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AFP

Hundreds of Afghans slam UN in vote row

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Up to 700 Afghans marched through Kabul on Tuesday to protest against a decision by the country's election commission to throw nine lawmakers out of parliament in a dispute over vote fraud.

The protestors chanted anti-UN slogans and accused the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) of interfering in the process as dozens of riot police lined the streets, an AFP reporter said.

"Death to UNAMA which supported this evil process," and "Death to those who oppose democracy," the crowd shouted as it marched close to the presidential palace and the main UN compound.

UNAMA welcomed Sunday's decision by the Independent Election Commission (IEC) to dismiss the nine lawmakers, saying a "long institutional impasse" had come to an end following last September's parliamentary election.

"The real work must now begin," it added, calling on Afghan politicians and officials to work for "peace, progress and prosperity" in their country.

The IEC was handed authority by President Hamid Karzai to make the final ruling in the nearly year-long row over ballot stuffing.

But the issue is highly controversial in Afghanistan and has prompted a string of angry protests on the streets of Kabul by supporters of rival politicians in recent months.

In June, a special election tribunal backed by Karzai ruled that 62 lawmakers, a quarter of the lower house of parliament, should be expelled. However, the IEC's final ruling fell well short of that figure.

Dozens of riot police officers with shields lined the route of Tuesday's protest although the demonstration ended peacefully, the AFP reporter said.

The organisers of the demonstration threatened to block roads and hold protests across Afghanistan unless more lawmakers were reinstated.

Daud Sultanzoi, one of the most prominent losing candidates, warned UNAMA that it should not go against the special election tribunal's ruling "or your hands will be burned".

"If they do not heed our demands, we will stage large demonstrations across the country, we will block the highways," he added.