JEMB COMMISSIONER Abdul Hakim Murad:

On behalf of JEMB and JEMBS I would like welcome you all here today. As far as you all know that JEMB and JEMBS have always tried to have good relations in terms of conducting the election in better and transparent way. In order to improve this relationship after this in future we will have these kinds of press conferences on weekly basis it means if God willing on all Wednesdays we will have regular press conferences here.

The most important subject for today’s press conference would be the issue of ballot papers for 2005 Wolesi Jirga and Provincial Council elections and they will be introduced for you today here.

Mr. Richard Atwood the Chief of Operations for JEMBS is here today with us and he will give information about ballot papers for us today and we have also Julian Type one of the two deputy chairman and an international member of the commission. Before I give the floor to Mr. Richard Atwood I would like to point to another successful phase of this election which has been successfully implemented in accordance with the planning of JEMB and that is the Voter Registration Update. We have successfully finished that and about 1.69 million individuals have used our facilities.

I would like to stress that this 1.69 million figure is preliminary and when we complete our cross checking we will announce for you the final figure.

JEMBS CHIEF OF OPERATIONS Richard Atwood:

Good morning and welcome to JEMB Conference here today. The main purpose of today’s press conference which is the first of our weekly press conferences is to look at the ballot design and to announce to the media the ballot design for this year’s elections.

Before I start on the conference can I just say that there will be a photo opportunity for the press who would like to take a picture of one of the ballots for this year’s election immediately after the press briefing. One of the key challenges this year for the Secretariat was to determine a ballot design that would be easy to use for Afghans and which could accommodate the large number of candidates in some of the races.

It is important on Election Day that voters can identify their candidate on the ballot as quickly as possible so that we move voters through polling stations at a good pace. This is especially important this year because each voter will receive two ballot papers: one for the Wolesi Jirga and one for Provincial Council. So as it became apparent that many of the ballots will have large numbers of candidates we conducted tests on focus groups of Afghans. We conducted tests with a number of different ballot formats, we conducted tests on voters in urban and rural areas, educated and uneducated, literate and illiterate, male and female.

We tested a number of different ballot types. One of the types was formatted as an enormous sheet for 400 candidates in Kabul. Like many of other designs, the large sheet ballot proved almost impossible for people to use quickly. The ballot that we found was overly easier than all the others for the people to use across all Afghan people, urban, rural, male, female, literate and illiterate was a ballot in the form of booklet. We have 69 different ballots this year: 34 Provincial Council and 34 plus 1 Kuchi Wolesi Jirga. In the final test we determined that where there were large numbers of candidates on the ballot the booklet ballot was the best ballot to use we settled
for a size of B3, which is the best sized ballots and easy to use in polling stations. On a ballot sheet of this size we can place 60 candidates in three columns of 20 with their name, their number according to ballot lottery, their photo, their symbol, and a space on which voters mark the ballot. Where there are considerably less than 60 candidates, we have to cut the ballots up. This will save on our distribution costs.

If there are between 60 and 120 candidates the ballot will be again in the format of a book the front page will be blank. If there are between 120 and 180 candidates the ballot will be a 3 page booklet. Anything over 180 candidates and we are into a 7 page ballot. There are only 7 page ballot in Kabul, Nangarhar and Herat.

The ballots are color-coded, blue for Wolesi Jirga and Gold or yellow for the Provincial Council. The Kuchi ballot is also a blue because it is a Wolesi Jirga ballot but for identification purposes we have a purple strike on the top. Even with these ballots which we determined from the focus groups were the best ballots to use with large number candidates. One of the Secretariat's main challenges will be to get voters through polling stations as quickly as possible. Each voter when they come to a polling station they will receive 2 ballots: one for the Provincial Council and one for the Wolesi Jirga. They will go behind perhaps 4 or 5 polling screens. They will mark both ballots and they will come out and cast one ballot in one ballot box for the Provincial Council and second ballot for the Wolesi Jirga in a Wolesi Jirga ballot box.

The formats and the layouts of all 69 different ballots is not decided. We are in the process of printing 40 million copies of the different ballots. We are printing extra ballots because each polling station will have surplus to allow if additional voters arrive.

We are actually printing ballots in Austria and in the UK. These are two of the only print house in the world that could handle such a complicated print job in such short time. We have included a number of security features in to the ballots and we believe that use of two print houses was indeed the only way we could print this number of ballots in this short period of time. Now that the ballots have been printed we are looking at a distribution plan so that we can get them from Kabul out to all provinces.

The materials that we have to transport out to polling stations this year weigh about 10 times what they weighed last year and just to give you an example the 40 million ballots will weigh 1,100 tons. The ballots for one polling station in Kabul weigh over 40kg. To bring the ballot to Afghanistan from the UK and Austria we have to use an Aircraft which will be Antonov 24 which is the second biggest Aircraft in the world. The Antonov will have to make 5 flights over three weeks from Austria. We are bringing the ballots from UK in on Jumbo Jets and these enormous Aircrafts will have to make 15 flights from London to Kabul.

Just to add to transport ballots from Kabul to Herat we will have to make 6 flights with Hercules Transport Aircraft. This is just flights. I haven't mentioned at all the impact this will have on local transport on the backs of donkeys, on other vehicles, but I think speaking on behalf of the Secretariat we are very happy with the final product of the ballot. We believe it is the best ballot that could be produced with a large number of candidates. We are happy with quality and just as importantly we are confident ballots will arrive on time in Kabul so we can distribute them out to all provinces before September the 18.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS:

Question:
Two days ago Qanooni the head of the National Understanding Front in a press conference criticized the recent announcement by JEMB that counting will be done at provincial level and he is still saying that the counting must be done at polling stations level. And at the same time he has accused JEMB that it is allied to the Government and functioning in favor of the government?

JEMBS CHIEF OF OPERATIONS Richard Atwood:
The JEMB decided I think about two weeks ago that the count will be conducted in provisional count centers and they decided for a number of reasons the main reason was the protection of the community vote. We believe that an important mechanism against intimidation of small villages or communities is the secrecy of how that community voted. The way that community voted is kept secret.

A centralized count is not unusual in a post-conflict environment and by counting the ballots at provincial level we will not publish the way each district or each village in that province has voted. I will also say that the count this year is an incredibly complicated process.

Last year there were 18 candidates on the ballot paper. That was relatively small, so the count can be conducted by counting each ballot and putting it into piles of 18 and then counting the number of votes for each candidate.

This year the ballots are much larger and they have a number of different pages. Clearly the amount of space in some of the polling stations simply wouldn’t be enough to count these ballots. We also believe that we will have a much control over the accuracy of the count in provincial center the provincial count centre will be open to observers and candidates’ agents.

JEMB COMMISSIONER Abdul Hakim Murad:

I think the JEMB is independent. The Afghan Electoral Commission has been working in order to establish the democracy and democratic standards in Afghanistan. We seek everybody’s idea in this regard and we respect everybody’s idea I think this is Mr. Qanooni’s personal idea. The IEC has been established according to the Constitution of Afghanistan and it is acting in according to the articles documented in the Constitution of Afghanistan and also the Electoral law.

Question:
Last year with 18 presidential candidates the election was postponed for some reasons. So now this year that you have got large number of candidates, for example in Kabul 400, do you think you will be able to finish or conduct successfully the election in one day with such a high number of candidates?

JEMBS CHIEF OF OPERATIONS Richard Atwood:

There is no doubt that one of our main challenges this year is the ballot production. The ballots are all in the printers and we expect to have them over the coming weeks. Where we have very large ballots the 7 page booklets we have increased the number of polling stations. So that there are less voters per polling station and we expect them all to go through on one day. We have also increased the number of polling screens so that more people can mark the ballot at the same time. We don’t expect to go to a second (polling) day. I would also like to say that this is Afghanistan’s second election, and although the ballots are more complicated we believe that in general voters are more familiar with the process. As Commissioner Murad said there won’t be an extension past September 18.

Question:
Do you think all the voters will be secure on the election day?

JEMBS CHIEF OF OPERATIONS Richard Atwood:

The responsibility for security for this year’s election lies with the Government of Afghanistan. The JEMB Secretariat’s Security department is in constant liaison with the Government of Afghanistan and its international partners; however we are confident that the security environment on Election Day will be conducive to conduct polling.
**Question:**
What is the guarantee for the ballot boxes' transportation from the polling station to the counting centers, so don’t you think that there will be possibilities of fraud while transporting ballots from polling stations to counting centers?

**JEMBS CHIEF OF OPERATIONS Richard Atwood:**
It was a concern also raised by some of the political parties, there are a number of mechanisms that we are putting into place to ensure that the transport of ballots from polling centers to counting centres is as transparent as possible. Firstly this year we are using metal seals rather than plastic seals so we don’t expect any of them to break on the way.

We are using 5 metal seals on each of the ballot boxes. I think equally importantly the Secretariat is now looking at some sort of procedure by which one observer from each centre could accompany the ballot boxes between polling centers and count centres. We are looking at a procedure by which wherever possible we will provide to one person an observer or a candidate agent from each polling center to the count centre.

**Question:**
Now that the civic education is done, what is the main phase of the election process?

**JEMBS CHIEF OF OPERATIONS Richard Atwood:**
I should first clarify that the civic education is ongoing and will be ongoing till Election Day. In fact civic education activities will increase as we get closer to the Election Day. The main deadline now for us is the Election Day and our main challenge before Election Day is to get materials together and to make sure that every polling station is equipped with polling materials. We are making 140 thousand new ballot boxes because we can’t use last year’s ballot boxes for this year.

Our main challenge will be distributing the ballots, the ballot boxes, the polling screens, the furniture and the polling kits around the country so that everything is ready for the Election Day.