



EGYPT PARLIAMENT WATCH



WEEK IN BRIEF DECEMBER 17–30, 2017

Summary

- The House of Representatives is in [recess](#) until January 8. Only committees and the cabinet will discuss or vote on legislation until the full legislature reconvenes.
- The two weeks surrounding Western Christmas and the new year were replete with votes on notable legislation, such as the Comprehensive Health Insurance Law and the Persons with Special Needs Law. President Abdel-Fattah El Sisi also ratified several laws, apparently giving priority to laws relating to security and the military.
- Multiple representatives weighed in on the sectarian terror attacks in Helwan, the discussion among lawmakers in the United States about Coptic issues, and the decision to move the U.S. embassy in Israel to Jerusalem.

Notable Developments

Representatives React to Attack on Mar Mina Church:

The House of Representatives [condemned](#) the attacks on Copts on the Mar Mina Church and nearby store in Helwan. A large number of representatives and parties, including the [majority Coalition in Support of Egypt](#), also made [individual statements](#) condemning the attack. In broad strokes, they praised the police for preventing a larger massacre, sent condolences to the families of those injured or killed, emphasized that terrorists targeted all Egyptians no matter their religion, and said that terrorists aim to distort the image or damage the security of the state.

Representatives React to Congressional Memo on Coptic Rights and Safety:

Several days before the attack on the Mar Mina Church, the Foreign Affairs Committee, Defense Committee, and Human Rights Committee held a joint session with the head of the State Information Service, Diaa Rashwan, to discuss the memo sent to the U.S. Congress by U.S.-based group Coptic Solidarity on the poor treatment of Copts in Egypt by the Egyptian government. Reactions to the memo were only unified in their attempts to downplay its claims. Alaa Abed, chairman of the Human Rights Committee, said Copts are treated the same and enjoy the same rights as other Egyptians. Tariq Radwan, chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee, said that this is an internal issue that foreign elements should not try to influence. Representative Emad Gad, a Copt, claimed that sectarianism does exist in Egypt, but rejected foreign interference into Egyptian affairs. Representative Magdi Malek, also a Copt, cited statistics to demonstrate how much of a non-issue this is because of the rarity of sectarian issues in Egypt. In response to the memo, the Foreign Affairs Committee is reportedly drafting a formal statement, and several representatives called for a special session to discuss the state of human rights in the U.S.

Legislative Overhaul of National Health Insurance System:

The House of Representatives approved the government's draft Comprehensive Health Insurance Law. Though only three representatives voted against it and several ranking members of the body called it a gift to the nation, the law sparked contentious debate. The government presented the legislature with an actuarial study on the proposed changes to the system. However, the study was done before amendments to various portions of the law were made, leading representatives, including Ehab Mansour and Haytham al-Hariri of the 25-30 Bloc, to discount the projections entirely. Prior to the vote, the Tagammu Party rejected the law based on the criticism it received from medical professionals. The Wafd Party expressed concern over the length of implementation of the system. The Conservative Party was worried specific medical conditions would not be covered and the 25-30 Bloc rejected the legislation because of the multitude of ambiguities in the law that made it difficult to comprehend. Nevertheless, during an extended general session attended by government representatives, the vast majority of representatives stood in agreement with the law.

Representatives React to U.S. Decision to Move Embassy to Jerusalem:

President Donald Trump's announcement that the U.S. would move its embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem was met with unanimous anger and criticism from representatives. Several members attended a general session wearing matching sashes or carrying banners declaring "Jerusalem is Arab." Representative Muhammad Abdul Ghani submitted a draft law to boycott U.S. products and Saad al-Gamal stated he was working with the Arab Lawyers Union and the Palestinian Lawyers' Syndicate to take legal action against Trump. Over 50 representatives signed a petition to change the name of the Cairo street where the U.S. embassy in Egypt is located to "Arab Jerusalem Street." Representative Nashwi al-Deeb called for Arab countries to expel Israeli diplomats as a show of unity on the issue. Representatives also collectively referred to the U.S. threat to cut aid to any United Nations country that voted to condemn the decision as "arrogance."

Other Developments

In Legislation:

The House of Representatives [passed](#) the Comprehensive Health Insurance Law.

A final vote was [taken](#) to [pass](#) the government's Drone Law, which bans the use, sale, and importation of drones without a permit from the Ministry of Defense.

The House of Representatives [passed](#) the government's [Egyptian Space Agency Law](#), which creates an agency to conduct research, explore space, and launch satellites for Egypt's strategic use. The agency's supreme council includes four representatives for Egypt's security sector (the defense, interior, and military production ministries, and the General Intelligence Directorate) as well as the president's office and the Administrative Control Authority among its 13 members.

The House of Representatives [passed](#) the amendments to the Urban Communities Law, which empowers the state to deal with informal settlements and buildings on agricultural land, and requires the Cabinet and Ministry of Housing to authorize new urban communities.

The House of Representatives [passed](#) the government's amendments to the [Single Person Company Law](#), which governs the establishment of sole proprietorships and limited liability companies in Egypt, as well as the regulations should they become a publicly traded company.

The House of Representatives [passed](#) the Persons with Special Needs Law, which mandates that at least five percent of government housing be for such persons and exempts such persons from licensing fees and a wide variety of taxes.

The House of Representatives [passed](#) the [government's](#) amendments to the Retirement, Insurance, and Pension for the Military Law, which sets the age to retire with the pension and benefits reserved for lieutenant generals at 64.

Sisi ratified the [amendments](#) to the [Deputy Ministers Law](#); the [amendments](#) to the [Family Courts Law](#); the [Drone Law](#); the amendments to the [Retirement, Insurance, and Pension for the Military Law](#); the amendments to the [Police Academies Law](#); and the [Unions Law](#).

In Session:

A delegation from the Communications Committee [visited](#) the new technology park in Alexandria to look into its development and the new projects there.

The Religious Affairs Committee delegation to North Sinai and the Rawda mosque [issued](#) a report with a series of social and economic recommendations to develop the region.

A delegation from the Agriculture Committee, led by Hisham al-Shaini, [visited](#) Beni Suef and Fayoum to examine several agricultural [projects](#) the committee had previously discussed or requested information on. The trip [included meetings](#) with the [governors](#) of both governorates and local [farmers](#). The Agriculture Committee [summoned](#) the ministers of agriculture, irrigation, environment, and local development to discuss their report on the trip.

A number of cabinet ministers were summoned during this period as well. The Workforce Committee [summoned](#) the ministers of manpower and education to discuss ways to deal with the unemployment crisis and find job opportunities for youth. The Foreign Relations Committee [summoned](#) the ministers of foreign affairs and water resources for a [briefing](#) on the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam. The Manufacturing Committee [summoned](#) the minister of petroleum. Minister of Irrigation Muhammad Abdul Atti [responded](#) to the Agriculture Committee's request for a briefing by meeting its members to discuss the 20-year national water resources strategy, which will cost

900 billion Egyptian pounds. The minister of agriculture also [appeared](#) before parliament to answer questions, though several of the representatives who had requested to question him were absent at the time. The minister of investment appeared before parliament to discuss the Single Person Company Law. The ministers of planning, transportation, petroleum, and the public sector also [appeared](#) before the parliament for the December 26 general session.

In News and Statements:

The Legislative Department of the State Council [rejected](#) the constitutionality of the amendments to the Sports Law that the House of Representatives [passed](#) in principle on November 21, which would prevent judges from running for the chairmanship of sporting clubs. This law and the reasoning for the decision will now be sent back to the legislature for further discussion and potential amendment.

The National Electoral Commission [announced](#) that the election to fill deceased representative Herqel Wafqi's seat in the House of Representatives will go to a [runoff](#) between one of his relatives, Rashdi Wafqi, and Khalifa Radwan.

Representative Osama Shersher [announced](#) his resignation from the Media Committee. He is reportedly resigning in protest of the minister of culture's disinterest in meeting with representatives when summoned or answering questions.

Muhammad al-Suweidi, chairman of the Coalition in Support of Egypt, [called](#) for a cabinet reshuffle, saying many of the members of Prime Minister Sherif Ismail's cabinet are not "up to the necessary level."

Deputy Speaker of the House Soleiman Wahdan [spoke](#) at a conference set up to support Sisi's yet-unannounced reelection bid and called for him to run for a second term. At a separate event, the majority Coalition in Support of Egypt [renewed](#) its support for Sisi's reelection.

Parliament [refused](#) to [lift the](#) legal immunity of Representative Mortada Mansour for the second time this month and at least the eighth time in the third legislative session.

Looking Ahead

- The House of Representatives may not reconvene until January 8, but do not expect the new year to slow down Egypt's legislative agenda. The body held a general session on January 2, 2017, and with the amendments to the Criminal Procedures Law moving through committee, the Prisons Law yet unfinished, the amendments to the Sports Law being returned, multiple ministers being summoned for questioning, and the issues of Coptic safety and rights at the forefront of representatives minds, the next week should be busy.
- The runoff for the seat of deceased Representative Herqel Wafqi is set for January 5–9. The first round of voting between the two runoff candidates, Rashdi Wafqi and Khalifa Radwan, was *very close*. However, Rashdi Wafqi is a *member* of the Nation's Future Party (*second largest* in parliament and a major portion of the ruling Coalition in Support of Egypt), a relative of the Herqel Wafqi (a widow *won* her late husband's seat last year), and a former police general (a regular profession among his *peers*). Based on past election results, Wafqi is the prototypical representative. Electorate interest in such a candidate and the competency of the newly created *National Electoral Commission*,¹ managing an election for the first time, will be on display in this last vote before the 2018 presidential race.

¹The National Electoral Commission was created by a law passed on July 4, 2017. It replaced the Supreme Elections Committee which monitored the 2014 presidential and 2015 parliamentary elections. The body's mandate is to set up and oversee all national elections in Egypt, including exceptional elections to fill empty seats in the House of Representatives. The commission's board includes 10 members, comprising one head and nine senior judges appointed by Sisi and affiliated with the Court of Cassation, the Court of Appeals, the State Council, the State Lawsuits Authority, and the Administrative Prosecution Authority. Under this law, judges will only oversee Egyptian elections until 2024, at which point the commission and its staff will take over this role.



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EGYPT **PARLIAMENT WATCH**

Egypt Parliament Watch is the most comprehensive project on Egypt's elected legislature, providing analysis of the body's performance in fulfilling its constitutionally mandated tasks, the legislation it produces, and the political dynamics at play.