



# EGYPT PARLIAMENT WATCH



## WEEK IN BRIEF JULY 10–16, 2019

### Summary

- The House of Representatives approved the draft NGO Law on July 15, which will replace the 2017 NGO Law if ratified by President Abdel-Fattah El Sisi. Representatives were critical of the draft law being submitted so close to the end of the legislative session, noting that they did not have an appropriate amount of time to debate it. Despite last-minute attempts to prolong discussions of the draft law, the bill was approved with only seven representatives (notably from the opposition 25-30 Bloc and the Nour Party) reportedly voting against the proposal.
- Speaker of the House Ali Abdel 'Al adjourned the fourth legislative session of the House of Representatives; parliament will remain in summer recess until it reconvenes in October. According to a House report, parliament approved 156 laws and 65 international agreements during the fourth legislative session. Despite a late push, the House failed to pass a law governing a new upper house of parliament as outlined in the recently ratified constitutional amendments.
- Independent media outlet Mada Masr reported a growing divide in the House between Abdel 'Al and other representatives. The report indicated that the representatives have grown increasingly critical of Abdel 'Al's leadership, and that these sentiments have been expressed by Egypt's intelligence apparatus as well.

## Notable Developments

### House Approves New NGO Law:<sup>1</sup>

The House of Representatives [approved](#) the draft NGO Law on July 15 after previously [agreeing](#) to it in principle during plenary session on July 14; the new NGO Law will replace the 2017 NGO Law if ratified by President Abdel-Fattah El Sisi. Though representatives [acknowledged](#) the importance of the bill in preventing unlawful activities and in light of the upcoming United Nations [Universal Periodic Review](#) of Egypt's human rights record, representatives [criticized](#) the government for introducing the bill so late during the legislative session. Speaker of the House Ali Abdel 'Al questioned why the cabinet referred the bill to the House despite parliament typically breaking for summer recess by June 30. Similarly, Social Solidarity Committee Chairman Abdel Hadi al-Qasbi noted that the committee debated the draft law for three days, which he did not believe was an appropriate amount of time to consider the bill.

During voting procedures for the bill on July 15, Representatives Nadia Henry and Hatem Abdel Hameed [submitted](#) two separate requests to prolong discussions of the draft law. Henry's request was rejected by Abdel 'Al for lack of substance, and it is unclear if Hameed's request to revisit utility expenditures for civil society groups' headquarters was acknowledged. Seven representatives reportedly [voted](#) against the draft law, though no official vote count exists. Of the seven representatives, Mada Masr reported they were members of the opposition 25-30 Bloc and Nour Party, as well as Representative Mustafa Bakri who notably rejected the bill. The bill awaits ratification by Sisi before becoming an official law.

### Abdel 'Al Concludes Fourth Legislative Session:

Abdel 'Al [announced](#) the end of the fourth legislative session of the House of Representatives on July 15, prompting summer recess until early October. At the conclusion of Monday's plenary session, Abdel 'Al [thanked](#) multiple parliamentary officials, including his two deputies and members of the General Committee, for their efforts in guiding the House's agenda for the past nine months, while also recognizing representatives in the House for their efforts in promoting the interests of their constituents and the state. Abdel 'Al [praised](#) the "trusting" relationship between the government and the House, and he [described](#) the constitutional amendments as the most significant achievements of the House during the past session. Following the adjournment of the legislative session, the House [published](#) a report of its accomplishments, which reportedly include 156 laws, 65 international agreements, 32 field visits, and 22 requests to lift parliamentary immunity.

### Investigative Piece Reveals Lack of Faith in Abdel 'Al's Leadership:

Mada Masr published an article documenting growing divisions between Abdel 'Al and other parliamentary figures, including members of the General Committee. During plenary session on July 8, representatives grew upset with Abdel 'Al over his demeanor and asserted to him that he had lost control of the legislature. Parliamentary sources speaking to Mada Masr stated that faith in Abdel 'Al is at an all-time low since he became Speaker of the House three years ago. Abdel 'Al has also reportedly lost the support of Egypt's "sovereign entities," referring to the intelligence apparatus and the presidency.

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<sup>1</sup>For more information on the substance and implications of the new NGO Law, please consult TIMEP's [Draft NGO Law of 2019](#) Brief.

## House Considers Prosecutor-General's Requests to Lift Parliamentary Immunity:

The House debated three requests from the prosecutor-general to lift the parliamentary immunity of current representatives. The House [agreed](#) to lift the immunity of Representative Salah Eissa after he allegedly accepted bribes exceeding 2 million Egyptian pounds in exchange for illegal building permits for cemeteries; he is being charged in Case 520 (2019). However, the House refused the prosecutor-general's requests to lift the immunity of Representatives Muhammad Mahmoud Omara and Rania al-Sadat. Omara was accused of assault as part of Case 27077 (2018), while Sadat was accused of illegal economic activity in Case 1 (2018).

## House Fails to Pass Laws Governing Upper House before Summer Recess:

Prior to the House breaking for summer recess, representatives considered two separate draft laws pertaining to a possible second legislative house, though these bills ultimately failed to be approved before the end of the legislative session. Per the constitutional amendments ratified earlier this year, a second upper house was to be established. Social Solidarity Committee Chairman al-Qasbi, who is also the chairman of the Coalition in Support of Egypt, [submitted](#) a draft Senate Establishment Law, which called for a chamber consisting of 240 representatives. The coalition was rumored to be planning on introducing a separate draft law legislating Senate elections, which would have [taken place](#) in October during a 60-day electoral period. Per parliamentary bylaws, the House will be able to revisit and debate pending legislation that has not been voted on, including the law establishing the upper house, during the fifth legislative session in October.

## Russian Parliamentary Delegation Visits Egypt:

Russian Senator Farit Mukhametshin, a member of the Foreign Affairs Committee in the Russian Federation Council, visited Egypt's House of Representatives. Mukametschin, also the leading Russian figure in the Egyptian-Russian Parliamentary Group, [met](#) with his counterparts in the Parliamentary Group on July 15 to discuss bilateral cooperation, primarily in education. Members of the Egyptian parliamentary group, led by Representative Sahar Talaat, were invited to visit Russia in September to continue discussions. Mukhametshin also [attended](#) plenary session on July 15, when Abdel 'Al recognized his visit as indicative of strong bilateral relations.

## Other Developments

### In Legislation:

The House [approved](#) a three-month extension of the state of emergency on July 11, which appeared originally in the Official Gazette on April 23. The extension is set to begin on July 25. Egypt has been under states of emergency nearly continuously since April 2017, and parliament has approved all emergency declarations since then. Egypt's constitution limits states of emergency to three months, with one extension of the same length, though this restriction has been repeatedly circumvented by allowing brief lapses before declaring a new emergency.

The House [approved](#) the Public Shops Law on July 15, which it had previously [agreed](#) upon in principle on December 10. The law [requires](#) shops to acquire operating licenses from a government-led licensing committee before beginning operations; existing shops prior to the law must acquire the proper licensing within one year of the law's implementation. The law also requires businesses regulated under the law to place surveillance cameras around their facilities.

The House [approved](#) the government's Social Insurances and Pensions Law on July 15 after previously [agreeing](#) upon the law in principle on July 10. The law [makes](#) the National Insurance

Commission subordinate to the authority of the Ministry of Social Solidarity, while also allowing the state to invest 75 percent of bonds and bills available in the Treasury Reserve.

The House [approved](#) the amendments to the Economic Courts Law on July 15. The amendments [grant](#) economic courts the ability to hear criminal cases related to money laundering, micro financial activities, and crypto-crimes in addition to others.

The House [approved](#) the amendments to the Lawyer's Syndicate Law on July 15. The amendments [permit](#) the head of the syndicate to serve two four-year terms, and the amendments regulate the process for members of the syndicate to express votes of no confidence in elected members of the union.

The House [approved](#) the government's amendments to the Trade Unions Law on July 11. The amendments reduce the number of workers required to be in an officially recognized union, and it replaces prison sentences under the law with financial penalties.

The House [approved](#) the amendments to the Intellectual Property Rights Law on July 11 after it had [agreed](#) upon the law in principle on July 10. The amendments provide protections for agricultural products (such as seeds) bred by individuals working in the agriculture sector.

The House [approved](#) the government's Supreme Council for Medicine Law on July 11, which states that all public medical employees fall under the authority of the council, a government entity under the auspices of the prime minister.

The House [agreed](#) in principle to the government's amendments to the Private Universities Law on July 10. Under the amendments, the Supreme Commission for Higher Education will be led by the minister for higher education and will also consist of university presidents and educational experts from public and private universities.

The House [agreed](#) in principle to the amendments to the Port Said Development Law on July 10. The amendments clarify budget practices for the Development Authority created under the law, especially financial transactions related to investments.

The House [agreed](#) in principle to the government's amendments to the Stamp Tax Law, which imposes a tax on stamps ranging from 1.25 to 1.75 percent.

### **In Session:**

Representative Rida al-Beltagi of the Energy Committee [submitted](#) a briefing request on the delivery of a drinking water station in Sheikh al-Shoban, Cairo.

According to a report from *Yum7*, representatives [received](#) 130 messages from constituents on WhatsApp during the month of June.

The African Affairs Committee [published](#) a document detailing its diplomatic accomplishments during the fourth legislative session, which included visits to 12 other countries, 27 meetings with ambassadors, and 16 meetings with public officials from other countries.

## In News and Statements:

Free Egyptians Party Chairman Essam Khalil [stated](#) that the party has been meeting with several international organizations to discuss Turkey's human rights violations, and the party intends to submit a report on the matter before the United Nations Human Rights Council in Geneva.

Representative Abdel Rahim Ali of the Arab Affairs Committee [praised](#) the recent announcement that Sisi will visit France in August, calling the trip an opportunity to expand Egyptian-French relations in several fields.

A delegation from the Libyan House of Representatives, associated with the Libyan National Army led by Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar, [visited](#) Egypt's House of Representatives July 14 to discuss the ongoing security situation in Libya as well as Turkish involvement in the conflict.

## Looking Ahead

- Abdel 'Al [announced](#) that plenary sessions will be broadcast live during the upcoming legislative session beginning in October.
- Representative Mahmoud al-Saidi of the Economic Affairs Committee [stated](#) that the House is expected to debate the draft Local Administration Law during the next legislative session starting in October.



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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.