

Afghanistan Declared Islamic Republic
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TEHRAN, Jan. 27 (Mehr News Agency) -- On Monday the new Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan came into effect after it was signed by Afghan President Hamid Karzai.

A new Islamic republic has been established. The fact that Afghans chose the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan as the official name of their country is highly significant.

Now there are three Islamic republics in the region: the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, and the Islamic Republic of Iran. Each has a different interpretation of what an Islamic republic should be, and this is a positive development.

According to most Islamic scholars, the ideal Islamic state will only be established by Imam Mahdi (peace be upon him) after he appears. Therefore, it is necessary to have diverse views on the Islamic political system before that great event. Through diversity a greater consensus can emerge.

The delegates attending the Loya Jirga (Afghan grand assembly) earlier this month to draft the new Afghan Constitution had some difficulties in determining what kind of system to establish for the country, but finally some compromises were reached.

Islamists wanted the Constitution to be based on Shar'ia (Islamic law), whereas moderates and secularists wanted it to be based on secular civil law. Finally, it was decided that Afghanistan should have a system of civil law which would be in line with Islam.

Article 3 of the Afghan Constitution states: "In Afghanistan, no law can be contrary to the sacred religion of Islam and the values of this Constitution."

The willingness of Loya Jirga delegates to compromise illustrated their concern for the future of Afghanistan.

Islam is the official religion but freedom of religion is also enshrined in the law.

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Article 2 of the Constitution states: "The religion of Afghanistan is the sacred religion of Islam. Followers of other religions are free to perform their religious ceremonies within the limits of the provisions of law."

Afghan women are given equal rights with men in the Constitution and are guaranteed representation in the lower house of parliament, called the Wolesi Jirga (the House of the People), by Article 83 of the Constitution which states that "at least one female delegate should be elected from each province."

The Tajiks initially wanted a parliamentary system but agreed to a presidential system in the end. All ethnic groups are also declared equal by the Constitution.

Afghans have chosen an Islamic system and Westerners should not complain about this. It is very likely that Iraqis will also choose an Islamic system and name their country an Islamic republic when they write their constitution.

Every nation interprets democracy according to its own cultural norms. Western democracy is not the only form of democracy. Westerners must come to terms with this fact.

Afghans have experienced over two decades of war, famine, and instability. Everyone should support them in their efforts to build an Islamic democracy.

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