Province).

In order to register, returnees must produce their UNHCR Voluntary Repatriation Form (VRF). Returnees who do not have a registration card, or who used an IOM Out-of-Country Voter Registration card to vote in Pakistan or Iran during the 2004 Presidential Election, should visit a registration centre.

News in Brief...

Female Candidates from Herat continued from page 5

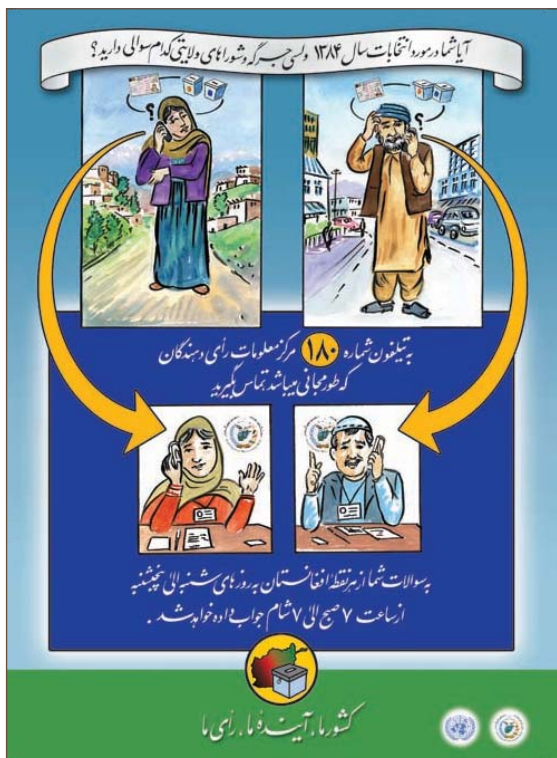
- **JEMB decisions made:** The JEMB certified the final candidate lists for the Wolesi Jirga and Provincial Council elections and adopted policies on refunds of candidate registration fees and print advertising during the campaign period.
- **Final Candidates' List published:** The final list of candidates for the Wolesi Jirga and Provincial Council elections was published and submitted to the JEMB for certification. Following the publication of the list, ballot design and production is in full-swing.
- **Voter registration on-going:** The Voter Registration Update Period is on-going, with no procedural complications to report. An average of 52,000 Afghans are using the registration services each day, and a total of 994,452 cards had been issued across the country by 14 July. Registration will conclude on Thursday, 21 July.
- **Capacity building begins in senior management positions:** National counterparts have been recruited for nearly all senior staff members in JEMBS. They have been enrolled in a five-day training course this past week, and will begin their work next week.
- **Public outreach efforts remain strong:** Public Outreach efforts have reached over 3.9 million Afghans in face-to-face meetings so far during the voter registration period, and last week 3,000 questions were fielded by telephone in the newly established Voter Information Centre.

and other events. The campaign period is yet another challenge for women from more traditional communities, where families prefer that their wives or daughters do not go out and speak with strangers.

Still, among those who have been nominated as candidates, some will go on to make up 25 percent of the lower house of the first Afghan National Assembly to convene in almost 30 years.

"Once [female representatives] get to Kabul they will show the doubtful what they are capable of," Ms. Kakar said. "Hopefully, we will slowly start to see changing attitudes as a result."

* Candidate names have been concealed.



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 the Constitutional Loya Jirga)	844,712
Australia (exchange gains from 2004)	35,190
New Zealand (exchange gains from 2004)	48,616
Netherlands	5,284,015
UK	7,786,691
Denmark	1,996,531
New Zealand	729,627
Switzerland	1,000,000
Australia	1,560,388
Norway 1	793,660
Italy	4,819,277
Canada	6,349,206
Finland	2,409,638
EC	8,202,654
Total received to date	56,283,307
Total committed	5,940,000
Total Received 2005	56,283,307
Total Committed (agreements signed)	5,940,000
UNFUNDED	70,513,329
Pledged	
DONOR	AMOUNT (USD)
	33,260,000
Effective Carry Over from 2004	16,027,851
Total Project Budget	148,665,087

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

Photography: Marie Frechon and Jiffer Bourguignon /JEMBS