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ABDUL SAMAD

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Review: "The people of Afghanistan will succeed!" the 91-year-old Zahir Shah told the assembly to applause. The parliamentary and provincial council elections were held on 18th September 2005. Afterwards, the first results were declared on 9th October. Final results were delayed by accusations of fraud, and were announced on 12th November. Former warlords and their followers achieved the majority of seats in both, the Lower House and provincial councils. Women won around 28% of the seats in the Lower House, six more seats than the 25% clause in the Afghan Constitution, which had been launched in 2004, guaranteed them. Approximately twelve million voters were eligible to vote for 249 seats of the Wolesi Jirga, the Lower House of Parliament, and the 34 provincial councils.

Executive Summary: The Konrad-Adenauer-Foundation (KAF) office in Kabul, Afghanistan has covered the work of the Afghan Parliament for the past two years. The Afghan government, its Parliament, and the Afghan people are faced with the most challenging time since the end of the Taliban government in late 2001. Unless the lives of ordinary Afghans have improved, security, stability and eventual peace will remain a distant reality.

In this first bulletin of the year 2009 we have focused on the following issues: The outcome of par-

liamentary developments, the beginning of the very important presidential election 2009, security and governance issues, international affairs relevant to Afghanistan, human rights and very vital environmental issues. In this year's bulletins, the comments or the conclusions are placed at the end of each issue.

Parliamentary Issues: The fourth legislative year of the Afghan Parliament was inaugurated on the 19th of January 2009 by President Hamid Karzai. He delivered a long speech and in part of the speech he said that as much as the Afghan government was tainted with corruption, international donors were also corrupt. Mr. Karzai said that the Afghans accept the fact, that there was corruption in their administration, but donors were more corrupt. The incumbent President named the existence of corruption, the strengthening of security forces, preventing civilian casualties and the unsuitable use of donors' assistance as the biggest domestic challenges. At the international level, he said that Afghanistan wanted peace and cooperation with its neighbours and prefers cooperation and friendship with the international community. The President also pointed out that he had asked the King of Saudi Arabia to mediate between the Afghan government and the armed opposition groups.

In its first meeting of the fourth year, Upper House Senators

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elected the two Deputy Speakers and two Secretaries. Hamid Gailani retained his post of First Deputy Speaker with 58 votes for the fourth year. Arif Sarwary, who received 42 votes, is the new Second Deputy Speaker. Upper House has 102 Senators. Mr. Moggaddedi remains Speaker of the upper house (meshrano jirga).

In the Lower House, Mirwais Yasseni, MP from the eastern province of Nangarhar, Mohammad Arif Noorzai, MP from the southern province of Kandahar and Shakila Hashimi, MP from the central province of Logar contested for the post of the First Deputy Speaker. Mirwais Yasseni retained the First Deputy Speaker's position with 135 votes for the second year. Saleh Mohammad Saljouqi retained his post of the Second Secretary with 121 votes for the fourth year. The post of the Second Deputy Speaker was contested amongst Ammanullah Payman, MP from Badakhshan, Mir Ahmad Joyenda, MP from Kabul, Malalay Ishaqzai, MP from Kandahar and Safia Sediqi, MP from Nangarhar, however, there was no winner and this post has to be voted for again. The post of the First Secretary was contested between Abdul Satar Khawasi, MP from Parwan and Abdul Satar Darzabi, MP from Jawzjan, however, none of the candidates received a majority. Therefore, Mr. Qanuni remains the Speaker of the Lower House (wolesi jirga).

The Lower House approved the draft police law on the 28th of January 2009. In this version of the draft law, provincial and district governors will get more influence on the operation mode of police in areas under their jurisdiction.

Conclusion: Recently, the Second Secretary of the Lower House informed the media that the Lower

House has managed to approve numerous laws in the past three years, however, due the issue of oversight over the work of the government, the expectations of the people have not fulfilled. On the issue of representation, Lower House MPs might agree that for a variety of reasons, they were not able to adequately represent their constituencies.

In accordance with the Constitution, one third of the Senators in the Upper House, who are supposedly representing the district councils, should have been replaced by new members after completing their tenure of three years, but they are still working as Senators. These Senators are more than likely to continue with their duty in the Upper House. District elections did not take place in 2005 and the mentioned Senators were invited by the President based on presidential decree.

Elections: Ashraf Ghani Ahmadzai, former World Bank official and former Minister of Finance during the Afghan Interim and Transitional governments, held a press conference on 27th of December 2008 at his home in Kabul. During this press conference, he criticised the current Afghan government for its weakness to punish those allegedly involved in widespread corruptions. He said that Afghanistan was in political, social and economical crisis. Mr. Ahmadzai added that there was no system in place to punish government officials if they behaved incorrectly or to reward them for better performance. Mr. Ahmadzai also said that the Afghan government was one of the five most corrupt governments in the world, according to the United Nations. He went on to say, that a limited number of persons were playing games with the future of the Afghan people. There is no authority,

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which would be able to evaluate and control the activities of these people. Mr. Ahmadzai said that all the problems mentioned above were attributed to the lack of proper leadership in the government. In this media conference, Mr. Ahmadzai called for a gathering of all tribal leaders, religious Ulema, political leaders and armed opposition groups to find a solution for the future of Afghanistan and to make a decisive decision for the timing of the next Presidential election.

One week prior to his press conference, Mr. Ahmadzai had been endorsed by a large gathering of Afghans as a potential candidate for the presidential election and he had already said that if the people wanted him to run for the President's post in the 2009 presidential election, he would do so.

Fazil Sangcharaki, the United Front's Spokesman informed the media, that President Karzai contacted the Front to become a member, but the Front would only give its membership to President Karzai, if he was not going to candidate for Presidency in the upcoming presidential election. Sangcharaki added that the Front had its own candidate for the presidential election, without naming anyone. On the 30th of December 2008, Humayoun Hamidzadah, the President's spokesman informed the media, that President Karzai is not interested in becoming a member of the United Front, headed by former President, Rabbani.

Nadir Khan Katawazai, Lower House MP from Paktika, who spoke on Radio and Television of Afghanistan (RTA) during the first week of January 2009 saying that it would not be possible to hold elections unless the government solves im-

portant issues. Mr. Katawazai added that provincial governors in a number of Provinces where Pash-tuns lived, say that the voter registration process was going fine, however, in these provinces many people have not registered to vote, which meant that if election was held, its legitimacy would be questionable.

According to local media reports, on 18th January 2009, thirty thousand people received their voter registration cards in Zabul province. The Head of the Election Commission in Zabul, Oudratullah Naqshbandi, informed the media that 1,500 of the 30,000 voters, who had already registered, were women.

After the Joint meeting of UNAMA, the Afghan Election Commission and donors about the upcoming elections in Afghanistan, SRSR, Kai Eide, held a press conference on 18th of January 2009 and asked the international community for political support for the next Presidential election in Afghanistan. He added that the upcoming elections faced a lot of challenges. He went on to say that the presidential election needs to be free and transparent, and that these elections are going to be very important for the security and stability of Afghanistan.

Voter registration for the upcoming elections begun in the southern province of Helmand on the 20th January 2009, and according to Abdul Hadi, Head of the Afghan Election Commission in Helmand, this process will be completed in one month. Local media reported that, according to the Afghan Election Commission, the government held no control in four districts of Helmand; therefore, the registration process has not yet started in these districts. Afghan analysts

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maintain that the voter registration in Helmand will not be successful.

Once again, the head of the Afghan Election Commission Secretariat, Daoud Ali Najafi, citing financial difficulties reported to the media on 23rd January 2009 that the Election Commission was not ready to announce a date for the presidential election. This is not the first time that the mentioned commission has said so. Responding to this statement, Shukria Barakzai, Lower House MP from Kabul said to the media, that this was totally unacceptable to the Afghan Parliament and this should also be unacceptable to the Afghan President, just because the Election Commission had had four years to prepare for the Presidential election. According to Mr. Najafi, in two districts of Ghazni, one district of Maidan Wardak and four districts of Helmand, the election commission is not conducting voter registration due to security threats.

The Afghan Election Commission announced on 29th January 2009 that the 2009 Presidential election would be held on 20th August 2009 instead of June 2009. After this announcement a number of Afghan analysts and members of the Lower House criticised the Election Commission strongly: Ahmad Saidi, an Afghan analyst said, that the Election Commission, basing its argument on article 33 and 53 of the draft electoral law, had neglected its duties for the past four years and now, three months prior to the election date its officials were saying that they are not ready to hold elections on the required date. Abdul Kabir Ranjbar, Lower House MP from Kabul said that any law or a draft law could override the constitution of the country and that the constitution of the country had to be respected at all times. Shukria Barakzai, Lower House MP while

criticising the decision of the Election Commission said that this issue needed to be referred to the judicial authority. Mohammad Moeen Marastyal, Lower House MP from Kunduz argues that if elections could not be held in June 2009, he was not sure whether the security situation would improve to such a degree as to hold successful elections during August 2009.

The Afghan Election Commission is putting forward three reasons for delaying the elections: technical issues, finance shortages and security situation.

Conclusion: Ashraf Ghani Ahmadzai served as the Minister of Finance during the Interim and Transitional governments and later on as the Chancellor of the Kabul University. In these mentioned posts, Afghans still remember Mr. Ahmadzai as a hardworking member of the government.

A large number of the United Front's members are currently functioning in the current government as Vice President, Ministers, members of the Parliament and other high ranking government officials; nonetheless, Mr. Sangcharaki, the United Front's Spokesman blamed the current government for the plight of the Afghan people. Sangcharaki himself had served as Deputy Minister for Information in 2005. President Karzai has been and still is paying attention to members of the United Front. The statement of United Front's Spokesman that President Karzai wanted to become a member of this Front, and that he would only be offered a membership conditionally might have further decreased the popularity of the President amongst the Afghan people.

Security and Governance Issues: Speaking with an online

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news agency called 'Wakht' (Time), General Mohammad Zahir Azimi, the Afghan Ministry of Defence Spokesman said that the year 2009 would be a difficult year for the Afghans, however, this year would also hold good news for the people of Afghanistan and the international community. General Azimi was referring to the increased numbers of ANA soldiers, more equipment for the ANA and also to the fact, that the Afghan air force is to be equipped this year.

Local media reported on 11th January 2009 that the Federal Republic of Germany and the United Arab Emirate (UAE) were jointly making a contribution of 2.5 million Euros to construct a centre for the 'Civil Order Police' in Kabul. After completion, around 250 policemen could be stationed at this centre all the time, if and when needed. The German Ambassador, Mr. Lauk, who spoke at the inauguration of this centre, said that Afghanistan needs a police force which had the ability to bring security for all Afghans. A representative of the UAE Ministry of Interior said that his country had been assisting the Afghan police for the past two years.

For the ninth time in seven years, the northern province of Baghlan has a new governor. The new governor is Haji Akbar Barakzai. He was introduced to a gathering of 500 persons on 11th January 2009 by Qutbudeen Roydar, who is responsible for coordinating the affairs of the Provincial Councils at the newly established Independent Directorate for Local Governance (IDLG). According to Mr. Roydar, this change was for the purpose of meritocracy and to bring professional persons into the government in order to serve the people. According to local media, the new governor of Baghlan said his work-program would consist of na-

tional unity, ensuring security, lasting peace, campaign against terrorism and narcotics, expansion of reconstruction projects, creating a healthy administration and ensuring the rights of returnees.

The new Provincial Governor of Khost, Hamidullah Qalandarzooy, was introduced to the people of Khost. Previously, he had been the Deputy Minister of Communication. According to the local media, Dr. Gul Jamil Hussaini, Deputy of the Khost Provincial Council and a Khost tribal elder, Rasoul Mohammad Tanai asked the new governor to convince the coalition forces to stop searching the homes of the local people at night.

The IDLG also organized a gathering of 54 District Governors on 11th January 2009. Media reported that the purpose of this gathering had been to exchange views with district governors on security, political, social and economic issues. The district governors believe that their role in decision making is minimal and would like more independence in taking decisions. Ghulam Jailani Popal, who heads the IDLG, said to the media that in future, the districts governors would be selected by a Commission of UN Representatives, Provincial Council members and influential persons.

The Ministry of Public Health began a country-wide polio vaccination campaign on 12th January 2009. Media reported that the people of Khost had made the decision not to take part in this campaign until the coalition forces release the Mullah of the central Mosque who had been taken away at night by coalition forces and the coalition forces stopped searching their houses at night.

Local media said that the Federal Republic of Germany would soon

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start training the district police of the Northern provinces. The police in the three districts of Kunduz is currently under training. General Bakhtyar, the Commander of the Northern Border Police said to the media that drug-traffickers were a challenge for the border police and some areas of the border inside Tajikistan were not controlled by the Tajik police of which drug-traffickers in these areas took advantage.

On 18th January about five hundred former army officers who had been retrenched from the army, demonstrated in front of the Kabul Municipality and demanded that the Municipality provided the plot of land for each former officer that has been given to them by the President in a decree against their salaries of two years.

According to the government funded daily Annis, a consultative meeting with Jihadi leaders about important national issues was held on 21st January 2009. The situation in Afghanistan, the region and the world were evaluated, as well as views exchanged on important issues facing the government and the Afghan people. Participants were the Upper House Speaker, Sebghatullah Mujaddedi - former President during the civil war of the early 1990s, Burhanudin Rabbani – Lower House MP from Kabul, Abdul Rab Rasoul Sayaf – Jihadi Leaders, Pir Sayed Ahmad Gailani and Mohammad Asef Mohseni – Lower House MP from Kabul, Haji Mohammad Mohaqiq – Former Defence Minister, Mohammad Qasim Fahim – Head of the Ulema Council, Fazul Hadi Shinwari – First Vice President, Ahmad Zia Masoud – Second Vice President, Mohammad Karim Khalili – Minister of Haj Pilgrimage and Religious Trusts, Niamtullah Shahrani – Minister of Water and Energy,

Mohammad Ismail – Defence Minister, Rahim Wardak – Justice Minister, Sarwar Danish – Education Minister, Farouq Wardak – Head of National Security, Zalamay Rasoul and Attorney General, Mohammad Ishaq Aloko participated in this meeting which was chaired by President Karzai. According to the mentioned daily, more such meetings will be held in the future.

Local media reported that on 21st January 2009 the Taliban executed two persons. Zabiullah Mujahid, the Taliban spokesman said to the local media that the Taliban had arrested ten thieves in this district who had been disguising themselves as Taliban. Gul Qasim Jihadyar, who is the district governor of the area, informed the media that he was aware of the presence of thieves in this area but was not sure who executed the two people.

On 24th January 2009, local media reported the killing of 14 civilians in the eastern province of Laghman by coalition forces. Coalition forces are claiming that these were insurgents. Lutfullah Mashal, the Laghman provincial governor, said that there had been no coordination with the provincial officials prior to coalition forces carrying out this operation. A large number of people demonstrated in Laghman to express their anger about the continued killing of civilians.

According to Haji Tor Khan, a member of the Helmand Provincial Council, about 1,000 families have left the Nawa district of Helmand due to heavy fighting in that area. Haji Tor Khan informed the media that air and ground bombardment had resulted in the destruction of the people's homes. At the moment these families are living under the open sky. Hundreds of families from Helmand arrived in Kabul two years ago and are now

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living in terrible conditions in the cold winter of Kabul, and according to Abdul Satar Mazhari, who represents these internally displaced Afghans, about 22,000 families have already been displaced from Helmand.

For the second day, hundreds of residents of Laghman province demonstrated in protest of the 14 civilians killed by the coalition forces. Assadulah Wafa, who heads the office of Public Complaints Hearing in the President's office met with the demonstrators. He said that civilian casualties were not only happening in Laghman but this was a country wide phenomenon. Mr. Wafa added that after Obama has come into office, there was some hope that this would not continue. Deputy Head of Laghman Provincial Council, Gulzar Sangarwal, informed the media that after the demonstration they had met with the PRT commander and a Representative of the United States Ministry of Foreign Affairs. While looking into their eyes we warned them, "if such incidents continue in Laghman province, then either the local people or the foreigners can live here".

President Karzai, who spoke at the graduation ceremony of the first group of graduates since late 2001 on 25th January 2009 said, "we have said to the United States and the world if you don't equip the Afghan army with heavy weapons and air force planes, we will get them from somewhere else".

According to media reports, four armed persons kidnapped a wealthy businessman in the western province of Herat on the 26th January 2009. Herat is one of the wealthiest and considered to be one of the safest provinces in Afghanistan. However, according to media reports, the security situa-

tion in this province started to deteriorate three years ago.

Under the Chairmanship of President Karzai, the second consultative meeting of Jihadi leaders and Heads of the Commissions of both houses of the Parliament was held on 25th January 2009. According to the government funded daily Anis, the purpose of this meeting was to discuss the cooperation of the Afghan government with the international community in the fight against terrorism, increase in the number of coalition soldiers, preventing civilian casualties and finding ways retrieve the confidence of the people.

On 31st January 2009, Mohammad Hanif Atmar, the newly appointed Minister of Interior, held a press conference in which he said that the Ministry of Interior did support the establishment of creating tribal militias. He said that the Ministry of Interior was creating a security force from the local people who would be given weapons similar to the police and would have different uniforms. This new security force would be responsible for looking after highways and public assets. According to Mr. Atmar, young local Afghans who have no criminal record will be recruited for this forces will be trained by the Ministry of Interior and Ministry of Defence instructors. The United States would pay for the expenses. Mr. Atmar did not mentioned the final number of this new force.

Conclusion: The effort of the international community in the development of the ANP is appreciated by the Afghans. However, Afghans do not trust their current police force and the main reason for this is that many unreliable characters entered the police ranks when the Taliban government collapsed in late 2001 and continue to enter

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the police force today. The international community is spending millions of Euros and Dollars to train the Afghan police force but this process could benefit tremendously from the advice of the Afghan public, who are asking for a strict background check of those personnel already in the police ranks and those intending to enter the police force today and in the future. Afghans believe that instead of 100.000 unreliable, poorly trained and poorly paid police personnel, 50.000 reliable, well trained and fairly paid police officers will do a much better job.

The current Mayor of Kabul, Abdul Ahad Sahibi, who is regarded by the people of Kabul as less than competent, is the fifth Mayor appointed by the current government. The third and the only Mayor who is still remembered fondly by the people of Kabul was Dr. Ghulam Sakhi Noorzad. For the short time that he was in the Kabul Mayor's office, he worked tirelessly to change the current dirty appearance of Kabul city and did his utmost best to provide municipal services for its people. However, sadly and to the surprise of the millions of people living in Kabul, the government removed Dr. Noorzad against the will of the majority of Kabul's inhabitants. The people of Kabul still talk about the elderly Mayor Dr. Noorzad, who was in his sixties when he returned from Canada to serve the city and the people he loved. The people of Kabul want the government to reappoint Dr. Noorzad as the Mayor of Kabul city. They believe that only Dr. Noorzad can help put back this city on the right track.

Afghans are very concerned about the continued searching of their houses by the coalition forces at night. If there is a need to search a house, Afghans are asking interna-

tional security forces to conduct their searches in the daylight. Continued searching of homes at night will keep raising suspicion of the Afghans about the nature of the work carried by the international security forces. Afghans preventing their children from the very vital and critical polio vaccination campaign is just one example of this increasing distrust about the work of the coalition forces in Afghanistan. If corrective measures are not taken quickly, Afghans will further increase their distance further from the international forces.

Media reported that for the ninth time the northern province of Baghlan has a new governor. There are other provinces such as Kandahar, Ghazni, Khost and Paktia, where the government has been appointing and re-appointing governors a number of times. The IDLG was recently established to improve local governance. Traditionally, Afghans in the majority of provinces cultivate their small plots of lands for their living or send their youngsters to Pakistan and Iran to work and make some money. Security and governance would benefit immensely from the appointment of competent officials, and from income generating activities in the provinces. Afghans would be happy to send their youths to the district or provincial centres to work rather than to Iran or Pakistan illegally.

International Affairs: The former President of Afghanistan (during the civil war of the early 1990s), who is currently the head of the United Front held a press conference on 5th January 2009. He said to the media that the United Front condemned the Israeli attack on the Gaza and linked it to the Holocaust. Mr. Rabani called Israel the occupier and demanded for strong reaction especially from the Ara-

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bian states. In reply to the remark that the Afghan Ministry of Foreign Affairs had recognized Israel as an independent state, Mr. Rabani, said that the current Afghan government kept making the same mistakes.

During the first week of January 2009, the President of Pakistan, Asif Ali Zardari, paid his first visit to Afghanistan to meet with his Afghan counter part, Hamid Karzai. For the arrival of Mr. Zardari, The road from the airport to the presidential palace was closed by a variety of security forces (ANA, NDS, ANP and probably others) for hours.

Senator Joseph Biden was also in Kabul on 8th January 2009 to meet with Hamid Karzai. According to the government funded daily newspaper Annis, the two officials discussed issues related to terrorism, increasing the number of Afghan security forces and the long term commitment of the United States to Afghanistan, as well as their economic assistance.

President Karzai, travelled to India on 11th January 2009 and, according to government funded newspapers, he stayed there for two days to meet with the Indian Prime Minister and Foreign Minister, discuss the two countries bilateral relation, economic co-operation, campaign against terrorism and the regional situation, as well as expressing his sympathy for the Mumbai victims. Wahid Mujdah, an Afghan political analyst commenting on a private television channel said that President Karzai had been trying to change his image lately and was attempting to portray the image of an independent President, and his recent visit to India might also be relevant to this.

On 19th January 2009, Anis Daily reported that the international community who is blaming the Afghan government for problems such as administrative corruption, narcotics and other issues does not consider that it should also shoulder responsibility. The Afghan government claims the blames started after President Karzai raised his voice in support of the civilians killed by the coalition forces. Shukria Barakzai, Lower House MP from Kabul said it was surprising that after many years the international community was now blaming the Afghan government for shortcomings and vice versa. To-date both sides have failed to come to consensus about a single and a workable program. Sayed Ishaq Gailani, Lower House MP from Paktika said that the international community hadn't delivered its commitment and promises to this government when it had been established. Zubair Sahfiqi, an Afghan political analyst said that the presence of the international forces in Afghanistan had had a negative effect, and now the international community was blaming the Afghan government for their own mistakes.

On 19th January 2009, media reported that President Karzai had sent a letter to the Russian President, Mr. Medvedev on 3rd of November 2008. Information concerning this letter was disclosed to the local Afghan media by the President's office but that the contents of the letter were not made public.

The Afghan President, Hamid Karzai and Parnab Mukhrji, the Indian Foreign Minister inaugurated the 122 km road funded by the Indian government on 24th January 2009. This road begins at Delaram on the Afghan-Iranian border and leads to Zaranj, the centre of the Nimroz

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province. The Indian funded 120 km road from the Iranian border is money well spent by a donor. This new road will give Afghan and foreign traders doing business in Afghanistan another alternative to the existing trade routes via central Asia and the neighbouring country of Pakistan. India is also building and irrigation and electricity dam in the western province of Herat - another project funded by the Indian government that is sure to be welcomed by the Afghan public when completed.

Humayoun Hamidzada, the President's Spokesman, said to the media on 27th January 2009 that Afghanistan was a sovereign and independent country and would expand its trade and economical ties with various countries including Russia. Hamidzada added that the Afghan government's relations with Russia were only technical and Afghanistan had strategic relation with NATO and the United States. In relation to the statement by the NATO Secretary General, Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, Hamidzada said that the challenges before the Afghan government needed a regional solution. He said the Afghan government had been a supporter of regional cooperation in the past and the role played by the Iranian government in Afghanistan had been constructive.

Conclusion: The ordinary people of the poorest country in the world are not sure whether to trust their own elected government which they feel has neglected them for the past seven years or to believe in the judgement of the international community, that has also failed to-date to gain the trust of the Afghan public. The Afghan are patient people and have endured a lot for the past three decades. They are still waiting to see who will be the first to genuinely assist

them in the near future and not take them for another long ride.

Human Rights: Hawa Alam Nooristani, Lower House MP from Nooristan, said to the media that the Ministry of Women's Affairs was incapable of representing and supporting the women of Afghanistan. The rights of the Afghan women have been continuously violated but the mentioned Ministry was not able to raise its voice in support of these women.

About 200 women teachers and girls' students demonstrated in Mazar-e-Sharif the centre of the northern province of Balkh on 17th January 2009 and called on the government to hang those who are convicted of sexual crimes against women and children in public.

Local media reported on 18th, 19th and 20th January that the Sikh and Hindu community in the Kandahar province would leave Afghanistan if their lives and property were not secured. Awtar Singh, the Sikh and Hindu Community Leader said to the media that the Sikh and Hindu community also faced problems in Kabul, where their properties are grabbed by powerful persons. The Afghan Human Rights Commission officials said that the Sikhs and Hindus have reported to them the violation of their human rights and the confiscation of their properties. Dr. Anarkali Honrayar, a member of the Sikh and Hindu community, also blamed some members of the Sikh and Hindu community to have collaborated with the thieves and sold these said properties with false documents. She stressed, however, that it was the duty of the elected government to differentiate between forged and legal property documents.

Conclusion: According to media reports, in the majority of cases,

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those allegedly responsible for sexually assaulting women and children are linked with either local or central government officials. Most victims complained to the about lack of justice and the deficient prosecution of perpetrators. However, the government security forces and judicial authorities claim that they are bringing the perpetrators to justice. The real picture for the Afghan public seems to be obscure.

The vulnerable Sikh and Hindu community have suffered heavily during the past three decades at the hands of powerful armed gangs who have grabbed their valuable properties. The Sikhs and Hindus have complained continuously about the lack of attention to their plight by the government. A sizable Sikh and Hindu community lived in the provinces of Kabul, Jalalabad, Khost, Ghazni and Kandahar prior to the invasion of Afghanistan by the former Soviet Union in 1978. This is the first time that the Sikhs and Hindus are raising their voices about feeling insecure in Kandahar province. Continuous poor governance in that province might be the reason for this. It's not only the Sikhs and Hindus or other minority communities in Afghanistan that are complaining about the violation of their rights and want to live in peace and security in their own country. In the country the majority of Afghans share the same feelings about the vast presence of international security forces and international institutions.

Environmental Issues: On 3rd January 2009, President Hamid Karzai, held a cabinet meeting and assigned relevant government institutions to draw up short and long terms plan to stop the deterioration of the air pollution and improve the ever increasing dirty environment of Kabul city. The Af-

ghan public have been voicing their concerns for many years about the choking smoke emitted by the hundreds of thousands of second-hand cars using low quality imported fuel as well as by the numerous brick kilns, public baths and bakeries using coal, rubber, plastic and anything that burns, and about the dust from the still unpaved streets and footpaths in the city of Kabul. According to the National Environment Protection Agency (NEPA), Kabul's air is three to four times more polluted than that of the cities of the neighbouring countries and if the situation continues as such, the people of Kabul will have to migrate from this city.

After the Lower House of the Afghan Parliament had voted late last year and removed the Minister of Commerce, Mohammad Amin Farhang for negligence, the newly appointed caretaker of the Ministry of Commerce, Wahidullah Shahrani, travelled to the northern town of Hairatan on 11th January 2009 and established the office of the Norm and Standard Authority there. This office is responsible for checking and controlling the standard of imported goods that enter into Afghanistan. According to Mr. Shahrani all the laboratories of the Ministry of Commerce will be handed over to the newly established Norm and Standard Authority.

There are signs that the Afghan government is doing something about the terrible air pollution of Kabul city. The Emergency Environment Committee, chaired by the Minister of Public Health, Sayed Mohammad Amin Fatemi met on 27th January 2009 for the second time during the month of January. It was reported in the meeting that donors were ready to fund the government's drive to improve the

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environment condition in Kabul and rest of Afghanistan. The Ministries of Interior and Commerce, the Traffic and Norm and Standard Authorities were ordered to prepare a plan within one month on how the catalytic converter can be installed in the cars to decrease exhaust emissions.

Conclusion:

Afghans believe that the Afghan government and the international community should have paid attention to environmental issues many years ago and corrective measures should have been put in place when the elected government took office in 2004. The establishment of the Norm and Standard Authority to check and control all the imported products and especially petroleum fuel products that are distanced for the Afghan consumers is a needed and responsible decision by the government. Afghans have been the victim of low quality products pouring into this country for many years. Afghanistan has ports with the neighbouring countries of Pakistan, Turkmenistan, Iran, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and China. Afghans would be eager to see the establishment of the mentioned authority laboratories in these ports as well and would also be glad to hear about the work and effectiveness of this newly established administration soon.

According to the Minister of Health, Sayed Mohammad Amin Fatemi, every year more than 3,000 Afghans lose their lives from illnesses related to air pollution and dirty environment. The increased air pollution in the city of Kabul is putting the lives of the Afghan public and especially children and elderly in great danger. Urgent action and corrective measures are needed quickly to improve the environmental conditions in Kabul.