

RASED for Parliamentary Monitoring Program

9th Weekly Report on the Performance of the 17th Jordanian Parliament during its 2nd Ordinary Session

January 3, 2015

The House of Representatives in the ninth week of its Second Ordinary Session suffered the problem of not meeting the legal quorum once more. This same problem prevented the House from concluding its morning session on the final day of 2014, which led the Speaker of the House to cancel the afternoon session. The regulatory side completed the work remaining on the agenda to discuss governmental response to MPs' questions, in addition to inclusion of three interpellations on the agenda which were tabled for the second week in a row.

RASED noted lack of convention of the evening oversight session on Wednesday which was dedicated to discussion of the governmental decision to raise electricity prices. During the "New Year Commencement" session in the morning, the Speaker of the House announced discussion of this topic in the evening session of the same day. This was decided after MP Qasim Bani Hani requested cancelation of the original agenda and its dedication to discussion of "the topic of electricity prices with the government which are to come into effect early in the new year." However, the Speaker of the House stressed that the morning session was dedicated to legislation and this topic would be able to be discussed in the evening session instead.

The decision of not convening the evening session was made in Wednesday's morning session. Speaker of the House Eng. Atef al-Tarawneh filed and declared this cancelation in advance due to the lacking of quorum.

The House settled for issuing a statement, in which it urgently requested the government to be patient in the making of a decision on electricity

tariff amendments, freezing them in the meantime to conduct a study to re-examine the causes leading to the price increases.

It is to be noted that the House only convened for one single oversight meeting throughout the nine weeks of the Second Ordinary Session, affecting the oversight role of the House over the work of the government.

Also in the ninth week, the House decided on five draft laws and referred one to the Senate after approval of amended provisions therein.

The Senate approved the Income Tax Law of 2014 in a record time of not more than 72 hours, as reported by the House of Representatives. The law was presented to the Senate's Financial and Economic Affairs Committee over the weekend, and consecutively adopted and presented to the House. This convened for a session last Tuesday lasting one hour in which the law was accepted.

Noteworthy is that the House took 14 sessions to discuss this law. It has been stated by the Senate that its prompt approval is in part due to its importance to national interests and maintaining the Kingdom's reputation and credibility to international institutions and donor countries in the implementation of its obligations, despite the House's lack of conviction on the Draft Law and its impacts.

Accordingly, the Senate recommended the government submit the amended Income Tax Law to the National Assembly in its coming Ordinary Session after the Senate's Financial and Economic Affairs Committee identifies its main principles in consultation with the economic and social sectors. The Senate acknowledges that the Law as it was approved faces opposition from numerous groups which consider the provisions as repelling investment, and worry that the extra burden of economic sectors will be placed on citizens' cost of living. In addition to a lack of studies being carried out by any governmental party about

the implications of applying the law to the economic process, both at the macro and sectorial level.

During the past monitored week, three committees – Financial, Administrative, and Youth, canceled meetings which were set on the last day of 2014. The reasons of the committee's chairmen to take this decision at 16:00 on Wednesday, are similar to that taken by the Speaker of the House; immediately after hearing the Speaker's decision to postpone, the chairmen of the abovementioned committees announced the cancellation of the scheduled meetings for their respective committees for fear of lacking the necessary quorum.

In contrast, the Financial Committee held its meeting on a near-daily basis – including the weekend, with the relevant governmental agencies to discuss budget lines for the 2015 fiscal year public budget.

The National Steering and Media Committee meeting was attended by Minister of Media and Communications Dr. Muhammad al-Moumani, and Chairman of the Audiovisual Media Body Dr. Amjad al-Qadi. During this meeting, a first reading of Temporary Law 71 of 2002 on the Audiovisual Media Body was carried out.

The Public Services and Transportation Committee discussed Temporary Law 22 of 2014 on Public Transportation. The Joint Committee of the Legislative, Economic, and Investment committees approved a number of articles of the Electronic Transactions Draft Law of 2013. The Health Committee discussed the Temporary Law 79 of 2001 on Food Controls.

On the oversight level – the Transparency and Integrity Committee recommended a fact-finding mission on the whereabouts of Syrian refugees and reducing their in-flow, introducing iris (eye) scanning identification methods, and modifying procedures in check-points to control the refugees and their exit from the camps. This was done in

the meeting convened in attendance by Minister of Interior Hussein al-Majali and Director of Camp Affairs Brigadier Wadah al-Hamoud.

The National Steering and Media Committee discussed the issue of installing retired military personnel in the Ministry of Awqaf; expressing its understanding and confirmation of the military's demands. The committee committed to sending a memorandum to the Government taking into account laws and regulations.

The Labor, Social Development and Housing Committees appropriated a single meeting to the discussion of demands submitted by employees regarding the Civil Service Retirement Bylaw in the Civil Aviation Regulatory Authority, and for a deal-related pension and social security system as their new colleagues receive.

The Tourism Committee discussed a number of issues proposed to them by the tourism sector.

The Joint Committee of the Labor, Social Development, and the National Steering and Media Committees convened a meeting to discuss the reasons behind the solution on administrative bodies of charity organizations and a legal term for procedures issued by the Ministry of Social Development. The Administrative Committee dedicated its meeting to consideration of citizen complaints. The Public and Human Rights Committee visited rehabilitation and detention centers in the Zarqa Governorate.