



PRESS RELEASE

Berlin and Amman, 03 February 2010

“Jordan risks democratic stagnation if it misses this opportunity for substantive reform “

Jordan’s Prime Minister Samir Rifai told reporters on Sunday that new draft election legislation will be ready in two months’ time. This will form the basis for regional and parliamentary elections announced by King Abdullah II in November 2009 after he dissolved the Lower House of Parliament and initiated a de-centralisation process which is set to lead to the creation of new elected regional bodies.

“If this opportunity for substantive reform is missed, Jordan risks continued democratic stagnation.” warns Democracy Reporting International’s director, Michael Meyer-Resende. ***“More elected bodies only mean more democracy if elections are genuine and based on laws that meet international standards.”***

Welcoming Prime Minister Samir Rafai’s pledge to listen to opinions from across the political spectrum as well as civil society institutions, Democracy Reporting’s director said *“This reform initiative presents an opportunity to re-examine and remedy the shortcomings of the temporary legislation under which the 2007 elections were held.”*

In co-operation with the Al-Urdun Al-Jadid Research Center (UJRC) in Amman, Democracy Reporting International (DRI) has analysed Jordan’s legal framework and issued a list of key recommendations calling for a more equal distribution of parliamentary seats to ensure equal suffrage and more transparency in the voting and counting process, two key shortcomings which have impaired Jordan’s elections in the past¹.

“Our recommendations on how Jordan should adjust the election law to meet international democratic standards are on the table.” says Hani Hourani, Director General of Al Urdun Al Jadid Research Center. ***“If the government wants to meet its promise of holding parliamentary elections by the end of the year, it must undertake immediate practical steps to reform the current electoral system”*** he added.

¹ For a full assessment of Jordan’s current election law see “Assessment of the Electoral Framework, The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan”, http://democracy-reporting.org/frameworks_jordan.html

Jordan ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) in 1975. One of Jordan's key obligations under the ICCPR is it to ensure "genuine periodic elections" and "universal and equal suffrage"² to its citizens. In order for Jordan to meet its obligations Democracy Reporting International recommends the following:³

1) Guaranteeing Equal Suffrage

A new Election Law should provide guarantees for equal suffrage: Each seat in the Chamber of Deputies should represent a broadly similar number of registered voters or population. Currently there are large discrepancies in how many registered voters are represented by each seat. In its most extreme case some 52,256 registered voters in Amman's second district are represented by one Deputy, while in Karak's sixth election district there is one representative for 5,696 registered voters.

2) Strengthen the Transparency of the Electoral Process

A new Election Law should guarantee that all decisions and internal procedures by the election administration relating to a parliamentary electoral process are published promptly.

It should establish a right for candidates to follow the whole election process and gain access to all information. In particular, candidates or their representatives should have the right to receive an official copy of the results from every polling station.

3) Allow Effective Complaints

All stakeholders should have the right to lodge a complaint to a higher electoral body or an appeal to a court against any act, decision or omission that they deem to be a violation of the law. A new Election Law should establish an effective and clear framework for complaints. Currently the lower house determines the validity of its own election.

A new Election Law should establish the right for non-partisan groups in Jordan to observe the entire electoral process and to provide for similar access by international observers for both parliamentary and regional elections.

4) Reform of the Election Administration

Consideration should be given to establishing a professional and permanent election administration that is independent from the Ministry of Interior and other branches of government. These recommendations apply equally for legislation relating to national and regional elections.

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² Art. 25 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)

³ For a full assessment of Jordan's current election law see "Assessment of the Electoral Framework, The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan", http://democracy-reporting.org/frameworks_jordan.html