

# AFGHANISTAN PROGRAM PROFILE



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## History of Partnership

The House Democracy Assistance Commission approved a legislative strengthening partnership with Afghanistan in March 2006. The program has specifically focused on strengthening the bicameral Afghan National Assembly in the areas of research services, committee operations, budgeting, and oversight of the armed services and the executive branch.

Afghanistan has been among the Commission's most active and constructive partners. The Commission has sent several congressional delegations to Afghanistan since 2006, and has organized training programs in the U.S. for visiting Afghan MPs and their parliamentary staff. The Commission has also provided \$150,000 for a library project in Afghanistan to enhance the parliament's capacity for relevant research and analysis.

## Accomplishments

- Support for the parliamentary library, including furnishings and materials for the Afghan Parliamentary Institute.
- Ongoing Member-to-Member consultations with Afghan committee leadership in Kabul and Washington on the role of committees in oversight.
- Defense oversight seminars for Afghan committees on national defense and internal security.
- Improved budget scrutiny and oversight.
- Support for women MPs.

## Background

Following the removal of the Taliban from power in 2001, an interim Afghan government was established under the leadership of President Hamid Karzai. In 2003, 503 delegates from across the country gathered to ratify a new constitution establishing the National Assembly of Afghanistan. The Wolesi Jirga is the lower house of the Afghan parliament, and consists of 250 delegates who are directly elected for a five-year term based on a system of proportional representation. It is responsible for drafting and approving all legislation, which in turn must be approved by the Meshrano Jirga, the upper house. Parliamentary elections were last held in September 2010.

## Congressional Delegations

In June 2012, Representative David Dreier led a delegation of three Members of Congress to Kabul to renew the commission's partnership with the Afghan National Assembly. The delegation met with speakers of the Wolesi Jirga and the Meshrano Jirga for the first time since both men were elected in 2010. They also met President Hamid Karzai, opposition leader Dr. Abdullah Abdullah, counterparts in the National Assembly, and U.S. military leaders. The delegation reiterated the United States' commitment to a vibrant democracy in Afghanistan. In particular, they discussed the U.S.-Afghan

Strategic Partnership Agreement, the 2014 transition from ISAF to Afghan National Army leadership in the security realm, and the political transition that will take place after Mr. Karzai finishes his final term in 2015.

A delegation of six Members of Congress, led by Representative David Price, traveled to Afghanistan in November 2009 for a two-day series of meetings and working groups with counterparts in the Wolesi Jirga. The program included roundtable discussions with the Defense and Internal Security committees, a forum on constituent outreach and representation, and breakout sessions with members of various committees. The delegation emphasized the importance of forming an effective and inclusive government and the need to take concrete steps to address corruption. The delegation met with a primary leader of the opposition, Dr. Abdullah Abdullah, to get his perspective on Afghani politics and also held extensive discussions with senior U.S. civilian military leadership.

In May 2008, Representative Adam Schiff led a delegation of three Members of Congress to Kabul which focused on the importance of oversight and committee operations. The delegation met with counterparts from the Wolesi Jirga, Afghan President Hamid Karzai, and U.S. military leaders. The delegation specifically focused on MPs from five committees and allowed U.S. representatives to share their experiences with the new legislators, focusing on government oversight. The delegation also attended a ribbon-cutting ceremony to dedicate the Afghan Parliamentary Institute, an annex to the main parliament building funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and supported by the Commission.

Representative David Dreier led a delegation of four Members of Congress to Afghanistan on behalf of the Commission in November 2006. The delegation stressed the importance of legislative oversight over the government to their counterparts from the Wolesi Jirga. Improving committee operations was also a major point of discussion. During the visit, Representative Dreier signed a Memorandum of Understanding regarding the Commission's intent to help support improvements to the parliamentary library.

### **MP Seminars**

In November 2011, ten Members of the Meshrano and Wolesi Jirga who serve on their respective defense oversight committees traveled to Washington for a week-long seminar on defense oversight hosted jointly by the House Democracy Partnership and the Near East South Asia (NESAS) Center for Strategic Studies at the National Defense University. The focus on the seminar was on civilian oversight of the military. The Afghan delegation met with their counterparts on the House Armed Services Committee, witnessed a hearing on Afghanistan by the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, and met with numerous Members of Congress, Pentagon officials, and representatives of both the State Department and the U.S. Agency for International Development.

In October 2011, two Members of the Meshrano Jirga joined a three-country program in Washington focused on committee operations, particularly the importance of public hearings and legislative oversight of the executive. The Afghan MPs met with over a dozen Members of the U.S. House of Representatives, the Congressional Research Service, the Congressional Budget Office, and support staff to discuss the operation of committees in the U.S. system and how it may be applied to circumstances in Afghanistan.

In September 2009, the Commission arranged for 20 Afghan MPs to travel to Washington for a training program on budgetary oversight. The Afghan MPs met with representatives of the Office of

Management and Budget, the Department of Treasury, the Department of State, the U.S. Agency for International Development, the House Budget Committee, and the Congressional Research Service.

Members of the Wolesi Jirga joined members of three other partner legislatures for a week-long training program on committee operations in September 2008. The Congressional Research Service began the program with an overview of Congress and its committee structure. Committee staff and former Members of Congress spoke to participants about committee operations, including the role of staff in organizing public hearings. Members of Congress also spoke to participants and shared their personal experiences of using committee work to advance their legislative and oversight priorities.

The Commission organized a study tour in Washington, D.C. for six Members of the Afghan Parliament on defense oversight in June 2008. In collaboration with the NESAC Center, the program offered the visiting MPs an opportunity to interact with Members of Congress who work on defense oversight issues and defense appropriations. MPs also met with officials from the Departments of State, Defense, Justice and Homeland Security, as well as with the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

In June 2007, five Afghan MPs from committees on national defense and security traveled to the United States for their first seminar on defense oversight. In cooperation with the NESAC Center, the seminar allowed MPs to observe the relationship between the U.S. Congress and the armed forces, with the aim of encouraging Afghan civilian control of their military.

The Commission hosted an 11-member delegation from the Wolesi Jirga for a one-week program in August 2006. The group visited the suburban Chicago district of Representative Mark Kirk where they learned about constituent service and local-federal relations. In Washington, the MPs participated in personalized programs depending on their parliamentary responsibilities. The chairmen of the defense and internal security committee discussed defense oversight with Undersecretary of Defense for Policy Eric Edelman. The internal security chairman also met with the Drug Enforcement Agency to discuss counter-narcotics efforts.

### **Staff Seminars**

In June 2010, two staff members of the Afghan Wolesi Jirga traveled to Warsaw, Poland to attend the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Frost-Solomon Commission, which was the predecessor to the House Democracy Assistance Commission. They were joined by 22 staff members from 11 partnership countries, along with MPs and research staff from former partners of the Frost-Solomon Commission. While they were in Warsaw, current and former staff of the Congressional Research Service worked with the Afghan staff to help them further develop their parliamentary research service through workshops, peer-to-peer discussions, and open forums. Speakers underlined the importance of reliable, impartial, timely, and accurate research to the work of democratic legislatures. They also shared tips on how to engage legislators and help them see the value of research, which was a concern shared by a number of participants.

The Commission arranged for staff of the Afghan parliament to travel to Nairobi, Kenya, for a weeklong budget seminar in November 2009. The seminar presented the opportunity for the Afghans to learn from U.S. and Kenyan counterparts the importance of an independent budget review and oversight process. The program included hands-on workshops and presentations on budgetary modeling, macroeconomic forecasting, and the role of civil society organizations in complementing the legislative oversight function of a parliament.

Staff from the Afghan parliament have also participated in Legislative Staff Institutes organized by the Commission since 2007. In December 2012, a staff member from the Wolesi Jirga participated in a staff institute focused on committee operations. The seminar, which included participants from 12 HDP partner countries, was focused on developing the capacity of legislative committee staff and expanding the use of public hearings and committee oversight. The delegates met with representatives from the Congressional Budget Office (CBO), the Congressional Research Service (CRS), and former Members of the U.S. House of Representatives. Sessions were held on coordination between different committees, developing a committee agenda, nominations and confirmations, coordination with the executive branch, utilizing press to advance committee agendas, and legislative drafting.

In January 2012, two staff members participated in a training seminar on legislative research and analysis. They were joined by colleagues from 12 other HDP partner countries. The parliamentary staff institute included presentations and discussions with Members of Congress and top officials from the Congressional Research Service (CRS). Current and former CRS staff provided the participants an overview of basic legislative research and analysis techniques including identifying sources of information, basic policy analysis, developing alternatives for the legislature, and conducting impact analysis.

In December 2010, Afghan staff took part in a staff institute focused on committee operations, where they held meetings with the Congressional Research Service, staff from several House committees, and the Chairman and Ranking Member of the Commission. In addition, committee staff from the Republic of Macedonia shared their experience in developing procedures to begin using oversight hearings as an element of the work of their parliamentary committees.

In November 2009, Afghan parliamentary staff participated in a staff institute centered on the third annual World E-Parliament Conference, which specifically addressed the manner in which information and communications technology can help improve legislative representation, transparency, accountability, openness, and effectiveness.

Afghan parliamentary staff joined 28 parliamentary staffers from 10 partnership countries in Washington in December 2008 for a staff institute focused on strengthening committee operations. Participants gained an understanding of committee operations in the U.S. Congress and explored topics such as staff roles and responsibilities, legislative analysis, drafting and research, legislative-executive relations, and committee-press relations.

A staff institute in October 2008 centered on congressional oversight and budgeting again included staff from the Afghan parliament. Participants were given an overview of the budget process in the U.S. and the structure, organization, and services provided by the Congressional Budget Office. The program dealt with transparency, revenue estimation, and key budgetary policy issues such as health, defense, agriculture, infrastructure, and education.

Afghan parliamentary staff were present for the inaugural staff institute in December 2007. The Institute offered a two-track program, one for senior parliamentary administrators and the other on research and analysis services for the legislature. The program included a three-day overview of the U.S. Congress, a one-day visit to the Maryland Legislature to learn about state and local government, and a five-day series of meetings and workshops with current and retired Congressional research and administrative staff.

## **Self-Initiated Parliamentary Delegations**

In June 2012, 13 newly elected members of the Wolesi Jirga (lower house of Parliament) visited Washington, D.C. as part of a State Department IVLP program. The principal goal of the delegation's visit to the Capitol was to strengthen the bilateral relationship between the U.S. and Afghanistan and allow Afghan MPs to interface with their American counterparts. HDP staff organized a two-day program for the MPs which included meetings with the Ranking Member and other Members of HDP, the Chairman of the Congressional Afghan Caucus, and staff from the Congressional Budget office and the House Foreign Affairs Committee.

## **Material Assistance**

In 2008, the Commission dedicated a \$150,000 library project in Afghanistan which includes electronic equipment and furnishings for the main library in the parliament building and the Afghan Parliamentary Institute, as well as library materials.