



FEFA

بنیاد انتخابات آزاد و عادلانه افغانستان

Free & fair Election Foundation
of Afghanistan

UNEDITED TRANSCRIPT OF REMARKS DELIVERED BY NADER NADERY, FEFA CHAIRPERSON

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9:10 AM, LOBBY ROOM OF THE INTERCONTINENTAL HOTEL, KABUL

Nader Nadery: *In the name of God. Good morning. We are starting late as some of your colleagues {media} informed us that they are on their way here. Just to clarify, the next press conference (EUOEM) is at 10:00 am. Today is the first day of Ramadan, and it can be assumed that they will not start before we finish. We are not going to have an English briefing, but can answer questions in English if there are any. Today is the first day of Ramadan and we want to catch you in the morning when there is ample reserve of energy. For the friends who need translators, I would request those who are translating right now to sit in the middle areas and help out those who will need translations.*

You have already received FEFA's preliminary statement on the Election Day. That statement reflected FEFA's immediate observations and preliminary findings on the environment during the Election Day. Today we will elaborate on our findings about the electoral process in total; about the good and the bad of it, about the administrative issues involved that need attention, procedural and legal issues that require concern, today we will discuss these issues.

Before we dive into the talk about our findings, I wanted to briefly explain our observation methodology. In total FEFA trained 7368 observers. These are all volunteer observers. They are not paid any salary but their transport and food expenses on Election Day and during the period they are at work. From this group, 400 of them have observed the 2009 electoral process since the outset. These long term observers have been with FEFA during the voter registration period, the campaign period, the Election Day {and will remain with FEFA as the remaining part of the process unfolds.} 6968 individuals joined the 400 long term observers for Election Day observation. Around 2454 of the total number of FEFA observers were female.

The {Election Day observation} procedure was designed such that they {FEFA observers} had three reporting forms, each related to the opening, duration, and closing of the polls. Observers documented their findings about the opening, duration and closing of the polls. And during the Election Day, we received—through SMS--reports about the situation as the polls opened and closed. {FEFA observers were trained in reporting via SMS through a pre-designed and coded template.}

What I am sharing with you today is based on the reports FEFA received {from its observers} via SMS and phone calls during the Election Day. These reports are compiled in a database inside our operations rooms, and we have run immediate preliminary analysis on them. The reports we will receive through our checklists will be tallied, analyzed and included in our findings that will be published as part of our final report.

In some parts of the country, the security situation during the Election Day dictated that we move our observers. On very rare occasions, they could not continue their work. Exact numbers of these situations will be included in our final report.

It is very timely for me to thank and appreciate the courageous commitment of our observers around the country despite the challenging environment. It was not easy for them. On some occasions they were intimidated. On other occasions, such as in Khan-Abad district of Kunduz province and Charkh district of Logar province, they were caught inside the election site when surrounded and attacked. There were also instances of intimidation in places such as Qandahar. In Khost, our observer's door was blown up by a grenade. These are instances that explain how despite the challenges, FEFA observers have acted with great courage. It is also most appropriate to take a moment and share the pain of {families} that lost their loved ones during the Election Day. And we should go beyond just sharing their pain. We should seek to eternalize their memories as those who sacrificed for this process {building a democratic Afghanistan.}

The first set of observations to be shared with you today relate to the administrative and technical aspects of the elections; about what elements, in FEFA's view, were good and in which areas did we observe problems. First, let me congratulate the Independent Elections Commission (IEC) for successfully managing to set up polling stations and supplying material in most parts of the country, in accordance with the expectations and as was possible in light of logistic and administrative considerations. But FEFA observers also observed that around 1500 polling stations around the country opened late, with an {average} delay of about one hour.

Around 650 planned female polling stations {did not have female staff}¹, and this had a considerable impact on female voter participation. For example, our observers reported that in Urozgan out of some 36 planned female stations only 6 of them opened. Another example that we shared during our observations of the prior phases such as the voter registration, many people received multiple voter registration cards. FEFA had also observed under-age registration. My FEFA colleagues have already shared those observations with you. Unfortunately, the issue of the indelible ink and malfunctioning punches surfaced. There has been a lot of reporting about this. Our concerns is that they {indelible ink and the punch} were the guard in the mechanism in place to deter multiple voting, which became a problem in the early hours. Fortunately, the IEC acted promptly to correct this situation, and we want to inform you that our observations show that the problem with the ink and the punches did not have any considerable negative impact on the process.

¹ In the conference it was stated that "around 650 female polling stations did not open." This was an error in data analysis that stands corrected as "around 650 planned female polling stations did not female staff."

One of the other things we observed in the workings of the IEC is the lack of an internal control and monitoring unit that evaluates the performance of IEC staff; who's task would have included observation of the activities and performances of local IEC staff around the country and reporting on it to the IEC headquarters if there were problems. Unfortunately, this internal observation control mechanism did not exist.

Another important matter you all in media have talked about extensively—not during Election Day but after it—is that of security. Our observations and analysis indicate that the Taliban deployed a systematic, extensive and coordinated effort to disrupt the process between 6:30-9:00 am through barrage of rockets in different parts of the country. This trend was observed as an organized effort between 6:30-9:00 am. Also, these attacks continued in a disconnected fashion during the day. You have also reported on some systematic attacks on voting centers in some parts of the country. We observed two impacts of these security incidents, one is that the nature of public participation in an extensive way in the process was impacted, and the second impact was that these attacks—specially the rockets and grenade attacks on the polling centers—led to closure, suspension or delays in the working hours of some of these polling centers.

It is worth mentioning that in some parts of the country, soon as attacks were stopped, the Afghan people sought to reopen polling centers and went to vote. This in itself is a marked indication of the peoples' commitment to the process and this ought to be noticed. Some of the provinces impacted by the attacks include Kunduz, Baghlan, some cases in Kabul where centers were closed and opened again, Zabul, Logar, Ghazni, Wardak and Kandahar. In these places, unfortunately, polling centers were impacted extensively and/or were closed.

When we talk about security issues, it is worth mentioning that security officials have played a key role in reducing the number of suicide attacks in many parts of Afghanistan. Especially in cases where there was a likelihood of higher number of casualties, they have acted very effectively. It is must on us to thank them for their courage. Beside courage, they also exhibited a commitment to the process. What is important to mention is that the electoral process does not end with the end of the Election Day. While praising their (security officials) courage, our expectation is that in the next couple of days they will (secure) the security of those that participated in the voting, and also those that are with the IEC, observers and several others who are part of this process. In this current phase, there is a need for more measures in order to providing them the security they need.

About irregularities, and I know you all are very interested in this part, if we may begin with irregularities that have ties to the security situation. Intimidations are one such element, and not intimidations in the form of direct military attacks, but more the intimidations that you all have also reported on and we have captured in our previous media engagements. These are the intimidations from the Taliban, directed at voters and candidates and in some instances, unfortunately, the Taliban transformed their intimidations into cruel punishments, that our observers were witness to such cruel and illegal punishments by the Taliban, one instance, unfortunately, FEFA observer was witness to cutting of fingers of two voters in Kandahar province. Other intimidations, intimidations that FEFA observers recorded during the day, relate to direct intimidation by Commanders and/or influential candidates at the local

level for provincial council, these have been reported very rarely {by the media}, these people—the provincial council candidates—in several parts of the country, have used extensive intimidation of voters. In some instances, these provincial council candidates have deployed their people around polling centers and directly and indirectly forced people to vote only and only for them. Or the candidates themselves were present and asked people to vote for them. The details of centers where such activity was observed will be shared with the Electoral Complaints Commission (ECC). And they can address the issues specifically.

In some parts of the country, the powerful supporters of at least two presidential elections candidates, have also—directly and indirectly—tried to force people into voting for their preferred candidates. FEFA will report these instances to IEC as well so they are addressed properly.

Another widely observed irregularity was that of the impartiality of local IEC staff. This was, unfortunately, observed in many places. These instances are recorded through our checklists and once all are compiled, the findings will be shared, god willing, in the next few days with the ECC.

Some instances reported relate to the violation of established procedures, and these include the early closing of some polling centers and in cases the start of the counting process even during the first hour of the afternoon of the Election Day. This was observed in at least three provinces that include Ningrahar and Takhar and this was also observed in Kunduz, where at least one such instance took place when the polling station was closed at 1:00 pm and counting started.

Another irregularity that FEFA observers reported was that of the continuation of campaigning during the voting period. When we observe the whole process, our standards are determined by the procedure, bylaws and principles that are applicable to the elections. Based on these regulations and procedures, the continuation of campaigns during the Election Day are prohibited and illegal. In many centers our observers noticed Provincial Council candidates and their supporters actively campaigning. In some provinces people were handing out campaign materials such as posters and cards. No effort was made to stop these irregularities. This was either because there was a lack of instruments to do so, or the people involved were the locally influential and powerful. For example, in Daikundi province an IEC staff was actively supporting the candidacy of two of the candidates or in another case the chief of a female polling station was the wife of a local Provincial Council candidate.

Our observers also reported cases of proxy voting, as a trend in the irregularities during this day. It was observed in many forms, including men voting for women, one person voting for another, one person voting for a group of men and women. This irregularity was spread all over, and instances of it were seen in at least Kabul, Paktia, Ghor, Kunduz, Laghman, Paktika, Kandahar, Logar, Kapisa and Balkh. And this is a major violation of the electoral law and procedures. For example, one of the Provincial Council candidates himself would come to the polling station, collect peoples' cards, mark them himself and put them in the boxes. FEFA intends to communicate the details of this case to the ECC. At the local level, multiple voting instances have been observed. This is owed to the irregularities of the voter registration process, especially the problem of some people receiving more than one voter registration card. This was observed specially in relation to the ink, and some of you already know that some people were

innovative to the point that used bleach for cleaning the ink, and we even received reports that on one occasion people tried and managed to wash off the ink with dauogh (a yogurt drink); the assumption was the sour the daough, the better it cleaned the finger! But this problem did not have a major impact on voting process.

Underage voting was another irregularity that we observed, and we had already reported on during the voter registration period. There were several instances of under-age registration that we reported on. So it was predictable that on the voting day, this will be an issue. It is against the rules and procedures and was observed in Bamiyan, Ghazni, Laghman, Ningrahar, Ghor, and Nuristan, amongst others. As we mentioned earlier, the number of IEC female staff was very low around the country. And this had a direct impact on the female participation. On some occasions, when female voters approached the station and noticed there was no female polling staff, they left without voting. In some instances, even FEFA's female observers had to leave the stations because men were operating female voting stations.

The final issue is that of fraud, and it is worth mentioning that fraud is different than violations or irregularities in the legal context. FEFA has reports about ballot box stuffing, and because of the sensitivity of this issue and the places in which it has happened, all the information about this will be presented to the ECC. Another irregularity reported is in the way the IEC's local staff operated: some staffers abused the prevalent illiteracy in Afghanistan and lead voters to vote for the IEC staff's preferred candidates. This is very serious and should be investigated. Another instance is that of unauthorized personnel, or representatives of Presidential and Provincial Council candidates in different parts of the country, forcefully evacuated IEC staff and then they themselves started using the ballot papers.

Despite all these issues, what is most important for us as a message is that the peoples' participation in the elections despite a series of challenges is a very positive step forward. This shows that the people of Afghanistan have the commitment and interest to progress towards an institutionalized democratic system. But we also need to flag this issue that in the institutions in charge of this process, there are issues and they ought to be addressed. And therefore our suggestion as a civil society organization, an observer organization is that noticing the situation in the country, all efforts must be made to {solve the issues through} the processes and mechanism in place.

This {the electoral} process isn't over yet. Now it is in a sensitive phase which is that of the counting and verification of the votes. And it is must to let the mechanism in place that are in place to address all the irregularities that have been observed, to address them. So the transparency and acceptability of the elections is ensured, and credibility is maintained, this is key to the credibility of the elections. For this purpose, the established mechanisms such as the IEC and others should follow up on the issues raised here. So the people Afghanistan can accept the elections, as the standards would dictate, to be acceptable and credible. And I will stop here, some friends have requested that I present a summary of this in English as some didn't have access to a translator...

The end.