



EGYPT PARLIAMENT WATCH



WEEK IN BRIEF MARCH 4-10, 2018

Summary

- The House of Representatives will not [reconvene](#) in general session until April 2 to allow representatives time to campaign on behalf of their candidates ahead of the upcoming presidential election. Most representatives support President Abdel-Fattah El Sisi; though the Ghad Party is supporting the bid of its leader, Moussa Mustafa Moussa, the party holds no seats in the House.
- Multiple representatives hailed the Saudi crown prince's visit to Egypt as a sign of the strong relationship between the two nations in terms of economic affairs, religious diversity, and regional disputes.
- Members of the House praised the Supreme Constitutional Court's annulment of previous legal rulings regarding the Tiran and Sanafir agreement as an affirmation of parliamentary decision-making, given that the House of Representatives had supported the agreement.

Presidential Election Developments

Politicians Prioritize Campaign Effects:

Following Speaker of the House Ali Abdel 'Al's [announcement](#) that the House of Representatives would not meet in general session for nearly a month owing to the presidential election, several representatives and parties prioritized their campaign efforts for both President Abdel-Fattah El Sisi and his opponent, Moussa Mustafa Moussa. Multiple representatives, notably [Mustafa Bakri](#) and Deputy Speaker [Soleiman Wahdan](#), either organized or attended political rallies on behalf of Sisi's reelection bid. Similarly, the Wafd Party [held](#) a large conference expressing its support for Sisi, while ranking officials within the Free Egyptians Party led by the party's chairman, Essam Khalil,

discussed its coordination efforts to campaign for Sisi in the final weeks leading up to the election. In one of the first major campaign endeavors on behalf of Moussa Mustafa Moussa, members of the Ghad Party marched in Cairo calling for citizens to vote for him in the upcoming election.

Internal Wafd Party Turmoil Persists:

Division within the Wafd Party continued after its chairman, al-Sayyid al-Badawi, moved the organization's internal elections to precede the presidential election, contrary to the request of the party's high council. Tensions in the organization prompted 25 members to sign a petition calling for the party's internal election to occur at a later date to avoid interference with the presidential election. The high council of the party responded to the request by holding a meeting to discuss recent developments within the organization, yet no progress was made to resolve the ongoing dispute. In light of the party turmoil, Bahaa Abu Shoqa, secretary-general of the group and Constitutional Affairs Committee chairman in the House, officially announced his candidacy for chairman of the party to replace the increasingly unpopular Badawi, whose own bid for president was rejected by his party.

Notable Developments

Representatives Praise Saudi Crown Prince's Visit:

Saudi Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman visited Egypt as part of a multi-day delegation trip, which included several meetings with Sisi, ranking parliamentary officials including Coalition in Support of Egypt Chairman Muhammad al-Suweidi, and Coptic Pope Tawadros. Several representatives, notably Mustafa Bakri, Housing Committee Chairman Moataz Muhammad Mahmoud, and Tadrus Qaldus of the Communications Committee hailed the visit for its economic implications, bilateral relations between the two nations, and the joint resolve to reject Qatar and maintain severed diplomatic relations with the country. Representatives also offered their support for bin Salman's meeting with Pope Tawadros, citing it as an affirmation of Saudi Arabia's commitment to religious diversity. Members of the House promoted the various investment and environmental projects conducted by Saudi Arabia, especially in the Sinai and Suez Canal regions. At the conclusion of the crown prince's visit, Egypt and Saudi Arabia signed two separate agreements, including a Saudi investment of \$16 billion in development projects in various governorates, as well as a joint venture totaling \$10 billion to build a new megacity in Sinai.

Tiran and Sanafir Decision Affirms Representatives' Intentions:

A nearly two-year-long legal battle regarding the controversial Tiran and Sanafir Islands agreement between Egypt and Saudi Arabia concluded with the Supreme Constitutional Court annulling all previous legal decisions pertaining to the deal. While Sisi and the House of Representatives advocated for the agreement's passage, courts in Egypt were divided and issued conflicting rulings about the treaty. Following the Supreme Constitutional Court's decision, several representatives spoke out in favor of the ruling. Abdel 'Al and Human Rights Committee Chairman Alaa Abed highlighted the decision as an affirmation of legislative processes and the political desires of both the House of Representatives, which had voted unanimously to uphold the agreement, and Sisi. Following the court's ruling, no time frame has been announced for the transfer of the islands per the agreement.

Abdel 'Al Critical of Representatives and Citizens:

Abdel 'Al called out representatives on several different occasions for their behavior during general session. His qualms began during Sunday's plenary session, where he **criticized** members of the House for their extensive deliberations on legislation. Abdel 'Al asserted that general session **ought** to be used to vote on legislation, while members should utilize committee meetings as the platform to discuss laws. He later **chastised** representatives for failing to attend session during the body's vote on amendments to the Penal Code. Abdel 'Al **delayed** the final vote on the legislation until enough representatives arrived to the meeting. Following **statements** by Representative Muhammad al-Husseini of the Local Administration Committee that were critical of the government's response to the **Beheira train crash**, Abdel 'Al **refuted** Hussein's claims, and hailed his own personal expertise as a lawyer, academic and industrial as evidence of his ability to lead parliament through this situation.

Abdel 'Al also **expressed** disdain for recent protests by workers of a cement factory, **claiming** that unrest will not be permitted during the tumultuous time Egypt faces. He **ridiculed** the protesters for demanding rights through assembly, while **adding** that unauthorized protests are outlawed under recent legislation.

IT Crimes Law Progressing through Parliament:

The Communications Committee **agreed** in principle to the IT Crimes Law, yet the committee will continue to discuss various articles of the law during the parliamentary recess. Several representatives in the committee **pledged** that the legislation would not restrict freedom of expression on the Internet, **adding** that websites can only be blocked under the law through a court order. Committee Chairman Nidal Said **expressed** similar sentiments claiming that the law is not aimed at banning social media websites such as Facebook, but rather **protecting** citizens and the government from cybercrimes. The legislation will move to the general body of parliament to be debated and voted on once the House reconvenes after the presidential election. While no major organizations have decried the draft law for its rumored censoring of certain websites, the potential censorship is consistent with recent calls made by government officials to boycott prominent websites of news organizations including **BBC** and the *New York Times* for publishing articles critical of the state.

Representatives Respond to U.N. Human Rights Report:

Minister of Parliamentary Affairs Omar Marwan **spoke** at the United Nation Human Rights Council's (UNHRC) session in Geneva, where he **acknowledged** Egypt's resolve to improve its human rights standards. Marwan also **accepted** 223 of 300 recommendations made by the body to improve the conditions in Egypt. While Marwan was receptive to criticism from the UNHRC, representatives in the House dismissed the claims, **stating** that the information mentioned in the reports was based on inaccurate sources. Tariq al-Khouli of the Foreign Affairs Committee **referred** to the UNHRC comments as a "bogeyman" used to affect political affairs in Egypt.

Other Developments

In Legislation:

The House of Representatives **agreed** to amendments to the Penal Code. The new legislation **calls** for the death penalty against any individual convicted of possessing explosive materials with the intention of using them for dangerous purposes. The law also **stipulates** that any individual aware of people in possession of explosive materials who does not report them to the proper authorities is subject to imprisonment.

Parliament **approved** amendments to the National Railway Authority Law. The amendments **permit** citizens and other legal entities to participate in the management of the railway system, effectively partially deregulating the industry.

Parliament **agreed in principle** to the University Hospital Law. The law **establishes** a new bureaucratic structure for university hospitals and **outlines** the different leadership positions that comprise each institution. The legislation also **separates** hospitals from universities in order to avoid financial complications.

The House of Representatives **approved** the draft Incentives for Science, Technology, and Innovation Law **in principle**. The legislation **provides** tax exemptions for academic institutions or entities conducting research projects.

Parliament **approved** a presidential decree for scientific and technical cooperation between Egypt and the European Union to **contribute** to knowledge production in the Mediterranean region.

Soulaf Darwish of the Human Rights Committee **submitted** a draft law criminalizing public outcry or abuses against members of the armed forces. The punishment **entails** a prison sentence of three to five years and a fine of 5,000–10,000 Egyptian pounds, depending on the severity of the criticism.

Muhammad Zakaria of the Manufacturing Committee **formulated** amendments to the Terrorist Law, which would **restrict** the ability of suspected and known terrorists to participate and engage in electoral activities.

Said Hassassein of the Health Committee **submitted** a draft law amending the Private Universities Law. The legislation would **reduce** the financial burden borne by the state paying for students to study abroad.

In Session:

The Religious Affairs Committee **met** with a delegation from Indonesia including the ambassador to Egypt and several members of the Indonesian parliament. The Indonesian delegation **sought** advice about proposed legislation to limit alcohol consumption in the country.

Religious Affairs Committee Chairman Osama al-Abd **met** with the Italian ambassador to Egypt to **discuss** increasing joint cooperation and bilateral relations in a variety of fields.

Members of the Foreign Affairs Committee **met** with a delegation from Hungary. The two sides **exhibited** mutual desire to coordinate on future projects together.

The Budget Committee will **hold** a meeting with members of the National Railway Authority to discuss current problems plaguing the railway system, especially in terms of finances.

Mustafa al-Gendi of the African Affairs Committee **won** 13 votes in a preliminary election for the chairman position of the Pan-African Parliament. Gendi **defeated** a representative from Tunisia in the head-to-head election.

In News and Statements:

Karama Party member Hassan Hussein was **arrested** on Friday and is in detention at an undisclosed location, prompting his family to **file** a complaint with the prosecution office. Hussein and political activist Gamal Abdel Fattah later **appeared** before the Supreme State Security Prosecution nearly

a week after their disappearance, **accused** of disseminating false news and belonging to a terrorist organization.

Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Tariq Radwan **issued** a statement expressing concern over multiple requests from members of the British Parliament to visit deposed president Muhammad Morsi in prison over reports of his deteriorating health. Radwan **accused** the parliamentarians of meddling in Egyptian affairs, while **affirming** the high quality medical care that Morsi receives.

Abdel 'Al **welcomed** the decision of the Administrative Court to restrict television broadcasting during meetings of parliament, **stating** that representatives would become too distracted by the presence of cameras in session.

Ismail Nasser al-Din of the Housing Committee **expressed** interest in submitting an amendment to the constitution to increase the president's term from four years to six. Nasser al-Din **referred** to a similar movement ongoing in China, hailing the nation's economic success as a motive for change. He **added** that the current term limits are ineffective since representatives in parliament serve for five years while presidents serve for four years, which limits the ability of the president to complete considerable change due to the brief tenure in office. Presidential candidate Moussa Mustafa Moussa **mentioned** similar sentiments regarding an extension of the president's term to six years.

Arab Affairs Committee Chairman Saad al-Gamal **stated** that this year's International Women's Day represented an unprecedented moment in Egypt's history, as parliament currently holds the most seats occupied by women in its history. Gamal also **issued** a statement celebrating Martyrs Day in honor of all military personnel that sacrificed their lives in defense of the homeland.

Tariq Hasanein of the Economic Affairs Committee **demanded** that the government submit its budget for the upcoming fiscal year before the end of the month.

In reaction to recent violence between security forces and football fans, Mahmoud Hussein of the Youth and Sports Committee **argued** for increased punishments for those who clash with security forces.

Fuad Abaza of the Arab Affairs Committee **called** for the creation of a fact-finding committee to investigate the water crisis in Alexandria.

Looking Ahead

- The Tourism Committee will **launch** a delegation visit to the pyramids region to assess current construction and development projects.
- The Ghad Party is **organizing** a parade this upcoming weekend to demonstrate support for presidential candidate Moussa Mustafa Moussa. A number of tribes in Assiut are also **organizing** a public conference to support Moussa.



The Tahrir Institute
for Middle East Policy

1140 Connecticut Ave NW Suite 505
Washington, DC 20036
office 202 969 3343
fax 202 480 2178
timep.org

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.