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بنیاد انتخابات آزاد و عادلانه افغانستان

**Free & fair Election Foundation
of Afghanistan**

**Election Day Press Statement
20 August 2009**

The following statement is based on two rounds of scheduled reporting by FEFA's observers. It is also informed by multiple special incident and general outlook telephone briefs during voting hours. This statement is based on eyewitness reports by FEFA observers between 7:00 am and 6:00 deployed in all 34 provinces.

In any aspiring democracy, holding the second ever election presents a major challenge. By holding today's elections, Afghans have proved their commitment to developing a lasting democratic system. Amidst many challenges, this phase of the electoral process was an important step in Afghanistan's progress towards building a civil and democratic government. The candidates and campaigns, the Independent Elections Commission (IEC), state security institutions, media, and many civil society organizations played key roles in shaping the environment in which many people could exercise their political rights.

Election Administration and Procedural Observations

FEFA observed that throughout the country, many polling centers did not open on time, mainly due to factors such as last minute relocations of polling centers, last minute administrative and technical issues, and security concerns. FEFA observers reported cases of temporary and sometimes early closing of polling centers due to security incidents or disregard for established procedures by IEC field staff.

Early in the day, FEFA received and shared with the IEC reports from fifteen provinces about malfunctioning punches—to mark used voter registration cards—in polling stations. IEC reacted during the morning hours with instructions to polling staff to use scissors to cut the edge of voter's registration card. Questions about the durability of the indelible ink used to mark voters' fingers caused concerns early in the day. Unlike the 2004 Presidential Elections, this time around there are reports that the ink reemerges after attempts to wash it off.

Reports about improper interference by local IEC staff with the voting process were received throughout the day from many parts of the country. Questions about the impartiality of some IEC local staff constitute a trend that has persisted throughout the electoral process. Several anticipated patterns of fraud appear to have manifested in varying degrees. FEFA is assessing reports about these incidents.

Security Related Observations

Grenade and rocket attacks directed at polling and city centers emerged as a major form of disruption in many parts of the country. These attacks continued throughout the day. FEFA also received isolated reports of suicide bombings and gunfire in the vicinity of polling stations as well as reports of the manifestation of violent threats directed at the voters by the Taliban in several parts of the country.

Women Participation Related Observations

As had been predicted with concerns, female electoral staff appeared absent at many polling centers throughout the country. In parts of the country, FEFA observers reported incidents of male proxy voting for female voters. Fewer female polling stations opened than initially planned.

Voter Turnout

Preliminary FEFA impressions seem to indicate a lower voter turnout if compared to the 2004 Presidential Elections, in particular the female turnout. Voter turnout varied geographically within provinces and districts.

Media

On the day before the elections, the government requested all domestic and international media to refrain from reporting on incidents of violence between 6 am and 8 pm on Election Day. Local media complied, whereas international media reported on security incidents throughout the day. Though FEFA sympathizes with the government's argument that reports of security incidents might have discouraged people to vote, it notes that this limitation of media freedom is a violation of democratic principles.

Concluding Remarks

The above general observations raise concerns about the quality of today's elections, and about the impact of the reported incidents of violence—some gruesome. FEFA will continue to thoroughly assess field reports filed by its observers. FEFA takes this opportunity to reiterate its commitment to the transparency and fairness of the remaining phases of the 2009 elections. The electoral process is entering the critical phase of counting and verification of results. FEFA calls on key players to uphold the established rules of this process.

Media Advisory.

FEFA's chairperson Nader Nadery will hold a press conference on FEFA's further provisional findings, including first observations on the counting process, on Saturday 22 August 2009 at 10:30 am in Central Hotel. The hotel is located close to Chaar-rahi Ansary, in Shahr-e-Nau. For inquiries please contact Dr. Basir Hamidi at **0700016220**

FEFA's final report on the 2009 Elections will be published after verified results of the elections are released.

Background information on FEFA:

On Election Day, 7368 FEFA electoral observers, of which 2642 female, are deployed throughout the 34 provinces of the country. 400 of these are long-term observers that have monitored the entire electoral process from voter registration, candidate registration and throughout the campaigning period in each province.