

Ban lauds courage of Afghan people for taking part in parliamentary polls



More than 86,000 polling centre staff are being trained for Afghanistan's 18 September 2010 election

18 September 2010 – Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon commended the courage and determination of the men and women of Afghanistan for voting in today's parliamentary elections.

In a statement, Mr. Ban noted the high number of candidates seeking office, as well as the important role played by the nation's civil society in observing the electoral process.

More than 2,500 people, including some 400 women, competed for 249 seats in the Wolesi Jirga, or lower house of Afghanistan's parliament.

Mr. Ban praised the Afghan National Security Forces' efforts to protect the people of Afghanistan during the democratic exercise, which took place in more than 5,000 polling centres across the country.

"The Secretary-General notes that this election has taken place amid significant security challenges and condemns the reported acts of violence, expressing his condolences to the families and friends of those who lost their lives," the statement said.

Mr. Ban acknowledged the efforts of the leadership and staff of the Afghan electoral bodies, the Independent Election Commission (IEC) and the Electoral Complaints Commission (ECC).

He called on "all parties to use appropriate legal channels to file complaints and asks for patience as the electoral authorities complete the process in accordance with the law."

Earlier this week, Staffan de Mistura, the Secretary-General's Special Representative and head of the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (**UNAMA**), stressed the importance of the measures being taken by the IEC to improve the electoral process, following last year's presidential polls which were marred by fraud.

"The electoral authorities have learned many lessons from the experience of last year, in particular in improving their systems to prevent massive fraud. These elections will not be perfect, but I am hopeful that they will be better than last year's election," he said during a visit with provincial leaders and tribal elders in the southern city of Kandahar.

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