

To Secure Funds and Establish A Definitive Date for The Municipal Elections

Both government branches, the executive and legislative, continue to undermine the importance of municipal elections as if they were insignificant obligations that can be disregarded based on the authority's own agenda. This continuous violation of the constitution and the law not only robs the people of their voices but also deprives them of their right to choose their representatives at the local level.

After extending the mandate of municipal councils in the parliamentary session until May 31, 2024, at the latest, the Constitutional Council decided to reject the three appeals submitted by a number of deputies regarding the extension law, citing "the principle of the continuity of public institutions". This decision was made despite the Council's acknowledgment, in its decision summary, that "the law being challenged violates the principle of periodic elections."

While the decision of the Constitutional Council reaffirms the government's consistent disregard for the Constitution, the law, and the rights of the people, we, the undersigned associations and civil society organizations, call upon:

- The Minister of Interior to set a definitive date for the municipal elections as soon as possible.
- The government to secure the needed funds to cover the expenses of the municipal elections.

Moreover, we strongly oppose the use of the financial shortage as a pretext for prolonging the election delay, particularly in light of the repeated allocation of funds by the Cabinet for numerous unrelated matters.

Here, we recall the Prime Minister's statement during the parliamentary session, held on April 18, 2023, that approved the extension, where he addressed President Berri, saying: "We met with the Minister of Interior and decided to allocate additional funding to fulfill the municipal obligations, and in the Cabinet, we have prepared a draft law to secure additional allocations."

We also recall the meeting between the Prime Minister and the Minister of Interior one day after the extension, where they agreed that the Minister would prepare "the necessary updated budget for conducting the elections, in order to secure the required funds for them."

In this context, and as we have not yet witnessed any indication from the Ministry or the government regarding the imminent conduct of the elections, we believe that the responsibility does not solely lie with the government and the Ministry of Interior, but also with the Parliament, which has, in turn, relinquished its responsibilities.

While the Parliament was supposed to allocate funds for conducting the elections on their designated date, it instead summoned to approve the extension. The extension itself was ambiguous, as the Parliament approved it for a maximum period of one year and left it to the Ministry of Interior to determine its readiness to hold the elections within this year. Also, the justifications provided for the extension obviously demonstrated how the authorities view this obligation with complete disregard. Moreover, approving the extension in this manner opens the door for subjecting the elections to a process of settlements and role exchanges between the Parliament and the government, rather than allowing the Parliament to fulfill its role in overseeing the government and ensuring the application of the constitution and the law, as well as respecting the popular will.

We are witnessing daily resignations of municipal councils in several towns, adding burdens to governors and qaimaqams who will be unable to meet the needs of the population on one hand, and depriving citizens of having effective municipal councils that represent them and manage their affairs on the other hand.

Besides, the repeated postponement of elections has a negative impact on citizens' interest and engagement in municipal work, particularly among women and youth. This situation leads to a competition that is often limited to prominent families, influential individuals, or members of political parties and groups who have the resources and capacity to participate in the electoral process.

Therefore, we restate our demand to the Minister of Interior to set new dates for the elections as soon as possible, so that everyone can be prepared for this important event, including potential candidates, voters, and concerned civil society organizations. In this context, we strongly reject using financial and logistical difficulties as an excuse to postpone the elections, referring to the strikes by public sector employees. It is the government's responsibility to address these challenges instead of using them as a pretext for delaying the elections.

That said, we reaffirm that municipal elections are not insignificant matters that the authorities can treat with disregard and indifference. They represent a fundamental and constitutional obligation, and tampering with them undermines the principles of democracy, power-sharing, and popular representation.

Signatories

1. Adyan Foundation
2. Alternative Press Syndicate
3. Beity Association
4. Committee of the Families of the Kidnapped and Disappeared in Lebanon- CFKDL
5. FiftyFifty
6. Lebanese Association for Democratic Elections- LADE
7. Lebanese Centre for Human Rights- CLDH
8. Lebanese Center for Policy Studies- LCPS
9. Lebanese Union for Physical Disabilities- LUPD
10. Legal Agenda
11. Madanyat for Equality
12. Maharat Foundation
13. NAHNOO
14. Ondes
15. SEEDS for Legal Initiatives
16. Samir Kassir Foundation
17. Transparency International- Lebanon
18. Abir Chebaro- Feminist Activist
19. Dr. Josephine Zougheib- Political and Social Activist
20. Myriam Sfeir- Feminist Activist