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## Anger as Karzai opens parliament

**MPs who lost in disputed Afghanistan vote condemn president's decision not to allow more time for fraud investigation**

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Hamid Karzai, Afghan president has inaugurated the lower house of parliament amidst a sit-in staged by about 150 of the losing parliamentarians, at the presidential palace.

They were protesting over Karzai's decision to open parliament on Wednesday, without waiting for a verdict from a special tribunal investigating allegations of electoral fraud.

Al Jazeera's Afghanistan correspondent, Sue Turton reported from Kabul that the president put out a statement [on Wednesday] saying "he had wanted to carry on postponing the inauguration but that foreign hands had pushed him into going ahead with it.

"He said he was warned that if he failed to turn up they would inaugurate parliament without him and that he thought it would end in political crisis [if he did not go ahead].

"To save the country from foreign interference and crisis we decided to meet with the winning candidates and make them acknowledge that after the inauguration of the parliament, they need to accept the ruling of the ... court," his statement said.

Daud Sultanzai, a former member of parliament, accused foreign embassies and the UN of pulling the strings of the Afghan government.

"Are we living in an Afghanistan that belongs to the Afghan people or to the [UN] and foreign embassies?" he said.

Staffan Di Mistura, head of United Nations in Afghanistan told Al Jazeera, "Not only I but many Afghans and the whole international community were feeling that it was high time to have a parliament....the elections took place four months ago...the parliament needs to be there.

"The separation between judiciary and the legislative can work in this country."

Karzai said that winning MPs had given him a written acceptance that they will acknowledge the decisions of the court.

However, victorious MPs said Karzai's tribunal is unlawful and regular Afghan courts, where MPs may have immunity, must handle outstanding claims of election irregularities.

Twenty-four early winners were disqualified, a quarter of the five million ballots cast thrown out, and there were fewer wins than expected for the majority ethnic Pashtuns in the disputed vote four months ago.

### **'Foreign interference'**

Our correspondent reported that in his speech, Karzai talked about "how people had claimed his own presidential elections two years ago was illegitimate and he compared it to people claiming this parliamentary election also being illegitimate.

"He said these were people trying to kill Afghanistan's young democracy and the Afghan reaction should be to become more nationalistic, to do things for themselves in future instead of letting foreigners take the lead."

Karzai also expressed his displeasure with the West in his speech, saying "foreign interference" had been a "serious problem".

But UN's Mistura said that, "The implication (of president's remarks) was that we (Afghans) still need foreign presence but we want increasingly to take over our future.

"And this is exactly what the international community wants and that is why 'transition' has become the key word of this year."