



Electoral Reform Consortium: Extension of Municipal Councils Elections is Rejected and Alternatives are Available



Press Conference| Electoral Reform Consortium: Ammar Abboud, LADE; Roula Mikhael, MAHARAT; Sylvana Lakkis, LUPD, Julian Courson, Transparency International - Lebanon; Dayana El Baba, LADE.

With less than two months remaining until the scheduled date of municipal and Mukhtar elections, set for May 2024, and at a stage where we should be witnessing the peak of preparations and electoral campaigns, there are no indications suggesting actual readiness to implement the mandate on time.

On the contrary, political and media circles are speculating about the possibility of another extension of municipal councils, in a scenario that would not be the first of its kind, following two consecutive extensions by the parliament in 2022 and 2023.

While the government and parliament cited unsubstantiated reasons to justify the extensions in 2022 and 2023, such as logistical unpreparedness, economic conditions, and presidential vacuum, today the pretext of security conditions resulting from Israeli airstrikes on several Lebanese areas, especially southern Lebanon, is added, as stated in numerous statements by political officials.

We have learned that preparations for the extension have begun, despite the Minister of Interior declaring readiness of his ministry and setting possible days for holding the elections, and despite allocating funds to cover municipal election expenses within the 2024 budget. However, this has not been reflected in reality, as if everyone is waiting for the suitable excuse for extension, which explains the back-and-forth once again between the government and parliament, with the Minister of Interior and Municipalities announcing that he is “forced to hold municipal elections on time unless the parliament decides otherwise.”

Based on the above, **the Electoral Reform Consortium warns against any hidden plans by the parliament to postpone municipal elections for the third consecutive time, affirming that the government is legally obligated to hold the elections in May**, regardless of any other considerations. **The Consortium emphasizes the need to form a committee to develop a guidance plan to facilitate the participation of persons with disabilities in elections**, both in candidacy and voting, and to immediately start preparing polling centers and to start training those involved in the electoral process on how to deal with voters with disabilities.

The Consortium stresses that the rule must be holding elections on time as a commitment to the constitution and the law, and as respect for the principles of democracy, popular representation, and the rotation of power, at a time when the behavior of some parliamentary blocs indicates that the basis upon which authority relies is agreeing on extensions, only to then search for excuses to justify them.

And while the Consortium expresses its full solidarity with the residents of Southern Lebanon and all areas targeted by Israeli airstrikes since October 8, 2024 and emphasizes the necessity of considering this matter during election preparations, it insists that the solution should not be the extension of municipal councils under any circumstances.

In this context, the Electoral Reform Consortium points out that the situation resulting from the Israeli airstrikes should be an incentive to hold elections, not to postpone them, given the role that municipalities must play in dealing with escalating crisis, especially given that around 134 municipalities out of approximately 1,064 are currently dissolved, a number likely to increase in case of another extension of municipal councils.

Moreover, the increasing number of displaced people from areas under attack, who are increasing day by day, urgently need active municipal councils to manage their crises. **Therefore, the presence of local authorities is necessary, not only in the south but across Lebanon, especially in light of the central authority's failure to fulfill its duties.**

If justifying the scenario of postponing elections is based on refusing to expose southern citizens to danger in the current circumstances, **the Consortium affirms the existence of alternative options that the authorities can resort to, preserving the constitutional, democratic, and fundamental principles, instead of opting for the easier, and perhaps more convenient, choice of extension.**

Among these options, for example, is working on **implementing the Megacenters project by establishing large polling centers to allow displaced people to vote outside the south if the security situation stabilizes**, as previously happened during the Israeli occupation of the south when alternative polling stations were allocated for voters from the occupied areas to enable them to vote in parliamentary elections.

However, if that is not possible due to security, technical, or logistical reasons, the **government can postpone elections in specific areas**, considering that conducting municipal elections in different stages is possible because municipalities are not a unified body like parliament, and thus elections can be held in safe areas and postponed in less secure ones.

The Consortium recalls a precedent in this regard, specifically in the municipal elections held in Lebanon in 1998 during the Israeli occupation of several areas in southern Lebanon, where elections in occupied towns were postponed until after the liberation of the south in 2000.

From this perspective, **the Electoral Reform Consortium calls on parliament not to violate the constitution and the law by adopting any new extension law.** The Consortium also announces that it will visit various parliamentary blocs to emphasize its rejection of extension.

While the Consortium emphasizes the difficulty of the circumstances all Lebanese are going through, especially in areas affected by Israeli airstrikes, it rejects the exploitation of the situation by some parliamentary blocs to justify postponing elections; the same blocs that have used all the excuses to justify repeatedly violating the constitution.

The Consortium concludes by sounding the alarm through this press conference that the third postponement of municipal and local elections, if approved, comes within a continuous context of paralysis and obstruction, amid a presidential vacuum that has

become a passing matter for many, as if there is an underlying plan to empty the state of any effective institution, which we cannot overlook.

The Consortium concludes its press conference by sounding the alarm about the potential approval of the third postponement of municipal and local elections. This delay would occur within a continuous context of paralysis and obstruction, amid a presidential vacuum that has become a passing matter for many, as if there is an underlying plan to empty the state of any effective institution, which we cannot overlook

The Electoral Reform Consortium:

- **Lebanese Union for People with Physical Disabilities - LUPD**
- **Lebanese Association for Democratic Elections – LADE**
- **Transparency International Lebanon - No Corruption**
- **Maharat Foundation**

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