



## **MEDIA COMMISSION INTERIM REPORT**

**19 July – 8 September 2005**

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I. Executive Summary .....	3
II. The Media Commission .....	3
III. Media Monitoring.....	3
IV. Complaints .....	4
V. The Sponsored Advertisement Program .....	4
VI. Media Environment.....	5
VII. Annex 1: Second Media Monitoring Report (17 - 30 August 2005)	
VIII. Annex 2: Sponsored Advertisement Program Daily Report 8 September	

## **I. Executive Summary**

Established by the JEMB in accordance with Article 51 of the Electoral Law, the independent Media Commission has been tasked with monitoring media coverage of the electoral campaign; addressing complaints alleging breaches of fair reporting and media coverage or other violations of the Mass Media Code of Conduct; and implementing and overseeing a Sponsored Advertisement Program. This interim report provides an overview of the role and activities of the Media Commission from its establishment on 19 July until 08 September 2005.

The extensive media monitoring operation currently underway throughout Afghanistan employs a total of 68 monitors to follow all mass media coverage of the election on a daily basis. Monitors track the equity of coverage and compliance with the Mass Media Code of Conduct in all reporting and advertising. The findings of the monitoring operation are published regularly in detailed reports.

The fact that the number of media-related complaints submitted is relatively low may be attributed to the general comprehension of the Code of Conduct. It may also be a result of the success of the Sponsored Advertisement Program, which, as of 8 September, has served over 2,312 candidates. The accomplishments of this program are highlighted against the backdrop of a national media that is re-emerging after a longer period of conflict and censorship.

## **II. The Media Commission**

The Media Commission was established on 19 July in accordance with the provisions of Article 51 of the Electoral Law.

The main responsibilities of the Media Commission are:

- to monitor coverage of the electoral campaign to ensure fairness and accuracy in reporting;
- to address complaints alleging breaches of fair reporting and coverage of the political campaign or other violations of the Mass Media Code of Conduct; and
- to ensure that candidates have fair access to the broadcast media.

The Commission also provides information and short-term training to journalists and other media stakeholders on their role and responsibilities in covering the electoral process.

The Media Commission is composed of five members, three national Commissioners and two international Commissioners. The Commission is assisted in its work by a support unit in Kabul, and works closely with the JEMBS field offices to ensure that all necessary information reaches eligible voters in the provinces.

## **III. Media Monitoring**

The Media Commission has established an extensive media monitoring operation throughout Afghanistan to monitor coverage of the electoral process. A total of 68 monitors, including 12 women, were recruited from a range of ethnic communities and participated in a two-week training program in July 2005. Both before and during the campaign period, they have monitored radio, television and newspaper coverage of the election on a daily basis in order to assess equity of access to the media for all candidates, the extent of electoral campaign coverage and adherence of media representatives to the Mass Media Code of Conduct.

Two media monitoring reports have been issued by the Media Commission to date.<sup>1</sup> The first report covered the pre-campaign period of 24 July-16 August. This report concluded that political coverage of candidates and their electoral platforms during that period had been limited. A large part of the election coverage had related to the electoral system and processes, rather than candidates and their campaigns. This tendency had also been noted by the Media Commission in 2004 during the presidential election campaign. On a positive note, the report reinforced the preliminary conclusion that hate speech and incitement to violence was not instigated through the mass media.

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<sup>1</sup> The media monitoring reports and other Media Commission information can be found at [www.jemb.org/media\\_commission/](http://www.jemb.org/media_commission/).

The second monitoring report, covering the first two weeks of the campaign period 17–30 August 2005, indicated a substantial increase in political coverage by and about candidates. This is largely because of the increasing number of candidate advertisements following the commencement of the Sponsored Advertisement Program. Findings also showed that coverage of *Wolesi Jirga* candidates (72 percent) was much higher than that of Provincial Council candidates (28 percent), and that 16 percent of the coverage focused on women.

Based on the results of the first monitoring report, the Media Commission decided to conduct a series of workshops with editors and journalists in all eight of Afghanistan’s regions to encourage them to cover the campaign more vigorously and creatively.

**IV. Complaints**

As of 8 September 2005, the Media Commission had received only three written complaints, two of which had been adjudicated. Several other verbal complaints have been dealt with administratively.

Of the two complaints adjudicated, the first concerned misinformation on the part of a participating broadcaster in the Sponsored Advertisement Program. This was referred to the Electoral Complaints Commission, because it related to JEMBS staff and the JEMB Code of Conduct for Electoral Officials, and was not within the jurisdiction of the Media Commission.

The second was submitted by a candidate regarding confusion between the candidate and the broadcaster about the recording of a sponsored advertisement. In this case, the Media Commission dismissed the complaint since it found the media outlet had acted in accordance with procedures.

The low number of complaints may initially have been due in part to the limited coverage of candidate campaigns. However, the increase in campaign coverage has not led to a significant increase in complaints. This reflects positively on the Media Commission’s efforts to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the Mass Media Code of Conduct, and also on the controlled procedures established by the Media Commission for the Sponsored Advertisement Program.

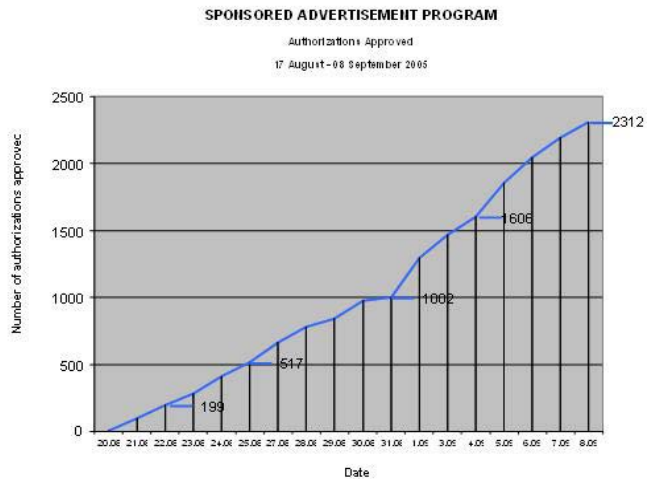
**V. The Sponsored Advertisement Program**

In order to fulfill its role of ensuring that candidates have fair access to the broadcast media, the Media Commission developed the Sponsored Advertisement Program, which provides all candidates with an equal amount of airtime on radio and television during the official campaign period. At the same time, paid advertisements are prohibited outside of the Program by or on behalf of any candidate or political party on radio and televisions during the electoral campaign.

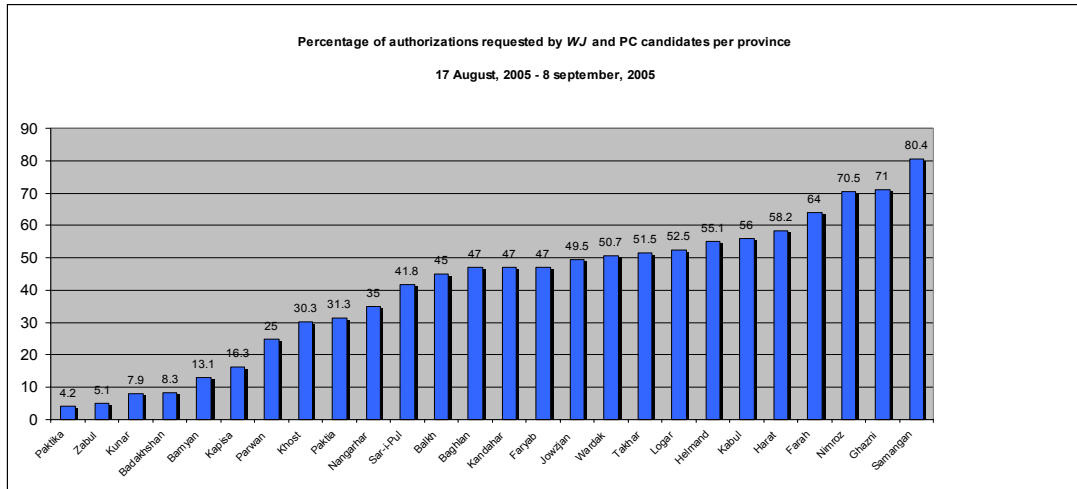
In this way, the Media Commission has ensured that the campaign messages of all candidates are broadcast and that the airwaves and press are not unfairly dominated by a specific group of candidates.

Candidates may apply to have their advertisements broadcast with a broadcaster pre-approved for their province. The Media Commission directly manages the application and approval process and oversees implementation of the Program.

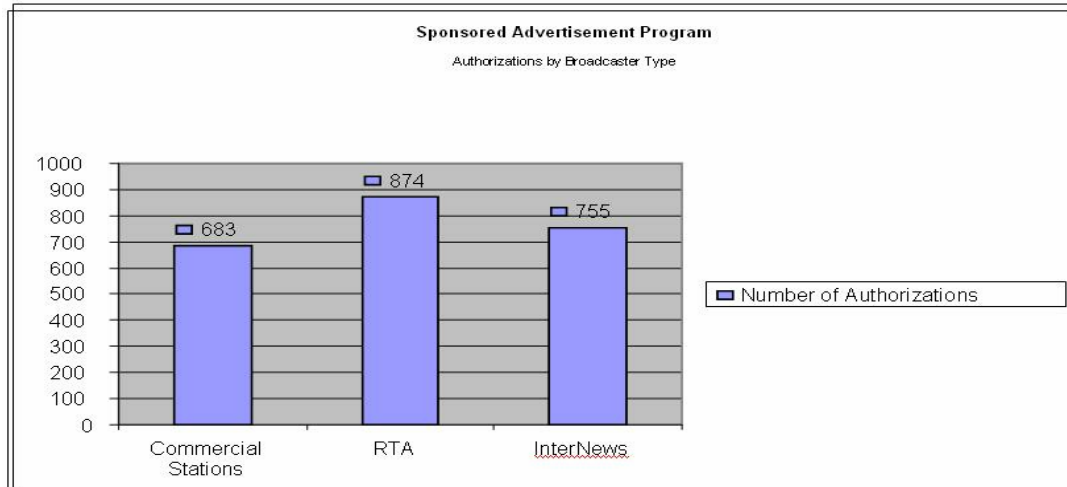
Before the launch of the Sponsored Advertisement Program, representatives of participating media outlets were trained by the Media Commission on their obligations and duties, and briefed on the Program’s administrative procedures.



The Program has engaged a significant number of candidates, which has resulted in a more comprehensive and vigorous election coverage. As of 8 September 2005, the Media Commission has authorized 2,312 *Wolesi Jirga* and Provincial Council candidates throughout Afghanistan to produce and broadcast advertisements. (Please see Annex 2).



The success of the Program is also indicated by the absence of complaints related to its implementation. The Media Commission has achieved this by requesting each participating media outlet to alert the Commission to any language within an advertisement that may violate the provisions of the Media Code of Conduct and other applicable laws before the advertisement is broadcast.



Stations may not refuse to broadcast a candidate's message unless the Media Commission determines there has been a violation. This is proving to be successful in preventing such violations without restricting normal political campaigning.

No violations of the ban on private purchase of radio or TV advertisements by candidates have been reported or recorded by media monitors.

## VI. Media Environment

The Afghan media is being re-established after an extended period of severe media repression. In the years before 2001, television was abolished, pictures were banned from newspapers, and any kind of music and even sport was kept off the radio.

Since that time approximately 300 publications, five 24-hour television stations, and more than 30 new private radio stations have been established. International radio stations including BBC, Radio Azadi, Voice of America, RFI, and DW now broadcast in Afghanistan.

While private broadcasting has flourished, the state broadcaster, RTA, has failed to keep up with this media growth. Provincial authorities retain direct control over much of the local media, and their journalists still feel pressure to answer to national government as well as local figures.

When approached by the Media Commission about loosening the constraints, governors often responded positively. However, official influence is still strong, and the arrests of several journalists and unconfirmed reports of intimidation continue to have a chilling effect on free, professional journalism.

In this environment, the daunting task of covering 5,800 candidates has been tackled with inevitably mixed results. The Sponsored Advertisement Program, with 2,300 candidates approved for broadcast as of 8 September, ushered a broad range of unique opinions to the Afghan airwaves. Public exposure to the candidates has provided a wealth of information that should positively influence the future political development of Afghanistan.

The integration of this diversity of opinion into Afghan political journalism will be a long-term process.

## Annex 2: Sponsored Advertisement Program Daily Report 8 September

Report on authorization process of SAP

Date: 08.09.2005

N	Name	Province	Authorized	In-process	Non-authorized Broadcast	Refused	Total Applications Received
<b>Commercial Stations</b>							
1	Killid	Kabul	75	0		25	
2	Radio Voice of Afghan Women	Kabul	23	0		5	
3	Afghan TV	Kabul	33	2		5	
4	Ayna TV	Samangan	67	0		1	
	Ayna TV	Balkh	81	0		4	
	Ayna TV	Kabul	21	0		5	
	Ayna TV	Faryab	52	0		8	
	Ayna TV	Takhar	32	2		19	
	Ayna TV	Kunduz	92	0		9	
	Ayna TV	Jowzjan	60	2		0	
	Ayna TV	Sar-i-Pul	36	1		0	
5	Tolo	Kabul	108	1		29	
6	Ariana network	Kabul	2	0		5	
7	Arman FM	Kabul	1	0		0	
<b>RTA Stations</b>							
1	RTA Takhar	Takhar	17	1		5	
2	Baghlan TV ( RTA )	Baghlan	87	0		4	
3	Baghlan FM( RTA )	Baghlan	2	0		0	
4	Herat TV ( RTA )	Herat	209	4		4	
5	RTA	Samangan	11	0		4	
6	RTA Kandahar TV	Kandahar	45	0		0	
7	RTA Kandahar Radio	Kandahar	26	0		0	
8	RTA Ghazni TV	Ghazni	62	0		4	
9	RTA Ghazni Radio	Ghazni	6	0		0	
10	RTA Kunar	Kunar	15	0		0	
11	RTA TV	Balkh	32	0		4	
12	RTA TV	Kunduz	33	0		28	
13	RTA TV	Paktia	65	4		0	
14	RTA Radio	Paktia	4	0		0	
15	RTA Radio FM	Faryab	10	0	7	3	
16	RTA Kabul FM	Kabul	3	0		1	
17	RTA Kabul TV	Kabul	66	0		31	
18	RTA TV	Helmand	19	0		1	
19	RTA Radio FM	Helmand	18	0		3	
20	RTA TV	Parwan	17	0		1	
21	RTA TV	Farah	68	0		3	
22	RTA TV	Badakhshan	15	2	24	0	
23	RTA TV	Nimroz	36	0		0	
24	RTA Radio	Nangarhar	5	9		1	
25	RTA Radio	Zabul	3	0		0	
<b>Internews Stations</b>							
1	Radio Zafar	Kabul	8	0	0	2	
2	Radio Isteqlal	Logar	12	0	0	3	
3	Radio Milli Peygham	Logar	51	0	0	2	

4	Spin Ghar	Nangarhar	80	22	0	3	
5	Sloeh Paygham	Khost	65	0	0	0	
6	Sharq	Nangarhar	88	0	0	10	
7	Quyash	Faryab	13	1	0	4	
8	Newe Bahar	Balkh	4	0	10	10	
9	Radio Ghaznawian	Ghazni	43	0	0	2	
10	Azad Afghan Radio	Kandahar	39	0	0	0	
11	Yaw wale ghag	Wardak	68	1	0	0	
12	Shora I Qarabagh	Kabul	37	0	0	6	
13	Radio Paktika ghag	Paktika	7	0	0	0	
14	Zohra	Kunduz	33	0	0	20	
15	Radio Sahar	Herat	5	0	0	1	
16	Radio Bamyan	Bamyan	16	0	0	0	
17	Radio Teraj Mir	Baghlan	16	0	0	3	
18	Radio Rabia Balkhi	Balkh	6	0	0	3	
19	Radio Takharestan	Takhar	65	0	5	16	
20	Radio Sabaoun	Helmand	79	0	0	2	
21	Sada-i-Solh	Parwan	17	0	20	4	
22	Radio Imam Sahib	Kunduz	2	0	0	5	
23	Radio Neda-i-Sobh	Herat	1	0	0	0	
24	Radio Amou	Badakhshan	0	0	38	0	
	<b>Total</b>		<b>2312</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>104</b>	<b>308</b>	<b>2776</b>