

# UN Action Urged To Strengthen Afghanistan Capacity to Support Future Elections



July 6, 2009



## **SPECIAL INSPECTOR GENERAL FOR AFGHANISTAN RECONSTRUCTION**

July 6, 2009

The Honorable Karl Eikenberry  
U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan

Ambassador Eikenberry:

In March 2009, we initiated an audit of U.S. and other donor assistance for the preparation and conduct of presidential and provincial council elections in Afghanistan. In the course of this audit, we identified a concern that requires immediate attention to build capacity at Afghanistan's permanent electoral institution, the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC). The full audit work focuses on the extent to which assistance is being used effectively to strengthen the capacity of the IEC and to sustain this capacity for future elections. We are preparing a draft of the full audit report which we anticipate issuing at the end of August 2009.

This letter report focuses on an issue that warrants immediate attention regarding the use of U.S. and international funds to support the upcoming democratic elections in Afghanistan. Specifically, we noted that a key advisor position in the United Nations Development Program's Enhancing Legal and Electoral Capacity for Tomorrow (UNDP/ELECT) project—which is critical to facilitating the institutionalization of the IEC to carry out its mandate and to establish sustainable capacity—remains unfilled as of July 2009. We recommend that the U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan present our findings to the Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General for Afghanistan and the Chief Electoral Advisor, UNDP/ELECT. Our observations in this letter are based on the review of documents from and interviews with representatives from the United Nations and the UNDP/ELECT project, the IEC and United States and other donor nations, including U.S. Agency for International Development officials and their implementing partners and other involved organizations, from March through July 2009 in Kabul, Afghanistan and Washington, D.C.

### **BACKGROUND**

International aid, of which the United States is a major contributor, is necessary to strengthen Afghan institutions, build upon democratic progress made, and conduct legitimate elections. The extent to which this assistance is used effectively is critical to sustain long-term results and lessen future dependence on international support. Support for Afghan's elections is managed through a "basket

fund” mechanism whereby the donors contribute funds to the UNDP/ELECT project. The Afghan electoral body, IEC, is responsible for overseeing and managing all aspects of the election process. For many IEC staff, this is the first substantive experience conducting an election. While a key component of UNDP/ELECT is to support IEC capacity building, UNDP/ELECT’s primary focus is to support IEC’s immediate operational needs to conduct the August 2009 elections.

## **URGENT NEED TO HIRE CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT ADVISOR WITH MANAGERIAL ELECTION EXPERIENCE**

The lack of international and Afghan attention to sustainable capacity building following the last electoral cycle in 2005 contributed, we believe, to the difficulties faced in 2009 elections. UNDP/ELECT planned to hire a Capacity Development Advisor to focus on long-term electoral institution building, earmarking approximately \$600,000 for this position.<sup>1</sup> However, as of July 6, 2009, this position remained unfilled. In our view, this position is critical to facilitating the institutionalization of the IEC to carry out its mandate and to establish sustainable capacity. The Advisor is responsible for various facets of capacity development “to ensure that capacity building and transfer of skills occur between technical experts/advisors and the IEC staff” and more significantly, to “develop a long term capacity building strategy in conjunction with the IEC”, according to the position description.

Filling this position is urgently needed to successfully assess and respond to capacity development issues, monitor progress, identify skill gaps, and report on achievements, lessons learned, and requirements for future international support. Executive authority and prior experience in election management are not currently prerequisites for the position but such experience would (1) more effectively support the IEC to fulfill its mandate and (2) facilitate a dialogue between the IEC, Ministry of Finance, and Civil Service Commission to develop and establish a budget capable of supporting all IEC functions for future elections.

Many of the donors we interviewed expressed similar concern that this position remains vacant less than 60 days before the election and emphasized the need for a dedicated focus on the sustainability of the IEC as an institution for this electoral cycle and beyond. For the donor community, leveraging the substantial investment in this election cycle is imperative to reduce future dependence by the IEC on international support.

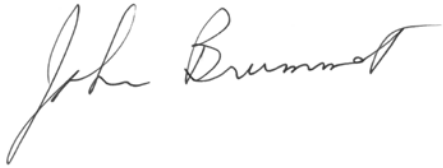
## **RECOMMENDATION**

We recommend the U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan present our findings to the Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General for Afghanistan and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan; and to the Chief Electoral Advisor, UNDP/ELECT and urge them to take immediate action to fill the position and to select an individual with election managerial experience.

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<sup>1</sup>The amount earmarked for this position has been identified in the UNDP/ELECT Indicative Budget 2009 and by the Chief Electoral Advisor UNDP/ELECT.

If you have any questions about this report, please contact me at (703) 602-3812 or [john.brummet@sigar.mil](mailto:john.brummet@sigar.mil).

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John Brummet". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized "J" and "B".

John Brummet  
Assistant Inspector General for Audits  
Office of the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction

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