

RASED for Parliamentary Monitoring Program 6th Weekly Report on the Performance of the 17th Jordanian Parliament during its 2nd Ordinary Session December 13, 2014

During the 6th week of the 2nd Ordinary Session, the House of Representatives chose to defer consideration of a vote of confidence in the Minister of Agriculture following the preference of a majority of the MPs.

During the week, the Finance Committee stopped discussions on the draft General Budget and the draft Budget for Government Agencies for 2015. Finance Committee Chair MP Yusuf al Qurna announced that the committee did not have faith in some of the assumptions made by the government that underpinned the foundations of the budget. The most important of these assumptions was the price crude oil, which was assumed in the budget to be \$100 USD per barrel but in fact has seen a drastic reduction in recent weeks.

MP al Qurna demonstrated several budget provisions affected by the assumptions about crude oil prices, including provisions on “Compensation for raising the prices on petroleum products”; “Lowering the direct subsidies for wheat for bakeries due to reduced diesel prices”; “Reducing loses of the national electric company”; “The government’s desire to raise prices of electricity for citizens”; and “A reduction for ministries and government agencies with respect to fuels that does not reflect prices of market goods”. The committee began an external study about its constitutional options for moving forward on the budget.

RASED views this is as a responsible decision and a positive step for the committee. The mechanisms for preparing the budget ought to be reviewed by the government, especially in light of the fact that the budget for 2015 lacked a strategic plan in its preparation and was built upon unrealistic expectations for the prices of crude oil. According to

international records, the price of crude oil is expected to remain at \$68, rendering a budget built upon the price of gas at \$100 per barrel difficult to implement.

RASSED believes that the government has not been accurate or transparent in its preparation of the budget and its associated projections. The fact that many of these projections are inaccurate does not reflect well on the government's ability to build a correct framework for the budget.

Perhaps the most significant occurrence during the week was a general debate session held for two days on the letter of intent signed between the National Electricity Company and an American company to "buy gas from the company as the developer of one of Israel's gas fields."

During the sixth week, the Executive Office held its first meeting and considered the issue of MP resignations from their committees. The office decided to allow committees that had problems of resignations to accept new members. RASSED applauds the decision of the Speaker of the House to call a meeting of the Executive Office for this issue. This case demonstrates the necessity of the Executive Office meeting according to the Internal Bylaws of the House.

The 6th week saw the Senate promulgate a code of conduct, which aimed to codify standards for behavior for the senators; values of democracy, dialogue, respect for other opinions; general reconciliation and a focus on good performance; a culture of transparency and openness; a spirit of teamwork, and practical provisions to enhance the efficiency of the Senate's work.

In contrast, efforts of the House of Representatives to make a code of conduct remain slow despite the desire of the Speaker of the House to approve a code of conduct before the end of the current month. RASSED calls on the Speaker of the House and the Permanent Office to undertake every effort to complete the code of conduct that His Majesty the King called for in the Throne Speech at the beginning of the session.

RASED applauds the announcement by the Speaker of the House regarding the House's desire to reopen consideration of its the internal bylaws in order to make adjustments to a number of articles which have been shown to require adjustments. RASED calls for discussions on provisions needing amendments in order to support the House's performance and enhance parliamentary reform. These discussions should be accompanied by practical steps. For example, the House should resolve the overlap between the powers of the Permanent Office and the Executive Office, and it should create a mechanism for MPs to make suggestions on laws directly to specific committees instead of through the Speaker of the House. It should also reconsider the mechanisms for forming parliamentary blocs.

During the week, most committees held meetings. Most of the committees discussed their mechanisms of work, while some debated draft laws on their agendas.

The chair of the Committee on Palestine, Yaya Al Saud, decided to bar the RASED team from attending its sessions without giving reasons, greatly reducing the work of the committee.

The dilemma of resignations continues to be a problem for the Committee on National Direction, which has had 6 members resign.

RASED for Parliamentary Monitoring found that parliamentary committees continue to suffer from a lack of discipline among their members in attending meetings. Committees had a high number of absences during the week, leaving committees without quorums and leading them to cancel and postpone meetings, and negatively affecting the progress of legislation in parliament.

During the week, the Legal Committee approved amendments the Law to Combat Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing No. 31 (2010). It also approved the amendments for the Law on Government

Claims (2012), and it discussed the amendments to the Consumption Law (returned from the Senate). The members of the committee asked the House to ask the government to withdraw the draft law in order to wait for chances to discuss the law in a more comprehensive way.

The Commission for Labor and Social Development Committee met and considered amendments to the Law for the Development and Employment Fund (2014), and it decided to postpone the adoption of a number of articles, specifically the provisions about the management of the fund. The committee was able to reach an agreement between the Electrical Workers Union and the National Electricity Company, leading to the end of the strike that had been scheduled for Tuesday.

The Committee on Energy and Mineral Resources discussed the subject of gas fields in the kingdom, and confirmed the need to work on supporting a strategy for drilling oil and gas in Jordan.

The Administrative committee held a meeting and discussed a number of amendments to the Law on Military Retirement (2014) without deciding on all of them and postponing it until a later meeting.

The Committee on Women's and Family members discussed the risks associated with early marriage under the legal age provided in the personal status law and ways to fix this phenomenon through developing legislation. In these discussions, the committee heard from a number of specialists.

The committee on Tourism and Heritage discussed methods for its work, as did the committee on Human Rights and Public Freedoms and the Committee on Agriculture and Water.

RASSED noted that there is still a large number of absences from sessions, which is leading to postponement and cancelation of meetings and having a negative effect on the quality of legislation in parliament.