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Sent: Wednesday, August 19, 2009 10:11 AM
To: H
Subject: Fw: U.N. asks Afghanistan to lift election media ban

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To: NEWS-Mahogany; TaskForce-1; NEWS-SCA; NEWS-IO
Cc: SES-O_Shift-II
Sent: Wed Aug 19 09:34:58 2009
Subject: U.N. asks Afghanistan to lift election media ban

U.N. asks Afghanistan to lift election media ban

KABUL, Aug 19 (Reuters) - The United Nations has asked Afghanistan to lift a last-minute ban on media reporting of violence during Thursday's presidential election, saying the Afghan constitution guaranteed a free press. Afghan authorities imposed the ban on Tuesday with two decrees, the first barring journalists from reporting any violence in the country between 6:00 a.m. and 8:00 p.m. (0130-1530 GMT) on polling day. The second ordered journalists to stay away from the scenes of any attacks. The government says the measures are intended to prevent reports of violence from scaring Afghans away from voting. Taliban fighters have vowed to disrupt the election. The United Nations said Afghans had a right to information, and restricting the media could undermine confidence in the poll. "People need access to information, not only on polling day but after polling day. The credibility of these elections is directly linked to the information that they have access to," said Aleem Siddique, spokesman for the U.N. mission in Kabul. "Its unclear to us what if any legal basis there would be for such a directive when Afghanistan's constitution guarantees freedom of expression and freedom of the press. We are making this point to the Afghan authorities," he said on Wednesday. Afghan police have taken a more aggressive attitude towards reporters in recent days. Several journalists were beaten by police at the scene of a suicide car bombing on Tuesday and a siege with gunmen on Wednesday.

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