WEEK IN BRIEF  JUNE 27–JULY 9, 2019

Summary

• The cabinet referred a draft NGO law to the House, which would replace the 2017 NGO Law if approved.¹ The 2019 draft law covers funding issues with domestic and foreign civil society groups, eliminates prison sentences in exchange for harsher financial penalties for violating the law, and permits the Ministry of Social Solidarity to suspend an organization’s operations before obtaining judicial consent. The bill is being debated in the Social Solidarity Committee, and is expected to be approved by the House by Thursday, July 11.

• Speaker of the House Ali Abdel ‘Al traveled to Russia to participate in the International Forum on Parliamentary Development. On the sidelines of the forum, Abdel ‘Al also met with various officials in the Russian parliament.

• The House will conclude its fourth legislative session on July 11 and will adjourn for its summer recess until October.

¹For more information on the 2019 draft NGO Law, please consult TIMEP’s Draft Law Brief.
Notable Developments

House Committee Debating New Draft NGO Law to Replace 2017 Law:

The cabinet referred a draft NGO law to the House of Representatives after the cabinet had previously approved the draft law in April. The 2019 draft law would replace Law No. 70 of 2017 if approved. The 2019 draft law would eliminate prison sentences for individuals who violate the contents of the bill, and would eradicate the National Agency to Regulate the Work of Foreign NGOs, an entity filled with security personnel created under the 2017 law. While these parts of the draft law represent notable changes compared to the 2017 law, the 2019 draft law also defines the purpose of nongovernmental organizations as “societal development;” requires foreign NGOs to apply to the Ministry of Social Solidarity to be recognized as an official group; requires all NGOs, whether foreign or domestic, to seek approval from the Ministry of Social Solidarity for funding sources; and allows the Ministry of Social Solidarity to temporarily halt an organization’s activities prior to acquiring judicial approval. After being referred to the House, the draft law was sent to the Social Solidarity Committee, where its members debated the bill throughout multiple committee sessions on July 8 and 9. Committee Chairman Abdel Hadi al-Qasbi said the bill could be approved by the entire House as early as Thursday, July 11.

Abdel ‘Al Travels to Russia for Parliamentary Development Conference:

Speaker of the House Ali Abdel ‘Al traveled to Russia between June 30 and July 4 to attend the International Forum on Parliamentary Development and meet with various Russian officials. While addressing the congregated group at the forum, Abdel ‘Al emphasized the importance of parliamentary work on national security issues, especially digital security. In a separate speech discussing regional cooperation between Africa and Russia, Abdel ‘Al underscored the importance of the African continent based on its youth population and plentiful natural resources. Abdel ‘Al also spoke about means in which Russia can interact with the African Union and its member states, including economic development through private-public partnerships, youth development, and regional matters of mutual concern. On the sidelines of the forum, Abdel ‘Al met with Valentina Matviyenko, chairwoman of the upper house of the Russian parliament, to discuss coordination on political and security issues, the resumption of flights between Russia and Sharm el-Sheikh, and other issues of mutual concern. Abdel ‘Al also met with Vyacheslav Volodin, Speaker of the Duma, to discuss the recent “2+2” summit between their countries’ respective defense and foreign ministers, regional issues, and economic cooperation especially in the Suez Canal.

Other Developments

In Legislation:

The House of Representatives approved the government’s amendments to the Trade Unions Law on July 9. The amendments reduce the required number of workers to comprise an officially recognized trade union and its various committees, and the law replaces prison sentences for violations of the law with financial penalties.

The House approved the government’s amendments to the Mineral Resources Law on July 8. The amendments grant the Egyptian General Authority for Mineral Resources the power to distribute permits for exploitation of mines and quarries, and require a one-percent fee to be paid to the state for each licensing fee.
The House approved the government’s amendments to the Nationality Law on July 7, which requires foreign-born residents seeking Egyptian citizenship to pay a fee of 10,000 Egyptian pounds as part of the application process.

The House agreed in principle to the government’s amendments to the Economic Courts Law on July 9, which would grant economic courts the ability to hear criminal cases regarding money laundering, microfinance activities, and electronic financial crimes, among others. The law also addresses technological concerns with economic courts and their structure.

The House agreed in principle to the amendments to the Lawyers Syndicate Law on July 8. The amendments permit the director of the syndicate to serve a maximum of two four-year terms, and the bill would also regulate the process for expressing a vote of no confidence in elected syndicate members. Some representatives criticized the amendments to the Lawyers Syndicate Law, stating that it was drafted to allow current Syndicate Chairman Sameh Ashour to seek a third term as union head. Despite the two-term limit under the amendments, representatives fear that Ashour would be able to run for another term, as his current term will not have ended before the law takes effect.

In Session:

For its committee meeting on July 9, the Agriculture Committee requested the presence of officials from the Ministries of Agriculture, Irrigation, Business Sector, and Finances to discuss its recent delegation to the governorate of Daqhalia last month.

The Defense Committee convened July 9 to discuss the Ministry of Interior’s strategy to treat refugees. Committee Chairman Kamal Amer asserted that Egypt treats the roughly 5 million refugees in Egypt as “its children.”

Abdel Al rejected a request to lift an undisclosed representative’s immunity due to an incomplete form within the request.

The Local Administration Committee received permission from the Ministry of Youth and Sports to upgrade two youth centers located in Beni Suef.

In News and Statements:

Representative Said Hassasein of the Tourism Committee stated that the House intends to form a committee to investigate the Egyptian Football Association and hold its officials accountable in light of the team’s disappointing performance in the African Cup of Nations.

Abdel Al welcomed Sheref Sabawy, an Egyptian-Canadian member of the Ontario provincial parliament, on July 8. Sabawy recently led a successful legislative push in Ontario to declare July Egyptian Heritage Month. The two officials met privately with parliamentary leadership to discuss the role of Egyptians abroad.

Abdel Al met with Fawzia Zainal, Speaker of the Council of Representatives of Bahrain, on July 2 to discuss bilateral relations and security concerns in the Gulf.

Representative Nidal al-Said of the Media Committee stated that Google could assist the development of small businesses in Egypt. Nidal’s statement follows the company’s announcement that it plans to reopen its office in Cairo.

Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Karim Darwish praised President Abdel-Fattah El Sisi’s participation in the G20 Summit as representative of Egypt’s increasing economic clout.
During a delegation trip to Djibouti on June 27, Abdel ‘Al met with Djibouti President Ismail Omar Guelleh to discuss economic development and regional security concerns. During a separate meeting on his visit, Abdel ‘Al met with Mohamed Ali Houmed, Speaker of the National Assembly of Djibouti, to discuss economic cooperation, regional developments, and parliamentary cooperation.

**Looking Ahead**

- Abdel ‘Al announced that the House of Representatives will break for its summer recess on Thursday, July 11. The House was scheduled to break for its summer recess on Tuesday but outstanding legislation required that parliament remain in session for two additional days.