PRESS RELEASE

AFGHAN VOTERS CAST BALLOTS IN HISTORIC POLL
September 18

Voters flocked to thousands of polling stations across Afghanistan early Sunday to cast ballots in Afghanistan's landmark first post-conflict legislative elections.

Nearly 6,300 polling centres opened in all 398 districts in the first hour of voting from 6.00 am as men and women voted calmly and joyously. Ninety-nine percent of the 4,088 polling centres contacted in the first hours of polling have opened.

"I am greatful that I have the right to vote. I have voted and I am happy," said Mariyan, 20, after casting her ballot in Kandahar in southern Afghanistan.

"We've come to vote for a peaceful and prosperous Afghanistan. My vote is not only for me, but for my children and my family," said another female voter, Khadija, 45, as she lined up to vote near the Darulaman palace in Kabul, Afghanistan's capital.

Some polling centres opened slightly later than the 6.00am opening time. The JEMB decided recently to open an hour earlier than originally planned to allow voters more time to handle the large and complex ballot.

Sunday's elections for the 249-seat Wolesi Jirga (Lower House of the National Assembly) and 34 Provincial Councils mark the next major step in Afghanistan's transition to democracy after a quarter century of conflict.

Almost 12.5 million registered voters may cast ballots at nearly 6,300 polling centres set up in all 349 districts of Afghanistan.

The Chairman of the Joint Electoral Management Body, Bissmillah Bissmil, urged Afghans to exercise their right to vote in a spirit of solidarity, as he opened polling at the Lycee Istiqlal school in Kabul.

"This election is for the Afghan people. By coming out to vote today, you will be playing a vital role in the final stage of Afghanistan's transition to democracy," he said.

"Every Afghan has a role to play in this step towards a peaceful future. Let us all act together in solidarity, to make this step to our democratic future smooth, peaceful and united."

Voters will cast two separate ballots each, one for the Wolesi Jirga and one for the Provincial Council in their province. Polling centre gates will close at 4.00pm.

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