

RELEASE IN FULL

From: Abedin, Huma <AbedinH@state.gov>
Sent: Thursday, August 20, 2009 7:54 PM
To: H
Subject: Fw: Low turnout seen in Afghan election; 26 killed

From: Gorog, Andrea
To: NEWS-Mahogany; NEWS-SCA; TaskForce-1
Cc: SES-O_Shift-III
Sent: Thu Aug 20 19:53:13 2009
Subject: Low turnout seen in Afghan election; 26 killed

Low turnout seen in Afghan election; 26 killed

KABUL (AP) Millions of Afghans defied threats Thursday to cast ballots in the country's second national elections since Taliban rule, but turnout appeared weaker this time because of continuing violence, fear and disenchantment. In much of the Taliban's southern strongholds, many people did not dare to vote, bolstering the hopes of President Hamid Karzai's chief rival. At least 26 people were killed in election-related violence, fewer than had been feared. Officials began counting millions of ballots as soon as the polls closed at 5 p.m. after a one-hour extension. First preliminary results weren't expected for several days, and some major candidates were already alleging fraud. A top election official, Zekria Barakzai, told The Associated Press that he estimated 40 to 50 percent of the country's 15 million registered voters cast ballots far lower than the 70 percent who voted in the presidential election in 2004.

*Andrea Görög
Watch Officer
Department of State Operations Center
202-647-1512*