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Afghan Elders Want US Troops in Afghan Courts

Nov 23, 2013

US soldiers charged with crimes in Afghanistan should be tried in that country, in the "presence of the hurt person or his family," according to a group of Afghan tribal elders and local strongmen participating in a grand assembly, or Loya Jirga, on Saturday.

"We have so far worked on 21 articles out of 26 ones of the draft and have brought changes on some articles, including the trial of the criminal American soldiers inside Afghanistan in front of the hurt person or his family," said Musa Akbarzada, a delegate from Ghazni province.

"This is clear: that the US soldiers who commit crimes are not tried under Afghanistan judicial law. But we want them to be tried inside Afghanistan," he said.

But the stance could prove a stumbling block. US officials have said that if there is no immunity from Afghan law for US soldiers, there will not be a deal.

Akbarzada said the delegates also brought some word changes on a number of the articles.

About 2,500 people have gathered in Kabul to accept or reject the bilateral security agreement with the United States. Local media outlets reported that majority of the jirga participants had approved legal immunity for US soldiers.

Washington is pushing Kabul to sign the pact soon after its approval in the jirga, which is expected to end Sunday. But Afghan officials say it would be signed only after the presidential election in April.

"What the US officials say is their viewpoint, but we do not want to hurry in signing the agreement. We prefer to sign it next year after the presidential election," said an Afghan official, asking not to be named.