

Karzai urged to ensure transparency in parliament

PRESIDENT Hamid Karzai faces a daunting challenge of purging his administration of corrupt individuals, including those involved in the flourishing drugs trade. Failure to act decisively would seriously damage his credibility and set a poor precedent for administrative reforms elsewhere in the country.

Much remains to be done if the parliamentary, provincial and district elections are to proceed as scheduled. The process may well have its flaws, as did the presidential polls, but these polls are an essential landmark in the political transition. The government and the international community must redouble efforts to ensure they are not delayed again.

The following are the recommendations made by the International Crisis Group:

To the Karzai government:

1. Accelerate preparations for the Wolesi Jirga (House of the People), provincial and district elections in April 2005 and seek necessary funding.

2. Issue decrees defining powers and responsibilities of provincial and district councils, and delimiting district boundaries based on current carto-

graphic data, increase efforts to obtain official population figures or estimates for each province and establish a boundary dispute resolution mechanism, with representation from the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission, the Interim Electoral Commission, UNAMA, and all political parties.

3. Undertake a comprehensive public information campaign, with particular attention to radio and television, to educate voters and candidates about the upcoming elections.

4. Strengthen the role of political parties in the political process by amending the Electoral Law to replace the Single Non-Transferable Vote (SNTV) system with a party list system and amend the Electoral Law to provide the Joint Electoral Management Body (JEMB) with sufficient time to vet parliamentary, provincial and district council candidates for linkages to drugs, Al Qaeda, Taliban violence, or involvement in human rights abuses.

5. Revise the Political Parties Law so that the process is insulated as far as possible from political pressure and manipulation, in particular by:

- (a) transferring registration authori-

ty from the justice ministry to the Interim Electoral Commission; and

- (b) providing for appeals against deregistration through successive tiers of the justice system.

6. Appoint a new Interim Electoral Commission — with current members eligible for reappointment — through a transparent process, with public consultation, and excluding candidates with links to militias or responsible for human rights abuses.

7. Review appointments to provincial and district security posts, and ensure that all provincial police chiefs, and as far as possible, district police chiefs, are police academy graduates.

8. Commence planning for the operation of the National Assembly and provincial and district councils, including by starting construction of the National Assembly building, making arrangements for housing and transportation for parliamentarians, and recruitment and training of parliamentary staff, and preparing facilities for provincial and district councils.

9. Continue to push for the disarming, demobilization and reintegration of the militias before the elections and rigorous enforcement of the benchmarks contained in the Political

Parties Law, where necessary with the support of International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) and the Coalition forces.

To the Joint Electoral Management Body (JEMB):

10. Set and announce as a priority the precise April 2005 election date for the Jirga, provincial and district elections.

11. Re-open registration, particularly in provinces where there was low voter registration in the presidential election or low female voter registration, and create a voters roll, using existing registration and voter data as well as data obtained through the new registration exercise.

12. Appoint an independent panel, composed of representatives of the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission, the Interim Electoral Commission, and UNAMA, to investigate complaints before and after the elections by candidates and voters, with decisions and findings to be made public and dealings with candidates and political parties otherwise open to scrutiny.

13. Make necessary arrangements well ahead of time for the conduct of the parliamentary elections including:

- (a) deployment of international and non-partisan national electoral observers;

- (b) visible security, particularly in remote and conservative provinces, to reduce the threat of attacks on voters, including women voters;

- (c) availability of mobile voting units in rural areas so that voting is not impeded by restrictions on travel; and

- (d) separate polling places for men and women in conservative areas, including sufficient female staffing.

To the United Nations:

14. Prioritize preparations for the parliamentary, provincial and district elections, in particular through active and substantial assistance for the population survey, the new registration exercise, demarcation of district boundaries and a public information campaign.

To Donors and Intergovernmental Organizations:

15. Call for elections to be held in April 2005 and provide all necessary financial and logistical support to keep them on schedule, in particular allocating and rapidly disbursing funds for:

- (a) a post-enumeration survey of the household listing, and the census proper, to be carried out by United Nations

amimentary polls

Population Fund (UNFPA) and the Central Statistics Office (CSO), and ensure that UNFPA has sufficient technical experts based in Afghanistan to monitor the CSO survey teams carefully;

(b) the registration of new voters in advance of the parliamentary elections and preparation of the voters roll; and

(c) a comprehensive public information campaign, including nationwide voter and civic education and special efforts with regard to provinces in which small percentages of women voted in the presidential election.

16. Assure sufficient funds for deployment of international observers for the parliamentary elections in each provincial centre as well as in district centres that have been cleared for movement by the UN security coordinator.

17. Help build the capacity of future Afghan legislators through first hand exposure to other parliaments, including exchanges of parliamentary delegations.

To NATO/ISAF and the Coalition:

18. Secure troop commitments for Phase Two of ISAF expansion, covering western Afghanistan, complete

deployment prior to the parliamentary elections including of rapid reaction battalions able to reinforce the Afghan National Army and Afghan police, and define timetables for Phases Three and Four covering the south and east.

19. Mandate ISAF and Coalition forces to support the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) process through cantonment of heavy weaponry, inspection of suspected weapons depots, and enforcement of agreements between the ministry of defence and UNAMA to decommission specific units of the Afghan Military Forces (AMF).

20. Begin an assessment of the numbers and locations of non-AMF militias with the aim of assisting the Afghan government to demilitarize the entire country.

21. Distance the Coalition from militia commanders who have stakes in the drugs trade but are currently cooperating in anti-Taliban operations, and adopt and encourage a counter-narcotics strategy based on interdiction, law enforcement, alternative livelihood, and eradication — in that order.—*Courtesy: International Crisis Group.*