RASED for Parliamentary Monitoring Program
20th Weekly Report on the Performance of the 17th Jordanian Parliament during its 2nd Ordinary Session
March 21, 2015

• RASED applauds the parliament's decision to discuss the Audit Bureau's annual report.

• RASED notes that the Parliament's recent decision to apply disciplinary provisions to an MP for his behavior during a sitting is unprecedented during this parliamentary session.

This saw an unprecedented event in the history of the 17th Parliament when a joint parliamentary committee (comprised Legal and the Behavior and Ethics Committees) sat and discussed a request submitted by Speaker of the House Eng. Atef Al Tarawneh to investigate with MP Moataz Abu Rumman about words spoken by the MP during last Tuesday's session. The request, signed by a number of MPs, asked the joint committee to open an investigation against the MP. The committee, citing Articles 119 and 120 of the House's Internal Bylaws, recommended barring MP Abu Rumman from 3 successive sittings of the House and from participating in parliamentary delegations, membership in the permanent office, and receiving his financial entitlements during this period. There was one MP in opposition this decision, Ali Al Khalaylah, who announced that he would announce his opposition before the entire House.

This decision is the first of its kind during the 17th Parliament. The Parliament has frozen the membership of one MP (Qusai al Dimisi) and recommended the dismissal of another member (Talal al Sharif), but it has never decided to bar an MP from attending a session because of his behavior.

During the week, a joint Legal and Administrative Committee of the House received the Draft Municipalities Law and Decentralization Law. The joint committee is expected to hold a meeting at the beginning of next week to choose a chair, a rapporteur, and an action plan to discuss the two draft laws.

RASED applauds the announcement of the Finance Committee's decision to begin discussion of the Audit Bureau's recent annual report, which represents a significant step toward fulfilling the House's financial oversight role. This step is especially important given that the House has a backlog of items yet to consider, including 5 annual Audit Bureau reports from 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, and 2013, and a draft of the amended Audit Bureau Law.

During the week, the House worked in its oversight role by looking into the interpellation of MP Mahmoud Al Kharabsheh about the Jordanian nuclear energy project. The House devoted its weekly oversight session to working with this investigation according to the internal bylaws and the parliamentary norms and traditions. It is expected that the House will hold an oversight session at the beginning of the 21st week to vote on suggestions presented by MPs about the interpellation.

The House decided to hold public hearings for gathering information about two topics: the deterioration of services in Amman Municipality and the crisis of the printed press.

The work of the committees last week was characterized by the holding of closed meetings. Most notably the legal committee held two closed meetings, the first to discuss requests to lift immunity from a number of MPs, and the second was a joint meeting with the Behavior and Ethics committee to review the issue of MP Moataz Abu Rumman. In addition, a newly created Commission of Inquiry on the Energy Portfolio sat to elect its chair and rapporteur.

In a closed meeting the Legal Committee discussed the suggestion to lift the immunity of 6 MPs, and in the meeting the committee recommended to lift the immunity of 3 of the 6. The committee justified its holding a closed meeting citing the sensitive nature of the discussions and the provisions in the bylaws that allow committees to hold closed meetings.

In a closed meeting, the joint Legal and Behavior and Ethics Committee discussed the request of Speaker of the House Eng. Al Tarawneh to investigate MP Moataz Abu Rumman.

The Commission of Inquiry on the Energy Portfolio held a closed meeting in which it chose as its chairman Amjad al Majali and MP Abul Mana'm al 'Awdaat as its reported. It is typical for Commissions of Inquiry to hold closed meetings.

The Economics and Investment Committee discussed the draft law for amending the Specifications and Standards for the Year 2008 sent to it from the Senate, and it decided on a number of provisions. It also discussed Temporary Law No. 67 (2002) on Securities.

The Committee on Education, Development and Culture passed a Draft Law on Protecting the Arabic Language and a Law for an Arabic Language Academy sent to it by the Senate. The Law for Protecting the Arabic Language compels the government to publish state laws, regulations, and treaties in Arabic. The Administrative Committee decided on articles of the Temporary Law No. 81 of 2003 on Using Internet Technology Resources in Government Institutions. The Committee on Energy and Natural Resources discussed an agreement on the settlement with the Jordan Electric Power Company. The Committee on General Services and Transportation listened to notes and suggestions provided to them about the provisions of Temporary Law No. 33 for 2010 on Transportation and Passengers.

The Education and Development Committee discussed a memorandum submitted to it by a group of PhD students from other Arab countries related to deleting the legal provision that compels students to stay 8 months in the country of the university. The committee decided to bring the issue to the Ministry of Higher Education for study and an appropriate decision.

The Committee on Integrity and Transparency had a fact finding meeting about members of the boards of trade unions and about the President of the Society of Registered Accountants. The Committee on Work and Social Development discussed projects at Balqa Applied University in the presence of University President Dr. Nabil Shuwaqfe. The Tourism and Heritage Committee discussed a number of financial obligations to the Libyan Government, as well as issues of the tourism sector in Ajloun Governorate.