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**Jordan Royal Discussion Paper III:
Each Playing Our Part in a New Democracy
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 Papers were published on Monday and Tuesday.
Editor, MEI@MD.

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The transition to parliamentary government, like democracy itself, is always work in progress. Stakeholders at every level must constantly be aware of their role in shaping the future. In this third discussion paper on Jordan's political evolution, I would like to focus on our collective way forward, after the landmark parliamentary elections of 23 January 2013.

These elections had double significance: They were important per se, and marked a milestone on Jordan's reform path. The democratic and transparent environment in which these elections were held earned them unprecedented national, Arab, and international praise. Voter registration reached 70 per cent, and the almost 57 per cent turnout was one of highest in our history and internationally. Such participation compares favourably with recent Arab elections, approaching the 62 per cent turnouts in Egypt and Libya, and significantly higher than Morocco's 45 per cent

(a result which itself deservedly won international praise). Another noteworthy feature in Jordan was urban participation, which increased by approximately 30 per cent in Amman and Zarqa.

The importance of our election was reflected in the record number of candidates. Eighty percent of political parties participated. First-time Members of Parliament (MPs) make up 61 percent of the new Parliament, showing that the country is more than capable of political renewal.

These polls – overseen for the first time by an independent electoral commission, and monitored by international and local observers – brought about a much more representative Parliament. There are blocs from across the spectrum, representing nationalist, Islamist, and leftist parties, as well as popular movements' leaders and activists. The election of eighteen women is a source of special pride: Three women won as leaders of national tickets and local district representatives, in addition to the 15 women who sit in the new Parliament under the women's quota.

We shall continue to build on this experience, develop and enhance it. All Jordanians can, and I hope will, contribute, through their continuous, active and responsible participation. But to be effective, parliamentary government will also require properly functioning national political parties with strong platforms, based on a solid framework of national democratic values, enrooted as a democratic culture not just in our institutions but also in our political life. The challenge ahead, for all elements of our political system and all Jordanians, is to deepen this culture.

The values needed for a successful democratic transition to parliamentary government are long familiar to Jordanians. Among the most essential are pluralism, tolerance, the rule of law, separation of powers, protection of the inalienable rights of every citizen and group, and guaranteeing that every shade of political opinion gets a fair chance to compete at the ballot boxes. All these guarantees are essential to ensure that at each stage of our country's evolution, both the will of the majority and the rights of all can be secured. In this context, it is essential that we keep developing our electoral system, through our constitutional institutions, so that it becomes fairer and more representative, nurtures pluralism, provides a level playing field, and is conducive to the formation of party-based parliamentary governments.

The basic form of parliamentary government stipulates a relationship between the legislative and executive authorities whereby the executive is accountable to the parliamentary majority through the vote of confidence. This is what the Jordanian Constitution stipulates. Among the major developments we have achieved in this regard through the recent constitutional amendments was the change to the vote of confidence mechanism. Now a parliamentary majority is required to grant confidence in the Prime Minister and government-designate as well as its policy statement,

while in the past a parliamentary majority was required to deny confidence in the government-designate.

Our efforts to deepen parliamentary government will develop gradually and in tandem with the development of political parties and parliamentary work over the coming parliamentary cycles. This approach was also developed by introducing a mechanism for consultations with the Lower House to achieve consensus on the designation of a Prime Minister, who, in turn, will have to consult with the Lower House on the Cabinet's composition and the policy statement that will constitute the government's program.

In various international parliamentary government practices, the Prime Minister-designate and Cabinet team may emanate from Parliament or not, or the Cabinet may be a mix of MPs and technocrats. General political practice in parliamentary governments worldwide allows for MPs to serve as ministers, and so does our Constitution, but in parallel with a set of fundamental requirements:

- The first is an advanced set of checks-and-balances that preserves the separation of powers and stipulates monitoring tools.
- The second is the gradual inclusion of MPs in the Cabinet in parallel to the evolution of political parliamentary and political parties work, reflected in the institutionalization and development of parliamentary blocs, whereby they become increasingly platform-based and solid, and eventually party-based. The timeline for this will depend on our ability to develop effective national parties based on platforms. The transition to parliamentary government will deepen as parliamentary and political parties' work matures over coming parliamentary cycles, reaching a stage in which political parties compete in elections on the basis of their platforms, and independents are also allowed to compete. This will ultimately lead to the emergence, on the one hand, of a parliamentary coalition on party basis that enjoys House majority and forms governments, and, on the other hand, of an opposition parliamentary coalition that serves as "shadow government."
- The third is to develop Civil Service's work so that it becomes more professional, neutral and apolitical, so that it serves as a trusted reference and source of technical support for parliamentary government ministers in their decision-making.

The on-going national debate provides a constructive democratic framework to deepen our parliamentary government experience and develop the mechanism for consultations on the selection of the next Prime Minister and whether to include MPs in government and in what percentage.

Every actor in our political system – every institution and public figure, but most importantly, each of you, as citizens – has a vital role to play in deepening and strengthening this democratic culture. In what follows, I would like to discuss the evolution of these roles, including my role as monarch, and the responsibilities we all must assume as engaged and responsible citizens.

I. The Role of Political Parties:

Democracy is not just about individuals expressing opinions and points of view. It is about aggregating what individuals say into a set of concrete proposals for joint action that will move the country forward. This is the key role of political parties.

In recent years, I have outlined on many occasions my vision for our political system: A small number of major, nationally based political parties, representing views across the spectrum. Only such a system is capable of offering the competition of ideas Jordan needs, as well as achieving the necessary parliamentary consensus on actions to be taken.

It will take us time to develop political parties with the breadth and capability to play this role. In other modern transitioning democracies, such as those in Eastern Europe during the 1990s, it took several election cycles and more than a decade for fragile, fragmented party structures to coalesce into true national parties that could govern effectively. But the alternative to properly functioning, national political parties is a continuation of weak coalitions, pieced together out of political expediency rather than solidly built on meaningful party platforms and ideas. In other countries, such conditions have produced unstable, unrepresentative governments, and Jordan deserves better.

The focus in the future should be on how to promote national political parties so that voters vote for party based candidates. In this respect, Jordan's political parties have a challenge and a responsibility:

- To help develop and sustain a national perspective in political life. The national lists in this election were an attempt in this process, one we can assess and learn from as we go forward. We can also learn from other nations' experiences in accelerating political parties' growth. But we must appreciate that political maturity comes from experience, guided by the will of the people through the ballot box.
- To work together around shared principles and policy priorities. I encourage all parties, groups and independents represented in this Parliament to come together around common policy concerns and viewpoints. Creating larger parliamentary blocs can contribute to both parliamentary effectiveness and political development.

- To champion clear party platforms and a professional party process. A fragmented system of weak parties will not earn the trust or engagement of the Jordanian people. To overcome existing public scepticism, political parties will need robust policy platforms that respond to voters' hopes and concerns. Parties need to run professional campaigns aimed at articulating their policies to the nation, winning elections, and forming governments.

It is my hope that the process of party formation and development takes place as fast as possible in the coming years. I encourage all Jordanians to participate in forging new, broad-based and representative political parties for our future.

II. The Role of Parliament and Parliamentarians:

It is the solemn duty of Parliament to enact legislation in the best interest of the country and also to hold the Government to account for its decisions. Parliament, in turn, is accountable to the citizens who elected its members. This is the basis for the important responsibilities each MP must fulfil:

- To serve as an honest public servant. In this matter, there can be no compromise: MPs must act in the public interest at all times. Those who serve personal or private interests, or who act on the basis of short-term or populist considerations that are not in the nation's long-term interests, fail the people who elected them and all Jordanians. This is a dereliction of duty, and at its worst, a form of corruption.
- To balance local and national interests. MPs represent the needs of local constituencies, yet must also work together to advance the interests of the Kingdom as a whole. Achieving this balance is one of the most challenging tasks of any MP – but it is the task and the honour of anyone who accepts elected office. MPs best fulfil their dual role through sustainable, broad-interest solutions. Far more constituents can be served, far better and for far longer, when an MP endorses and contributes to policies and programmes that alleviate unemployment and poverty, and acts vigorously and transparently to create local development and jobs, rather than when an MP pressures a government official to give some constituents a public job.
- To balance the need for collaboration with the need for constructive opposition. Striking this balance is the art of effective politics. Parliamentarians must work with each other and with the government to make progress in addressing national challenges. This need to collaborate recognizes the fact that MPs are members of one body, Parliament, with a duty to perform; and that the government, too, has a mandate to implement its programme. This reflects the principle of separation of powers, and prevents the

encroachment of one branch of government over the other. At the same time, MPs can and must hold the government to account, by constructively challenging proposals and suggesting alternatives, rather than theorizing or over-diagnosing the challenges we face instead of suggesting solutions to take us forward within available and sustainable means. This is an invaluable and necessary part of our democracy. It must never be abused as a tool to pursue narrow individual interests or character assassination, or to block proposals simply in order to undermine political opponents. The right balance between collaboration and constructive opposition will determine the effectiveness of future Parliaments.

- To work with the government on the basis of objectivity, not opportunism. To fulfil their public duties, the two branches of government must have a working relationship that is free of pressure and appeasement. The focus must be on the public interest alone. This is essential in the consultation process that leads to the designation of the Prime Minister, the formation of the Cabinet, and its programme. To ensure that this and other processes are not held hostage to pressure, appeasement, and favouritism, parliamentary blocs and political parties have a major monitoring role.

In the days ahead, I encourage all MPs and parliamentary blocs to work with determination to develop a parliamentary code of conduct, and internal bylaws of Parliament that will enshrine these responsibilities and translate them into practice. III.

III. The Role of the Prime Minister and Council of Ministers:

It is the responsibility of the government, led by the Prime Minister and Council of Ministers, to formulate and implement a comprehensive programme of action to enhance the prosperity and security of all Jordanians. The government must present its four-year programme to Parliament and is then held accountable for its implementation.

As we move into a new era of parliamentary government, the role of Prime Minister, as well as the skills and attributes required for the post, will evolve. In addition to leading a team of highly competent Ministers and mobilizing the resources of the Civil Service to implement the government's programme in a transparent, timely and efficient manner, the Prime Minister must also interact effectively with a wide range of stakeholders, most importantly the Parliament. Responsibilities that are essential today will become even more vital:

- To earn and maintain the confidence of Parliament. Parliament supports the government by enacting legislation to authorize its actions, and, on behalf of all citizens, holds government to account. Prime Ministers and Cabinets must thus secure and maintain the confidence of Parliament – not just upon their appointment but throughout their tenure. On an on-going basis, they must secure Parliament's support for the legislation required

to implement the government programme. This is a complex task, and will require Prime Ministers with the highest integrity, leadership and management skills.

- To set standards of excellence for government. Our people depend on and rightfully demand that their ministers and public servants act efficiently, respectfully, and with dedication. The Prime Minister will be called upon to lead according to best practices. This demands skills and experience in forward planning, policymaking and the Civil Service, excellent communication, negotiation and coalition building skills, and the ability to build consensus to deal with the challenges facing our citizens.
- To champion transparency and good governance, in words and deeds. In a parliamentary government system, open, transparent and pro-active communication by the Prime Minister and the Council of Ministers with Parliament and with citizens, in addition to ensuring commitment to fieldwork, will be essential to the success of government.

IV. The Role of the Monarch:

A key part of our political evolution is the development of the role of the Hashemite Constitutional Monarchy. The Hashemite Monarchy has never and will never lose sight of its paramount objective – to safeguard Jordan’s prosperity, stability, security, and unity, and ensure the wellbeing of Jordanians. At the same time, the Hashemite Monarchy has constantly evolved with the times and people’s aspirations. As our democracy evolves and achieves the milestones I have put forward, it is both inevitable and desirable for the role of the Monarchy to evolve.

Let me start by outlining the monarchy’s core responsibilities that remain critical for our nation:

- The Hashemite Monarchy will remain forward-looking and as monarch I will maintain my role as a unifying leader to prevent polarization in our society and to protect Jordanian values. The Monarchy will always remain the voice of all Jordanians, and especially the poor and the marginalized. The Monarchy will safeguard our national integrity and justice systems, through continuous improvement and constant diligence, and will continue to promote confidence in Jordanian excellence by championing creativity, recognizing success stories, and honouring individual effort and achievement.
- As Head of State and Commander-in-Chief of our Armed Forces, I will safeguard paramount issues of foreign policy and national security, acting through the Council of Ministers, which has the Constitutional responsibility to administer state affairs. My role as monarch must ensure that the army, security forces, the judiciary and public religious authorities remain neutral, independent, professional, and unpoliticized as we move along our journey towards a stronger democracy and party-based parliamentary government.

- It is equally the Monarchy's responsibility to protect and sustain Jordan's social fabric and religious heritage. As outlined in my speech to national public figures on 23 October last year, this is a proud and solemn Hashemite duty on behalf of all Jordanians. I have the responsibility and honour of guaranteeing that nothing undermines the fundamental elements that make Jordan unique, special, and an oasis of stability: National unity, pluralism, openness, tolerance and moderation.

As a sign of the evolution of the Monarchy's role, my constitutional responsibilities have already begun to change, with the recent constitutional amendments establishing new parameters for the monarch's powers. These amendments enhanced our democracy and enabled citizens to participate more effectively.

The Monarchy's role in the formation of governments will continue to evolve in tandem with our maturing parliamentary system. Elements of this maturity, discussed in this and the previous discussion paper, include: Functioning, professional political parties that produce qualified and experienced candidates; party platforms that articulate policies and programmes that voters can weigh; and working processes and structures for parliamentary decision-making, including evidence-based policy proposals from the Civil Service, and active citizen participation.

Building on these foundations of an effective parliamentary government system, we will move towards the point in which a majority coalition of parties in Parliament forms the government. In this process, I pledge to uphold the safeguards noted above, which are my solemn duty to my people. The Monarchy will continue to serve as the guarantor of the Constitution and safeguards of neutrality, stability and justice, which are explained in this part of the paper and need to be enhanced and enrooted in parallel to the maturation of our parliamentary system. This is a critical set of responsibilities for the Monarchy, along with its role to break parliamentary and governmental deadlocks, and to protect Jordan's national security, unity, and integrity in the face of serious threats that endanger our ability to move the country forward.

The success of this evolution demands that all stakeholders in the reform process rise to the challenge and achieve the necessary levels of national political maturity, so that the country and the citizens are not let down. In this way, through our constitutional institutions, we can achieve the highest possible levels of national consensus needed to realize the future our citizens aspire to.

In short, we must act collectively to achieve the reform milestones that lie ahead. I will continue to do my part to enhance political maturity and encourage participation within our society, by remaining the guarantor of our comprehensive reform efforts, championing constructive dialogue among citizens, and safeguarding our stability, security and achievements.

My vision for the evolution of the Monarchy is self-motivated and unwavering. I have been reflecting on this vision, on the record, since the early years of my constitutional responsibilities. It is an inclusive vision that does not side with any political group. It is a vision that sides with Jordan and all Jordanians.

The Monarchy's progressive role that I envision began with sincere efforts for comprehensive reforms, on parallel tracks, including socio-economic initiatives to empower and expand the middle class – the main driver of political reform. The Arab Spring and its Jordanian dynamics opened new horizons and allowed us to usher in a new wave of reforms and to embark on an irreversible renaissance. It is a future I embrace; one in which all our people will have a voice; one in which no one is excluded from prosperity, security and success.

V. The Role of the Citizen:

The final element I wish to discuss is the role of the citizen – the ultimate foundation of our democratic system. Citizen engagement is key to developing the properly functioning political parties we need. Citizens also have the ultimate say in holding government accountable, through their votes, their awareness, and their participation.

Fulfilling these vital responsibilities rests on the four core principles for democratic engagement outlined in my first discussion paper: Respect for all fellow citizens, not just those we know or agree with; accountability to one another; honest, constructive dialogue; and sincere compromise.

Voting in elections is one part of this role. I commend all Jordanians who exercised their democratic rights and made their voice heard in the recent election.

But while voting is vital, it is not nearly enough in itself. Holding our government and Parliament accountable requires action by citizens each and every day. Three areas of activity are central:

- Awareness and search for the truth. Citizens must take the responsibility to become informed about key national issues, based on facts not rumours, and to act on their knowledge.
- Generating ideas and solutions. If the government is not considering the best ideas to address the challenges we face, then it is citizens' responsibility to bring those ideas into the public sphere for deliberation and consideration. This simple action can have a huge impact on the future of our country.

- Active citizenship. If elected representatives and the government are not fulfilling their commitments, engaged citizens must pressure them to do so. This can be done through community groups, town-hall meetings, or online, through social media and other channels. Responsible, active citizenship creates a public sphere in which dialogue can be the first resort and protests the last resort, all of which are rights guaranteed by our constitution. This is the first step to mutual respect and practical solutions.

Today, our citizens' role in building a healthy democratic society is monumental. All Jordanians should take heart from the multiplicity of tools to make their voices heard – from exercising their duty to vote in parliamentary and municipal elections, in addition to universities, professional unions; to forming NGOs or community-based organizations; to writing letters and petitions, blogging, social media, and beyond.

The Future:

The January elections were a major step, but not the end of our journey. With the elections now behind us, I look forward to working together with successive governments, Parliaments, civil society institutions, and with you – the citizens – to improve the well-being and opportunities of all Jordanians. The change of the *modus operandi* of the Lower House and the government, in line with what I envisioned in this paper, and the recent Speech from the Throne, will play a key role in our path of democratization and comprehensive reform as we seek parliamentary and governmental stability, so that Parliament and government can carry out their work in a constructive atmosphere over a full four-year term, as long as the government maintains the confidence of the Lower House, and the Lower House maintains the confidence of the people.

Over these coming years, I know that we as the people of Jordan will collaborate and learn together as we continue to develop our democracy. I have confidence that the wisdom and energy of the Jordanian people will make this journey a success.

We will encounter real challenges along the way. At times, this effort will feel unfamiliar and difficult. This is to be expected, because we are doing something truly different for the sake of a better future. I know we will confront and overcome these challenges together. Democracies do this better than any other system of governance, because everyone has a voice and a role to play.

Source: Home page of King Abdullah II of Jordan,
http://kingabdullah.jo/index.php/en_US/pages/view/id/249.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>

The text of the Royal Discussion Paper II on **Making Our Democratic System Work for All Jordanians** can be accessed at: <http://mei.org.in/front/cms/publicationsDetail.php?id=NjE4>

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