

PRESS RELEASE

United Nations Development Programme

Afghanistan Country Office, Shah Mahmood Ghazi Watt, Kabul



UNDP Supporting Afghanistan's Historic Elections

Kabul, 5 October 2004---Despite continued unrest and deadly attacks on voter registration workers, more than 10.5 million Afghans have signed up to vote in the October 9th presidential election, the first in the country's history.

Twelve UN voter registration workers were killed and 35 injured in attacks by insurgents during the registration drive, and many citizens continue to report threats and intimidation against those who plan to vote in the election Saturday. But the registration effort penetrated even the most difficult and remote provinces of the country, with 3 700 registration teams signing up as many as 150 000 voters daily.

The Transitional Islamic State of Afghanistan, the UNDP and their partners – United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and the Interim Afghan Electoral Commission (IAEC) – have worked consistently throughout the past year to pave a new road towards democracy. UNDP is servicing the Joint Electoral Management Board (JEMB), and the Secretariat (JEMBS), in the areas of fund mobilization, staffing, procurement and policy advisory support. UNDP has facilitated the work of Afghan electoral authorities in the following areas:

- Resource mobilization and donor coordination;
- Out-of-country (refugee) voting
- Election management
- Voter information and civic education
- Media monitoring
- Nurturing an environment of political inclusiveness, responsiveness and equity
- National and international election observation.

Cooperation among the agencies began with the Voter Registration Project – from the first week of December 2003 through its completion on 15 August 2004 – and has continued through the 2004 Afghan Elections Project. A massive undertaking, the Voter Registration Project promoted and facilitated voter registration among all Afghan citizens including women, refugees, internally displaced persons, returnees, nomads and others living in remote, insecure areas. The registration process was accompanied by nationwide public information and civic education campaigns, using face-to-face approaches, broadcast media such as radio as well as community mobilization events and civil society partnerships.

“The non-aligned civic education effort of UNDP and its partners has perhaps been the most important element to this significant operation,” stated Ercan Murat, UNDP Country Director. “Transparency, legitimacy and freedom of choice are the cornerstones to any democratic process. These can only stand with the support of a willing, informed, and participatory electorate.”

Within Afghanistan, UNDP and its partners have made enormous efforts to ensure the best possible access to polling stations and the democratic process. A total of 5 000 polling centres are being prepared across the land, which will be coordinated through eight regional electoral offices – in Kabul, Bamyan, Herat, Gardez, Jalalabad, Kandahar, Kunduz and Mazar-i-Sharif. On polling day, registered Afghans will be free to cast their ballot at any one of the 25 000 polling stations that will be available at polling centres across the country. Separate stations will be provided for men and women to vote. It will be the first time they have voted in a democratic election.

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Another key component to this year's election will take place outside of Afghanistan, funded by UNDP and implemented by the International Organization for Migration (IOM). The out-of-country voting process will be held in the neighboring countries of Iran and Pakistan. Over one million Afghans living in Pakistan and Iran will be given the opportunity to vote.

In Pakistan, approximately 730 000 voters registered at 1 657 registration stations in 620 locations; the sites will serve as polling stations on election day. The stations will be set up in the refugee camps of the Northwest Frontier Province and Balochistan, and in the urban areas of Islamabad, Peshawar and Quetta. In Iran, 1 200 polling stations will be opened on 9 October in 150 locations to serve 600 000 voters.

To ensure the transparency and integrity of the elections process, UNDP is also facilitating the activities of more than 4 000 observers, both national and international, on election day.

"The 2004 Afghan Elections Project is the largest project of its kind executed by the UNDP in the past decade," says Jerome Leyraud, Project Manager of the Voter Registration and Elections Project, "in terms of number of people employed, contributions from donors, logistics and institutional arrangements to ensure free, fair and safe elections in a post conflict environment."

The UN Office for Project Services (UNOPS) and UN Volunteers (UNV) have also played important roles in the delivery of project assistance in many areas. The total number of people recruited specifically to assist in carrying out the upcoming elections is over 138 000. Of this total, the vast majority are Afghans and less than 400 international staff have been recruited. As of 5 October 2004, UNDP had received US\$76 082 056 for the elections project from the following donors: Canada, Denmark, European Commission, Finland, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden / SIDA, Switzerland, United Kingdom and the United States.

For more information, please visit UNDP – Afghanistan at: <http://www.undp.org.af> or the JEMB elections website: <http://www.elections-afghanistan.org.af/>

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