

Karzai Increases Power of Anti-Corruption Office in Response to Lack of Commitment Accusations

The government was forced to make a move after foreigners gave serious ultimatums to President Karzai's government for its lack of commitment in tackling administrative corruption and for involvement in corruption of his own relatives. Foreigners required Karzai to take immediate action in this respect. Senior officials of foreign countries had in particular been arguing with Karzai's government about this problem for some time. President Karzai then announced his preparedness to tackle administrative corruption by holding a 3-day conference in Kabul. He called the conference *National Conference for Fighting Corruption and Seeking Methods to Tackle It*. In a critical speech delivered at the start of the conference, President Karzai criticized his administration and described the visits of his officials to Dubai and other countries for leisure beyond the financial means of a minister or director. However, he also said that most corruption takes place in the provision of foreign development assistance and by foreigners. He accused foreigners of having set up a parallel government in Afghanistan. He said that foreigners give money and vehicles to a number of Afghan government officials to exert influence on them. It was at this conference that President Karzai began to defend the Mayor of Kabul, Amanollah Sahebi, who was arrested on the orders of the judicial body of the country. Karzai described Sahebi as someone who enjoys a name and reputation. Even then many people believed that Karzai had no intentions of fighting corruption. They knew that Karzai cannot deny corruption in his own government and is, therefore, admitting it and at the same time criticizing foreigners and their actions to portray administrative corruption in his own government as insignificant compared to corruption in foreign agencies and practices. By defending the Mayor of Kabul, after he was arrested on the orders of the Prosecutor General, Karzai negated the freedom of the judiciary and demonstrated that he thinks he is above the law. However, the fact of the matter was and still is that Karzai lacks the necessary tools and resources and thus the ability to successfully take on such a major task. This is something that the Head of the High Office tasked with the monitoring of implementation of the anti-corruption strategy, Mr. (b)(6), says. He has said that the President is closing the doors of this office if he is not giving it executive powers. This office, which was founded last year, had only two members of staff for four months. Mr. (b)(6) also spoke about the influence of powerful elements in matters related to administrative corruption as well as about the weakness of the laws. It is obvious that by powerful elements he meant persons with government power and within the government. These elements within the government will neutralize every resolve and prevent it from materializing into action. Additionally, President Karzai has increased the powers of the High Office of Oversight for implementation of anti-corruption strategy to overcome the increasing corruption in the government departments. Under the new arrangements, the officials of the department assigned to keep vigil on corruption would be working as attorneys. Before this, the body was only overseeing the situation but was not authorized to take action. A statement from the Presidential Office said that the authority of the anti-corruption department was increased under a presidential decree. The statement said that the officials of the department were authorized to work on the lines of attorneys and initiate action against any person found involved in corruption. The department has been asked to establish a committee within three months which will be overseeing the whole situation and report to the office. The committee will cooperate with the department officials and would keep a vigil on the international NGO's and other government departments regarding corrupt practices. Under the new instructions, the department officials would have the authority to collect information about the wealth of government officials and know their sources of income. Anyone found involved in concealing his wealth would be presented before the office of the attorney general for further action. Source: (b)(2)