

RASED for Parliamentary Monitoring Program 18th Weekly Report on the Performance of the 17th Jordanian Parliament during its 2nd Ordinary Session March 7, 2015

During the 18th week of the 2nd Ordinary Session of the 17th Parliament, RASED observed a significant problem with MPs' oversight questions remaining unanswered after the mandated period for government answers. Throughout this process, RASED observed what can only be described as a clear dysfunction in the work of the Ministry of Political and Parliamentary Affairs. The Ministry is normally responsible for facilitating the questions posed by MPs and ensuring they are answered by the respective ministries, but so far, the 8 day deadline specified by the Parliament's internal bylaws for answering questions has passed with no response by the responsible ministries.

The parliamentary oversight session that was held last Tuesday showed that current government practices have violated norms from past sessions in terms of MP questions and Ministry answers. There has been a notable lack of responsible ministers at questioning sessions that were held. Usually, if ministers or government representatives are absent from question sessions, they apologize; however, this practice does not appear to be in effect during this session.

During the week, MP Mohammed al Riyati announced that he will be appealing to the judicial authorities to open up a legal case against the Speaker of the House Eng. Atef al Tarawneh on the grounds of what happened during the vote on the public budget.

The right to appeal to the judicial system is the right of any citizen regardless of his or her status; however, RASED believes that what happened between the MPs and the Speaker of the Parliament is an internal issue for the Parliament governed by the internal bylaws of the

House related to the conduct of sittings, for example, Articles 115118- of the internal bylaws related to Order and Behavior.

The 18th week of the parliament saw one bloc, al Nahda, publishing a statement about the change that the Prime Minister made to his cabinet. Al Nahda criticized the fact that the Prime Minister did not consult the parliament before the change, indicating that the Prime Minister did not keep his promises and did not seek the input or suggestions of the King that encourage democratic participation in forming the parliamentary governments and asks that decision makers take into account the wishes and aspirations of the Jordanian people.

In an effort to increase participation in decision making, Mubadira Bloc held its second conference lasting two days about public education. The conference took place in the presence of Education Minister Dr. Mohammed Thanibaat, President of the Senate Education Committee H.E. Abdullah Awedaat, Chair of the House Education Committee MP Bissam al Batoush, and a number of experts in the field. The conference aimed to foster a discussion and follow up on the Jordanian Public Education Reform Plan in light of the Ministry of Education's plan for developing all aspects of public education. The conference ended with the announcement of an executive implementation plan for this reform plan.

The Tamkeen Bloc held a discussion session in Aqaba with the mayors of southern municipalities and activists representing civil society organizations in order to facilitate the exchange of views about the decentralization and municipalities laws. They discussed the views of citizens and the mayors about the role of municipalities in the near future, and they came up with a number of suggestions that the bloc could advocate for in its discussions on the laws when they are debated in the Parliament.

RASED believes that these actions strengthen positive engagement between the government, civil society, and local citizens, enhancing the participatory nature of decision making and helping to strengthen the overall representativeness of the democratic system. RASED recommends that other Parliamentary blocs engage in such participatory and community-based work, in addition to enhancing participation in other ways such as opening the electoral system.

RASED noted that the activities of the parliamentary committees during the week were not limited to just oversight and legislative work. Several committees held protocol sessions with visitors from outside Jordan. The Foreign Affairs Committee hosted a delegation from Denmark and held two consultation sessions with the House and the Senate which included the Legal and Women's Committees of the House and the Family Committee in the Senate. There was also a conciliatory meeting in the Committee on Tourism chaired by Speaker al Tarawneh which aimed at promoting agreement among committee members.

RASED noted that a bulk of the meetings of the Parliamentary Committees were held on Sunday and Tuesday, which are the days that the Parliament also holds its sittings. Mondays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays had a much lower number of meetings, and sometimes there were no meetings.

With respect to the case of the heavy load of meetings in this way, RASED noted pressure on the committees and the lack of time in between back to back meetings, affecting MPs attendance at many important committees and leading them to miss crucial events.

This crowding goes against the MPs' responsibility to attend all committee meetings laid out in the parliamentary bylaws, and the right of a member of parliament to be part of two committees at once. Having meetings at the same time or shortly after one another makes this impossible, forcing the MP to favor one committee over another.

RASSED noted that a number of meetings of the MPs lacked quorums, with the exception of the Administrative Committee which ensured that its committee meetings take place with a quorum. The other committees suffer from only three or four-and sometimes fewer-MPs attending meetings.

In the meantime, the Parliamentary Integrity Committee began an initiative to meet with representatives of the different parties to hear their opinions about the draft Political Parties Law, despite the fact that the law hasn't yet been entered into the agenda for the work of the committee and has not yet been specified for discussion.

For the first time in this Parliamentary session, two House Committees held a joint meeting with a Senate Committee. The Family Issues Committee and the Women's Issues Committee of the House met with the Senate Committee on Family Issues and the National Committee for Family Issues in the presence of the Parliamentary Women's Caucus.

The meeting was undertaken in response to a request by the chair and members of the House Women's Committees to discuss the personal status law.

For the first time during this parliamentary session, the Speaker of the House chaired a parliamentary committee. Eng. Atef Al Tarawneh chaired a meeting of the tourism committee to unify efforts in its work in a spirit of teamwork and unity to support for the tourism sector in the Kingdom. The meeting aimed to build a strategic plan for the tourism sector and to build up the role of the committee in following up with tourism issues in the Kingdom. The committee released statements about the reality of tourism in Jordan that confirm the country's security and stability as well as the abundance of tourist sites for heritage and religion. In the oversight realm, the Health and Environment Committee called for adherence to the Food and Drug Safety Administration standards and specification with respect to Polish wheat shipments, which are considered in violation of the standards.

The joint parliamentary committee on Work, Social Development, and Administration discussed requests of municipal employees submitted to the committee, which included the implementation of a civil service code for all municipal employees without exception, covering municipal employees in the townships and districts in accordance with the systems for savings funds, social and housing costs for municipal employees. The Agriculture and Water Committee held a meeting about the subject about the damage that recent frost caused to crops in the Jordan Valley.

In the area of legislation, the Economic and Investment Committee held a discussion about the amended Draft Securities Law for 2015. The committee decided on a number of provisions of the law. The Committee on National Direction and the Media Committee held a discussion about the Draft Law on National Records. The Energy and Mineral Resources Committee had a discussion about the Draft Law on a program to evaluate and develop the production of petroleum in Jordan between the Ministry of Finance and (the Ministry of Mineral Resources) in Jordan and the Company Transeuro Energy Corporation in the Hamza Oil Field for 2014. The Legal Committee discussed the draft law on Chemical Weapons for 2014, and the Culture and Education Committee discussed a law for the preservation of the Arabic Language.