

RASED for Parliamentary Monitoring Program

22th Weekly Report on the Performance of the 17th Jordanian Parliament during its 2nd Ordinary Session

April 4, 2015

The 22nd week of the House of Representatives' 17th Parliamentary Session was notable due to the House's passage of a new Audio-Visual Media Law, which an MP complained was unconstitutional because the vote on the law took place in the absence of a parliamentary quorum.

MP Tamer Beno submitted an interpellation regarding the quorum during the sitting of the House that was held last Sunday, in which the House passed a new Audio-Visual Media Law and several provisions of the Anti-Money Laundering Law. MP Beno's interpellation claimed that there was not a legal quorum in the parliament when these votes took place.

MP Bino stated in his interpellation on Tuesday that in the previous session held on Sunday, in which the laws were passed, did not have a complete quorum, as only 53 of the 150 MPs were in attendance at the vote. MP Bino argued that this made the vote on the laws unconstitutional, and that he would present a case requesting a legal judgment on the matter. Vice Speaker of the House Ahmad al Safadi, acting as the Speaker on Tuesday, disputed this, stating that "there was a quorum, as there were 76 MPs present [at the vote]."

RASED sees the suggestion put forward by MP Abdel Kareem al Daghami as a reasonable one: the issue of the vote's constitutionality should be dealt with by a third party to ensure that it is dealt with in a neutral way. This could be done by referring the issue to the House's Permanent Office for an investigation into the truth of the matter.

From its work monitoring the sittings of the Parliament, RASED's team of field observers is sure that voting last Sunday did not have a legal quorum. RASED calls upon the Permanent Office to investigate this issue in an appropriate way, in order to ensure that the House does not violate the constitution in its passing of laws without the required quorum.

Given this dispute, it may seem necessary to revise the Internal Bylaws of the House to explicitly require that MPs remain in their seats during the duration of their sittings to prevent more random patterns of attendance.

Given that the House of Representatives is open to the idea of amending its Internal Bylaws for the third time in three years, RASED calls upon the house not to rush the process. The House should be careful not to amend the bylaws quickly just to attempt to realize concrete achievements during this session. Instead, since the Second Ordinary Session is already nearing its close [set for May of this year], it would be wise for the House to deal with the issue in a future session.

In this context, it is necessary for the House of Representatives to review all of its procedures for legislative work and to look into appropriate ways to fix discrepancies in the Constitution or in the Internal to make its work smoother and easier than it currently is. The House should reconsider its mechanisms for discussing legislation in the Parliament, the role of committees as the places where legislation is truly formed, and ways to enforce the attendance of MPs at its sittings and committee meetings.

Despite RASED calling over and over for the necessity of taking steps to fix the problem of MPs' attendance and legal quorums, these calls and suggestions have not yet been heeded. The House of Representatives has not until now put forward any practical internal initiative to help deal with this issue in a complete way or even to help reduce it. This

supports the idea that the House must now unite to to help limit this dangerous problem, which has started to occur repeatedly without any deterrent. The experiment in publishing the names of MPs with excused and unexcused absences has not worked, because it seems that MPs now no longer care about the publishing of their names in this way. Therefore, the House must find ways to work harder on the issue, and it must look into finding ways to deal with financial compensation for absent MPs.

The 22nd Week of the 17th Parliament also saw the beginning of a national dialogue begun by the Joint Legal and Administrative Committee about the two draft laws for Municipalities and Decentralization. The committee held a small consultative meeting to discuss the membership of the two committees, and it decided on a work plan for the committee that would take longer than a month, and it determined to implement it and met with representatives of the Parties to listen to their notes and suggestions about the laws. The Committee also held a meeting with the Al Hussein Cultural Center with the members of the Greater Amman Municipal Council as well as members of municipal councils within the GAM.

During the week, that the joint Legal and Public Freedoms Committee had a meeting to prepare a final draft of the Draft Law for Political Parties and work on deciding on it before finishing with it. The joint committee met at the request of its head, MP Mustfa al Amawi, and it looked at written proposals from Jordanian parties, civil society organizations, the Jordanian National Committee for Women, activists involved in political work, professors of political science and law, topical experts, and representatives of trade unions.

The Foreign Affairs committee held a meeting with the Indonesian Ambassador in the presence of its chairman, MP Amjad al Majali, and its members the MPs Jamal Qamwe, Mahmoud al Karabsheh, Rula al Haroub, Wasfi al Zayoud, and Mustafa al Rawashdeh. The

meeting, which discussed an investigation into the energy portfolio and the issue of uranium enrichment, was announced as a closed, secret session, which represents a detriment to transparency and openness in parliamentary work.

The Committee on Integrity and Transparency discussed a number of complaints presented from citizens regarding the allocation of land to people in ways that others from obtaining residential land that they claimed under tribal custom.

The Administrative Committee met during the week for a discussion about Temporary Law No. 81 for 2003 on Utilizing IT Resources in Government Agencies. The Economic and Investment Committee discussed the Temporary Law No. 67 for 2002 on Securities, and the committee decided on a number of its provisions. The Committee on National Direction and Media discussed a draft law on State Documents for 2014 which creates a department for State Record Keeper responsible for publishing documents related to administrative and financial matters according to separate regulations.

RASED monitored the Committee on National Direction and Media to see the suggestions and reports that it produced during its succession of meetings about the crisis in the print media sector as it searched for effective solutions and support. The committee announced that it had met with different stakeholders on the issue, and that it had given specific recommendations to each set of stakeholders after each specific meeting. The Legal Committee sat with the members of the Commission for Educators in Jordanian Universities about the formation of a draft law for a union for them.

The Committee on Rural and Badia Affairs discussed tourism and heritage in its meetings with the Russian, American, Chinese, German, and Iranian ambassadors in the presence of the Minister of Tourism and Heritage Nayef al Fayez, the Director of the Tourist Police, and

other interest stakeholders. The participants discussed ways to support and promote tourism in Jordan abroad by making it known that Jordan benefits from safety, stability, and an environment ready for investment. The committee also discussed in its meetings the reality of tourism in Petra.

The Committee on Work and Social Development held a session in the presence of the General Director of the Social Security Fund, representatives of the Audit Bureau, and a number of stakeholders with interests in the Social Security Law. Together, they discussed a number of complaints that had been presented to the committee. The committee also sat for a meeting with a representative of the Canadian Government and a number of representatives of international organizations interested in Jordanian youth in order to discuss labor and labor law issues.