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**Jordan Royal Discussion Paper II:
Making Our Democratic System Work for All Jordanians
King Abdullah II
Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan**

Note: Responding to popular demands within the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan for political reforms King Abdullah II has announced a series of Royal Discussion Papers outlining his vision. The first in the series was published on 29 December 2012 and was followed by two other Discussion Papers on 16 January and 3 March 2013. The first two were published before the parliament elections held on 22 January 2013. Given the importance of these Royal Documents, the MEI@ND is publishing them for wider dissemination and deliberations. Earlier Paper was published on **Monday** and the third would be published on **Wednesday**. **Editor, MEI@MD.**

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Democracy is fundamentally something active, something we do as citizens and as a country. In Jordan, the basis for our democracy is the Constitution, which for close to 90 years has provided the framework for how we make public choices and decisions. This is the foundation, but our laws and institutions must continue to evolve and develop. We have made much progress on this path in recent years. We have amended one third of the Constitution and established the Constitutional Court and the Independent Electoral Commission. This enhanced the separation of powers, the checks and balances of our governance system, the independence of our judiciary and the inalienable rights of our citizens. These actions empower the Jordanian people to shape the country's future in a way that is more transparent, fair and inclusive than ever before.

Now we need to build on this foundation.

Crafting a modern democratic society will be the product of our learning and developing together over time, not a single moment or set of reforms. Reform is not merely a question of changes to laws and regulations. It requires an evolution in how citizens, civil servants and the representatives entrusted to make decisions on behalf of citizens operate and interact within the current system. As I outlined in my first paper, our commitment to active citizenship, respect and accountability, shared gain and sacrifice, and dialogue and compromise along our journey, is critical to our success as a nation.

In this paper, I want to discuss another critical aspect of our democratic development –the transition to parliamentary government.

The principles underpinning our journey are clear. We will nurture and protect political pluralism and develop the appropriate checks and balances for a properly functioning democracy. We will strengthen and enhance our civil society and ensure a level playing field for political competition. The rights of all citizens, especially those of minorities, will be safeguarded as per our Constitution. The key question we must answer together is how our institutions and systems will continue to enshrine and protect these principles as we make our transition. Make no mistake, there will be some setbacks, but more successes, and all of it will be subject to public scrutiny. But this is normal, for such developments are necessary to any emerging democracy and are a clear sign of its authenticity and credibility.

The Architecture of Our New Democratic System in Context

The fundamental principle of modern democracy is that the people elect representatives to make important public decisions on behalf of the country as a whole.

As countries have developed their democratic systems, a variety of models have emerged for the implementation of this democratic principle. In a republic, for example, there are both presidential and parliamentary systems. In a presidential system (for example, France), the president is elected and can often appoint the government directly, although the approval of parliament may still be required. In a parliamentary system (for example, Turkey), the government is often appointed by a Prime Minister from the elected parliament's majority party or coalition of parties.

In a constitutional monarchy, similar to the parliamentary system in a republic, the government is often formed from the elected majority party or coalition of parties in the legislative assembly (much like Spain and Belgium).

There are multiple variations on each of these models, and there is no single 'correct' solution for all countries. Each nation's system reflects its unique history and culture. Today, Egypt and

Tunisia are evolving republics. Morocco, like Jordan, is a constitutional monarchy. Our constitutional monarchy has changed and evolved for the past nine decades and will continue to do so. The next stage is an evolution in how we select our Government.

The Transition to True Parliamentary Government

As I have said before, the path towards deepening our democracy lies in moving toward parliamentary government, where the majority coalition in Parliament forms the Government. After the upcoming elections, we will start piloting a parliamentary government system, including how our Prime Ministers and Cabinets are selected. International experience suggests this will require several parliamentary cycles to develop and mature. The key driver of the timeline for this transition is our success in developing national political parties whereby they capture the majority of votes by citizens and with competent leaders capable of assuming positions in our Government.

Historically, the Prime Minister and Ministers have been chosen for their leadership qualities and expertise, and approved by a vote of confidence in Parliament. Our Ministries have depended on their knowledge and experience to manage the challenges facing Jordan. Without properly functioning national political parties to develop national platforms and build coalitions, as well as capable of capturing the majority of votes by citizens, it has historically been the exception rather than the rule for the Government to include serving Members of Parliament.

However, it is important that we start building our system of parliamentary government. As a first step, we will change how the Prime Minister is designated after this upcoming election.

- The new prime minister, while not necessarily an MP, will be designated based on consultation with the majority coalition of parliamentary blocs.
- If no clear majority emerges initially, then the designation will be based upon consultation with all parliamentary blocs.
- The Prime Minister-designate will then consult with the parliamentary blocs to form the new parliamentary government and agree on its program, which will still have to obtain and maintain the Lower House's vote of confidence.

I have no doubt that we will continue to refine this process as we learn from our experience and as our new system matures, but I look forward to this immediate next step towards full parliamentary government.

The Conditions for a Successful Transition

Full parliamentary government depends on the development of three conditions that ensure continued expertise and effectiveness:

First, we will need to see the emergence of true national parties that aggregate specific and local interests into a national platform for action. This will take some time. However, as more seats in Parliament come to be held by political parties that compete nationwide, based on national platforms for four-year programs and then form solid parliamentary blocs, our ability to draw Ministers from those seats will become greater.

Second, our Civil Service will need to further develop its professional, impartial non-political abilities to support and advise the Ministers of parliamentary governments. Parliamentary governments mean that Ministers appointed to a particular portfolio may not have had previous experience in that field. It is vital that the civil service be the repository of highly professional technical advice and that Ministers ask for and act upon the expert opinion and advice provided by the Civil Service.

The third condition is a change in Parliamentary conventions, the way Parliament works, to support parliamentary government. Parliament will be able to begin to develop these conventions after this election and can build them further over time. Ultimately, these conventions will guide the formation of Governments through consultation and consensus among parliamentary blocs. This will require a shared understanding of how such blocs can agree on common policy platforms as a basis for cooperation and stable Government. Opposition parties will similarly need to agree on conventions for how they cooperate in holding the Government to account and offer an alternative vision – their role is just as crucial for successful Government.

Looking Ahead: Roles and Responsibilities

The more quickly and completely these conditions are fulfilled, the more successful our transition to parliamentary government can and will be. As we make that transition, it will be important that different groups and institutions in our political society take on new and changing roles and responsibilities. In my next paper, I will describe what I believe are the roles and responsibilities of different actors in our system, and make some proposals as to how they should change in the coming years.

Source: Home page of King Abdullah II of Jordan,

http://kingabdullah.jo/index.php/en_US/pages/view/id/248.html

The text of the Royal Discussion Paper I on **Our Journey to Forge Our Path towards Democracy** can be accessed at: <http://mei.org.in/front/cms/publicationsDetail.php?id=NjE3>

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