



# EGYPT PARLIAMENT WATCH



## WEEK IN BRIEF FEBRUARY 15–26, 2019

### Summary

- Two representatives, Haytham al-Hariri and Khaled Youssef, faced defamation campaigns for their public opposition to proposed constitutional amendments. Hariri later announced his support for the proposal, and Youssef was referred to trial over an obscenity scandal.
- Five members of the Dostour Party were arrested for their activism against the proposed amendments.
- After the House of Representatives agreed in principle to the proposed constitutional amendments on February 14, several political parties and their members engaged in internal disputes or split due to differing opinions on the proposal. Notable parties with internal strife included the Wafd, Conservative, and Democratic Egypt Parties. Some members resigned from their respective organizations, while others were subject to internal investigations.
- General Federation of NGOs Chairman Talaat Abdel Qawi announced that the federation convened with other civil society groups on February 26 to discuss the proposed constitutional amendments. The meeting was the first of six such community dialogue sessions requested by Speaker of the House Ali Abdel 'Al.

## Notable Developments

### Political Figures Opposed to Amendments Face Defamation and Arrests:

Two representatives faced public defamation campaigns in light of their rejection of the proposed constitutional amendments. Multiple obscene videos of Representative Khaled Youssef were **publicized**, which led to the prosecutor-general's office **issuing** a media ban on Youssef's case. A hearing was later set in the Court for Administrative Justice on March 16 to **revoke** Youssef's membership in light of the scandal. Meanwhile, Representative Haytham al-Hariri, an opposition figure in the House, **announced** his support for the proposed amendments following a defamation campaign. A recording of a private phone call circulated on social media in which Hariri had a conversation of a sexual nature with a married woman.

Similarly, five members of the Dostour Party were arrested and **detained** by the state on charges of spreading false news; the five detained individuals are Ahmed al-Risam, Ramadan Abu Zeid, Hilal Samir, Shahart Hilal al-Masri, and Gamal Fadl. The Dostour Party is aligned with the Union to Defend the Constitution, and the five arrested individuals were **engaged** in anti-amendment efforts through posting videos rejecting the proposal or collecting signatures of opposed individuals. The Dostour Party does not have any seats in the current parliament.

### Representatives and Parties Dispute Positions on Constitutional Amendments:

After the House of Representatives agreed in principle to the proposed constitutional amendments, some representatives quarreled with their affiliated political parties over the amendments. Two separate officials in the Conservative Party, including Representative **Hala Abul Saad**, **resigned** from the organization after the party's leadership announced its opposition to the proposed amendments. The resignations prompted reports that the organization would expel members who supported the constitutional amendments, which the party denied in a statement. Similarly, the Democratic Egypt Party **referred** Representative Khaled Abdel Azim Shaaban to its internal disciplinary committee for investigation after he approved the constitutional amendments in principle while the party officially rejected the proposal.

Wafd Party Supreme Council member Muhammad Abdel Aleem Dawoud **announced** that some members of the party had formed their own political entity, known as the Wafdi Front, to reject the proposed constitutional amendments. The Wafdi Front subsequently joined the Union to Defend the Constitution, a group composed of political parties and individuals campaigning against the amendments.

### Civil Society Groups Convene to Discuss Proposed Amendments:

Chairman Talaat Abdel Qawy of the General Federation for NGOs **stated** that the federation met with other civil society groups on February 26 for the first of six meetings for the proposed constitutional amendments that Speaker of the House Ali Abdel 'Al announced. Abdel Qawy did not **reveal** whether any representatives attend the initial meeting, but noted that the group would submit its formal recommendations on the amendments to Abdel 'Al after holding all six sessions.

## Representatives Host American Religious Officials:

Several parliamentary figures, including Deputy Speaker al-Sayyid al-Sharif and Religious Affairs Committee Chairman Osama al-Abd, **hosted** officials from an American-Egyptian evangelical group led by Reverend Dr. Andrea Zaki, the president of the main Egyptian Protestant body, as well as officials from the World Religions Parliament, American religious officials, and American civil society members. During the meeting, Sharif **spoke** about relations between Egypt and the United States, while also noting recent developments in the fields of security and economic development. In terms of religious affairs, Sharif claimed Egypt has made important strides in reducing sectarian violence.

## Other Developments

### In Legislation:

The House **agreed** in principle to the draft Electronic Payments Law on February 24 but postponed a final vote due to a lack of quorum. The bill **requires** companies to pay their employees, excluding temporary workers, using electronic payment systems in order to phase out cash transactions.

### In Session:

The Suggestions and Complaints Committee **agreed** to a proposal from Representative Abul Maata Mustafa to establish a women's studies department at al-Azhar University's campus in New Damietta.

Several representatives from Gharbia **filed** briefing requests to Prime Minister Madbouli regarding Governor Hesham al-Said's alleged refusal to cooperate with representatives and journalists reporting on local issues.

The Budget Committee **approved** the report for the final state budget for the 2017–18 fiscal year.

The African Affairs Committee **proposed** the establishment of an Egyptian-African working group to monitor ongoing developments in Egypt's relationships with other African countries.

The Media Committee **postponed** its discussions of a briefing request regarding the housing development project and related protests in Nezzat al-Siman, Giza, until the committee hears about the neighborhood's development plans from the Ministries of Antiquities and Local Development.

The Religious Affairs Committee is **preparing** a report on its recent visit to Qena and Luxor, which will focus on the conditions of the mosques that the delegation visited in the governorates. The report will be presented before plenary session.

Members of the Agriculture Committee **conducted** a delegation visit to Matrouh as part of a greater outreach program to inspect regional agricultural problems.

### In News and Statements:

Saudi King Salman **met** with Abdel 'Al ahead of the European Union-Arab League summit.

African Affairs Committee Chairman Tariq Radwan **stated** that the E.U.-Arab League summit indicates the strategic importance of Egypt for European countries.

Abdel 'Al is **participating** in an Inter-Parliamentary Union conference in Luxor to discuss efforts to combat terrorism and the role of parliament in addressing concerns about foreign fighters

The Defense Committee **welcomed** a delegation from the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Parliament of Albania. The groups discussed means of improving bilateral relations between their respective countries.

Wafd Party Chairman Bahaa Abu Shoqa **hosted** Spanish Ambassador to Egypt Ramon Gil-Casares Satrustegui at the party's headquarters.

Defense Committee Chairman Kamal Amer **hosted** Norwegian Ambassador to Egypt Sten Arne Rosnes and Spanish Ambassador to Egypt Ramon Gil-Casares Satrustegui separately to discuss improving bilateral relations between Egypt and their respective countries.

## Looking Ahead

- The National Elections Authority **announced** that if the special parliamentary election in Ashmoun results in a runoff vote, the second vote would be held April 2-3 for international residents and April 7-8 for domestic residents. This schedule moves the runoff process forward one week from a previous timetable.



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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.