

A Development Agenda for Arab Parliaments
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Executive Summary

The study covers the major sectors of the development of parliamentary work in the Arab world over the last decade:

- At the institutional level: the organizational structure of the Parliament and its main units
- At the technical level: the qualification of the staff in the various departments and technical units, and the technical bodies assisting the Parliament's general secretariat
- At the political level: the level of support to the work for the parliamentarians themselves

The study presents practical ideas to proceed with the institutional development of the Arab Parliaments. The most important ones concerns how to:

- Improve the research and documentation sector,
- Improve the functioning of the Parliament's committees,
- Better train the staff on parliamentary work
- Better expose parliamentarians to various parliamentary experiences in the modern world

The study relied on the personal experience of its author as a consultant in the program of institutional development of the Palestinian Legislative Council and the Egyptian's People's Assembly as well as on case studies from a number of Parliaments, and personal contacts with a number of parliamentarians and experts from different countries.

Among the recommendations of the study are:

- The need to publish and give large access to the proceedings of the parliamentary sessions;
- The need to establish a modern and efficient archiving and bill tracking system;
- The need to insure a large media coverage of parliamentary debates;
- The need to explore ways of providing support for individual parliamentarian's work such as legislative aides, personal offices, constituency relations budgets, custom made research and documentation services and others;
- A better use of the potential of parliamentary study tours and exchange programs;
- The possible generalization of the ministry for parliamentary affairs, which exists in some countries, to improve on the relationship between the Executive and Legislative Institutions;
- The importance of benefiting from and collaborating with universities, independent research centers, think-tanks, and civil society organizations;
- The possible establishment of an Arab Institute for Parliamentary Studies and a yearly Arab Parliamentary Report.



Introduction: The Concept of Institutional Development of Parliament

The subject of parliament gained more momentum on the political and intellectual scene in the Arab World, and the development of the action of Arab parliaments became more important in view of the challenges posed by the development process and in function of the necessity of development in its own terms as well as keeping up with modern trends in the field of building and developing the institutional capacities of parliament.

It is obvious that the development in parliamentary action and performance in the Arab World is linked to international development in this area, and what it carries in terms of closeness between societal and cultural circumstances prevailing on the one hand, and what this development poses as challenges to keep up with the demands of the epoch in the other. It is also influenced by the trend towards globalizing the action of institutions and the local political experiences on another level.

All these are factors which led to adopting the tools of institutional action of democracy at the center of which lies parliament and this became a practically inevitable characteristic of the modern state. The question thus becomes: How can parliamentary institutions be developed in this new international framework, and not whether this development is necessary or not. In other words, the aim of developing parliamentary performance, according to the premise of this paper, is to improve the political performance of parliament i.e. increasing the capacity of parliament's ability to serve its members in fulfilling their duties, particularly through the creation of a common and appropriate culture between the technical apparatus and members. This enhances the role of parliament in society and by the same token, strengthens the democratic system.

Despite the fact that this argument among researchers, and parliamentarians themselves, regarding the motives for development and the latter's direction and scope, may be considered an obstacle preventing its application in accordance with a general agreement that supports it and increases its chances of success, yet, it may be considered an optimistic phenomenon because the issue of developing parliamentary performance now occupies an important position on the agenda of political debate at the public opinion level and among researchers. This emphasizes the importance of the subject of development and its significant social scope. Those who follow the tools of the media, and in particular newspapers and television, may notice a change in their schedule of priorities. They are giving wider space for the coverage of parliamentary performance, regardless of prior stances or value judgements existing in the way they cover parliamentary action.

This issue is no longer restricted, for example, to one newspaper supporting the opposition party and allocating one page a week to cover the news of its MPs or candidates. There is now a wide expansion and an organized follow-up regarding parliament's activities, and an increasing concern with wider coverage and provision of opportunities for many currents of thought to assess the performance of parliament and to discuss the diverse subjects linked to parliamentary life, such as the performance of MPs, the kind of legislation being issued, the criticism of the legislative process and pursuit of the debate around the formation processes of parliamentarians and parliaments. Institutional development is linked to a reformist and continuous view and has

its price which yields revenues, like any investment process. We can discuss and alter its costs and the accounts of its revenues.

This paper follows three directions or levels and emphasizes three sectors in the development of parliamentary action. The first is the institutional level (The organizational structure of parliament and its major units), the second is the technical level (those working in the various technical units and administrations i.e. the technical support apparatus to the general secretariat of the parliament) and the third is the political level (The MPs themselves).

As to the three sectors which the paper emphasizes they are: the sector of research and information, the sector of committees, and the sector of training. These are considered some, but not all, of the major sectors in the process of institutional development of Arab parliaments. The three were selected as examples only.

There are also three sources of information and data for this paper, first the published literature (traditional methods i.e. books, reports studies or Internet material) second, the primary sources i.e. the special publications regarding particular cases and practical models of parliamentary development or training programs, and third, the personal experience of the writer, based on personal observation and practical engagement [1] .

[1] Many of the information and proposals in the paper rely on the experiences and eyewitness accounts of the writer in the number of parliaments, he visited during the past five years, in Poland, Czech Republic, Canada, US, in addition to consultancy work in the program of institutional development of the Palestine National Council, Egyptian People and Consultative Councils and contacts with world parliamentarians and experts within the framework of the "Research Committee of Legislative Specialists" (RCLS) which is part of the International Political Science Association (IPSA).



First: Remarks Regarding the Experiences of Institutional Development in Contemporary Parliaments

1 - The Scopes and Methods of Institutional Development of Parliaments

The most important scopes and methods of institutional development in the parliaments of the contemporary world are as follows:

A - From the aspect of the political role of parliament:

In the parliaments of what is called new democracies (particularly in Central and East Europe) the processes of institutional development of parliaments are linked to one major issue: "How to make parliament a strong political institution". The issue was exemplified in number of matters more important of which is the nature of electoral arrangements, the relation between the legislative power and government and effect of political elites in power and political parties and influential groups on the efficiency of parliament and the nature of parliamentary committees, the type of rules and listed regulations of parliament's action as well as the extent of information provided to the MPs and the way it affects the role of parliament in its move towards democracy.

(i)

B - From the Aspect of the Administrative Structure of the General Secretariat:

There isn't one particular mode which is better than others in the organization of the technical support apparatus for MPs, where the general secretariat is linked to the parliamentary structure which in turn falls within the framework of the existing published system.

The methods of appointing the secretary general of a parliament, differ from one country to another. It lies in the hands of the Prime Minister in the Canadian Parliament, and in that of the President with the approval of Congress in the United States..., but, in any case, the secretary general is the sole top administrator to all those working in the parliamentary apparatuses and enjoys absolute administrative and financial powers to deal with them. On the other hand, there isn't one architypal mode for organizing, dividing or specifying the number of technical apparatuses in the general secretariat of a parliament.

The number of parliamentary committees (permanent ones) in itself differs according to the political and national concerns in each country. It increases and decreases on the basis of these interests. The common ground, however, is represented by the coordination between these apparatuses, on the one hand, and between them and supervisory apparatuses in the other houses of parliament, on the other. Some of these technical apparatuses serve both houses of parliament equally following their laws and procedures, such as the Congress Research Committee (CRS) in the United States and the parliamentary library in Canada.

Most employees of the general secretariat of these parliaments tend to be technically specialized and the proportion of those specialized in law, political sciences and economics exceeds 75 percent, in addition to a proportion whose major fields are History and Sociology. The preparation of non-specialized employees is so low that it is practically not noticeable, as in the

parliaments of Poland and the Czech Republic. In the parliament of Canada, even non-specialized services staff who worked within the halls of parliament were replaced by university students and temporary volunteers.

C - From the Aspect of Common Qualifications and Skills between Apparatus Employees and Staff of Different Parliaments:

The common ground is the existence of a minimum-shared base between the workers of the parliaments of these countries reflected in their ability to use the computer and modern systems of information (in spite of the existence of centers specialized in computers) and their obvious ability to handle the sources of fast and modern information gathering like the specialized periodicals and encyclopedias. In addition to this the Canadian parliament is characterized by its common use of Lap Top computers by MPs during parliamentary sessions.

D - From the Aspect of Use of Parliamentary Studies and Research:

These are divided into many types, first and foremost are the studies undertaken by the parliamentary committees, which are the central nerve ending of legislative action. The permanent and temporary committees of parliament possess essential research abilities in the fields of law, economics and politics which supply the cadres necessary for legislative action. Second, the directorates of research which could form part of the administrative structure of the parliamentary library (as in Canada) and the national library (as in the Library of Congress in the U.S) or are specialized administration existing in themselves as in Poland and the Czech Republic.

The third type is represented by the research centers linked to parties (Party Carecus) as in Canada. The fourth type are the non-government research centers that act as centers of experience and are self financed or financed through the government itself, as in the US, Czech Republic and Canada.

In any case, the common ground of these research services generally is the commitment to objectivity and the provision of facts and figures and different supportive positions of various points of view regarding the issues being questioned without favouring one political view and without party bias.

E - Regarding Library Services:

These Services are witnessing enormous developments in parliaments in general, whether from the point of view of the increase of acquisition of the libraries of recent up to date material or material in general (which in Canada reached over half a million documents, and also increased in the library of Congress) or in terms of modern indexing methods, thus making the extraction of material and the use of library documents easier.

This in addition to developing a network system between libraries whereby sources and other information can be exchanged with other local and international libraries. However, these libraries in most instances (with the exception of the Library of Congress, which is essentially a

national library) are primarily parliamentary libraries subject to organizational regulations - however limited - regarding their use by non-parliamentarians.

F - Regarding Parliamentary Information:

What characterized these parliaments, in principle, particularly in the Czech Republic, where parliament opens its doors to the public, is not just the ability to watch, but also to attend the parliamentary services (providing they are not secret ones). Some radio and T.V stations have arranged to cover parliamentary sessions and transmit this to the public via, the mass media. There are specialized bodies in parliamentary information and guidance aimed at accompanying students and other visitors while other agencies answer the questions of all interested parties through the telephone as in the Canadian information agency "Reference Canada".



2. The Development in Internal Regulation of Parliament

There are internal rules and procedures regulating parliamentary action since the parliament is an institution. These rules also regulate how MPs can perform their monitoring and legislative parliamentary tasks. As any other legal frameworks, the internal list of regulations and rules should be considered from a formal / legal and political / practical angles at the same time.

From a formal angle, the list includes a number of regulations pertaining to the performance of the various parliamentary tasks. In this sense, the stipulations mentioned on the list become conditions and regulations to be adhered to in parliamentary action. From the political angle, the list becomes a system or set of ideas and traditions and parliamentary principles aiming at facilitating parliamentary action and the achievement of a greater degree of democracy within the parliament, as well as transparency towards society and giving power to MPs to represent the citizens. This is why the list should be seen as a whole and examined over the principles it relies upon and the aspects which need to be developed.

The internal procedural list embodies great importance for parliamentary action. Here, the following can be proposed:

A - The organized procedural listing of parliamentary discussions and deliberations should never be in contradiction to the freedom of expression of opinion and views of all the MPs or with the variety of views, political allegiances and party affiliations existing inside parliament. In this matter, the party or political differences should not undermine the natural right for all, on equal terms, to participate in the permanent and special committees within parliament, or take part in the leadership of the parliament and its committees.

B - The organized procedural listing should guarantee a cooperation between the parliament and the other political and constitutional institutions.

C - The organized procedural listing of discussions and the issuing of parliamentary decisions are only a part of a complementary system or set in which the procedural list itself legally occupies the third place, after the rules of the constitution and law. This is why an MP could protect using the stipulations of the constitution or law if he finds that the procedural list does not allow the freedom of discussion.

D - The rigid view which considers the procedural list as the primary reference in parliamentary action i.e. a binding order for everyone regarding parliament's structures or discipline of work and its performance of its legislation, monitoring and financial functions, should be constantly discussed and developed.

In this regard, we suggest a discussion of the possibility that parliament elects a committee and calls it "The Procedural Commission". This committee should be specifically concerned with the following: Looking at the possibility of altering the procedural list at the beginning of a legislative session so that the list becomes more in line with the political, economic and social developments and conditions of the society in question. These developments will inevitably improve parliamentary action. The committee should also examine MPs complaints regarding

the parliamentary presidency's commitment to the list's provisions whether in the discussions or in issuing parliamentary decrees, and ensure the committee present its report on these complaints to the presidency of the parliament who will in turn submit it to MPs.

During the parliamentary session whose specific task is to discuss parliamentary complaints, the leader of parliament should temporarily delegate his position to one of his deputies or to the oldest MP in parliament, because he cannot be an adversary and a judge at the same time.

E - The preparation and organization of the procedural list should not be complicated to an extent that it is difficult to understand it and act upon it by legal experts and people with legal experience. This is a matter that contradicts the task for which the list has been created and its role in "facilitating" the MP's action and enabling him to perform his job. In the case of complicated lists, the MP is left with two choices: Either to do as little as possible in the way of study and analysis for the sake of formality (like the order of presence and procedure of voting) or to spend much effort to adapt to the complications of the list, using special capacities (professional or personal or party provided by a party). There are matters not available to all. He may rely on the general secretariat of parliament, thus becoming more dependent on technical staff, losing his active independence and becoming a mere role figure.

F - The tendency in procedural lists of Arab parliaments to consider the leader of parliament as a patron over the performance and behavior of MPs contradicts the egalitarian principle among parliamentarians. The leader of the House is the first among equals and his role is primarily organizational.



3. The Development of the System of Parliamentary Committees

Parliamentary committees perform a significant number of tasks and provide parliament with the capacity to increase its effectiveness and experiences. The committees enable MPs to examine the projects of laws and supervise the government's programs. They also enable citizens to participate in the legislative process.

Despite the differences in number, type, size and task of these committees between one parliament and another, yet they are gaining increased importance as an organizational element in the effectiveness of the legislative councils. The parliamentary committees enable the MPs, particularly in the new developing democracies, to participate effectively in parliamentary action. (ii)

All modern parliaments rely on committees for the direction and management of their affairs. Committees include small numbers of MPs chosen for a temporary or permanent period, to examine and study a number of issues and subjects more thoroughly than if they had been left to the parliament as a whole. The American Congress, for example, is described as "a mere group of committees meeting in a hall regularly to approve each other's measures". (iii)

A - Types of Committees

Committees can usually be classified into two types: General and Special. Most general committees review and recommend laws. They may form sub-committees to discuss specific issues and matters. The special committees deal with a specific issue, and then cease to exist after they have completed the role for which they were formed. They usually present a report to the other MPs or public opinion which includes a summary of their views and recommendations regarding the subject or issue which they studied. (iv) In addition to this, there are permanent and temporary joint committees (In parliaments which have two houses) which review issues of common importance to both houses. Sometimes these joint committees are formed to iron out differences and make positions closer over projects of laws or issues which require the approval of both houses of parliament (See in the Annex: Comparative table of committees numbers in 20 contemporary parliaments of 20 countries which are: Argentina, Bulgaria, Canada, Costa Rica, El Salvador, France, Germany, Hungary, India, Ireland, Japan, Jordan, Namibia, Portugal, Romania, Russia, Senegal, Thailand, United Kingdom and United States).

Parliaments differ in the strength of their committees, the jurisdictions they have and their numbers. In the French National Assembly for example, the committees have limited powers of decision making. They cannot amend a decree proposed by the government. They can only make some technical modifications on the government's decrees.

In addition, these committees cannot examine the government proposals with enough scrutiny. Their number has been reduced from 20 committees in the constitution of the Fifth Republic to only six at present. In contrast to such committees in France and Britain, their equivalent in Germany have similar power to those in the American Congress.

German parliamentary committees are the real and indispensable legislative "Kitchen" in the German Bundestag. In the American Congress, legislative action depends on permanent and small subsidiary sub-committees, which are sometimes described as "small legislative councils". The huge number of legislations, can thus be spread out making the work far more effective and enabling thousands of legislations to be dealt with within one parliamentary session which goes on for two years. Each of these legislations is dealt with separately in the Lower House (parliament) and Upper House (Senate) with all their representative bodies. Without the abovementioned committees, this huge legislative achievement would not have been possible.

B - The Committees' Numbers

In a comparative study of the numbers of MPs in a parliament and the number of permanent committees in it, using eleven parliaments as a base, it was found that the sizes of parliaments varied between 120 - 662 members, and the number of committees was between 6 - 38. Other studies showed that the sizes and numbers of committee members were linked, to a large extent, to their effectiveness and impact on legislative action.

The ideal size of a committee - for it to remain effective in the performance of its role- was between 13 - 25.

In some parliaments, such as the American Congress, it is possible to use experts and specialized people in some committees, and any committee can form subsidiary sub-committees (In 1993 the Lower House of Congress formed 22 permanent committees and 118 subsidiary sub-committees. Each of the two houses of Congress can form special or selected committees to discuss particular issues. Because of the increase in the work of committees, the permanent ones formed over 300 subsidiary sub-committees to assist them).

C - Committees Meetings

The continuity and frequency of meetings differ between one parliament and another. In some cases, the committees meet at other times than during normal parliament sessions. In other countries, the committees meet, whether parliament is in a legislative session period or not. This is the case in the British House of Lords and the Canadian House of Commons and the French Senate and the Irish Senate and the National Assembly in Namibia and in Portugal and the Romanian Senate and the Upper and Lower Houses of the American Congress, and in the People's Council and Consultative Council in Egypt and in the Palestine National Council.

Decisions are taken in committees, by simple majorities of the MPs present as long as a quorum has been ascertained. Votes are usually taken by a show of hands. Some committees allow voting by proxy where some absent members delegate their votes to their fellow MPs. In 1995 the American Lower House of Congress cancelled proxy voting in its committees.

A question asked here is whether the public can attend committee meetings or not? In most instances, this matter is decided by the constitution of the country or the regulations and rules of the legislative power itself. Some constitutions allow public presence at committee meetings thus

allowing citizens and the press to attend. Other countries constitutions do not grant this right, but the regulations and traditions of the parliament or its committees allow it.

The parliaments which allow the public to attend the committee meetings are those of Argentina, Costa Rica, Hungary, the United States. In some legislative councils the committees hold closed meetings which the public cannot attend unless their attendance is necessary, because of protection of secrecy or for national security reasons. This exists in Germany, India, Namibia and Senegal.

The open meetings of parliamentary committees enable the public to follow closely the discussions taking place and it becomes conscious of the way members voted and what they said during the deliberations. On the other hand, the attendance of the public entails certain risks which affect the work of the committees especially when their presence may sometimes prevent the committee members from expressing their views and conceptions freely or perhaps hinders them from reaching middle solutions or agreement among each other as they do in closed sessions.

According to a survey conducted in 1986 in over 82 parliaments, it was observed that 49 of them generally or always conducted special sessions for their committees, 12 conducted both special and public sessions, and 21 always or usually conducted open sessions. Some of the committees allow the public to have access to the records of their meetings and to write summaries on these meetings or on what observer committees recount. Usually the records of these meetings are published without any problems.

D - Membership and Leadership in Parliamentary Committees

The composition of MPs membership in permanent committees reflects the strengths of the various parties represented in the legislative council as a whole. For example, in the German Bundestag, the principle of equity in party representation permeates over membership in committees. The majority party dominates all the committees of the Bundestag.

The situation is not very different in the parliaments of Bulgaria, Canada, France, Hungary, the United Kingdom and the United States where electoral support of parties decides representation in committees.

In France, small parties are not permitted to be represented in parliamentary committees. For any party to be represented, it must have at least 20 seats in the National Assembly. In contrast to this, the Portuguese parliament allows small parties to be represented in committees by only one member in one committee out of three. In El Salvador, the small parties have one member in every committee of the legislative council. Even if it had one member in the parliament as a whole, he will still be a member of all the parliament's committees.

Parliaments differ in the method of appointing the chairmen of committees. In the American Congress, the majority party leads all the committees of Congress while in the German Bundestag the chairmanship of committees is based on the number of seats gained by each party. In the British parliament, the majority party leads all the committees with the exception of the

treasury committee. In addition to this, committee members become "specialized" in the fields they represent after serving in a particular committee for some time and gaining experience in its field. MPs usually tend to join the committees whose concerns are nearest to their fields of specialization or which are important for their electoral district. (v)

E - The Committees Staff

The appointment of committee staff and cadres differ from one parliament to another. Some parliaments have large professional cadres supporting the parliamentary committees while others do not have such professional cadres. The number and quality of these cadres reflect the importance of parliamentary committees to the legislative system. When these committees have focal importance - as in the American Congress - there is a greater need for professional staff with specialized experience and wide jurisdiction. When committees are not vital or less important, only a small staff with limited administrative and technical jurisdiction exists.

In Canada, the size of committees staff is limited, and their role is restricted to calling witnesses, organizing meetings and preparing cases. A study of legislative institutions undertaken in 1993 showed that Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Honduras lacked trained cadres of support in their parliamentary committees. In most committees, there was only one specialized support staff member appointed by the general secretariat or the general secretary.

Sometimes cadres from the executive apparatuses are asked to help perform specific tasks in the parliamentary committees which inevitably affects the objectivity and neutrality of their work. Some parliaments allow their committees to use external experts and specialized people for certain subjects or issues.

F - Coordination Between Committees

Competition usually arises as a consequence of the variety, size, and importance of areas of concern of the various parliamentary committees. Sometimes this may go as far as leading to struggles and differences. One of the ways to coordinate the work of committees is through dividing the complicated tasks into sub-sections each taken over by a specific committee, as is the case in the American Congress. In some cases, a sub-committee is formed among the many committees as in the Polish Parliament. A third solution is allowing the many committees to present their recommendations to a central committee, as in the Swedish Parliament.

G - Listening (Grievance) Committees: Model and Mechanism

The importance of a parliamentary committee lies in its being a "Policy Kitchen". Because the common ground in parliamentary matters is that parliament does not discuss a subject before referring it over to one or more of its committees in what is called joint committees. Such committees will discuss it and reach a position which they present to parliament for further disunion.

Generally, parliamentary committees are of two types, (vi) the permanent ones i.e. the standing committees, whether they deal individually or jointly with a subject referred to them and the

special committees or Ad-Hoc, temporary committees which parliament forms for particular reasons to discuss a particular issue and which are dissolved as soon as they perform their action or after parliament issues a decree dissolving them or announcing contentment for what they had done.

Listening committees are considered special committees because they are formed for a particular purpose, temporary in nature, and dissolved as soon as their business terminated.

In other words, listening committees are special committees formed by parliament for the purpose of hearing many parties and differing ideas which are presented to them in the subject they are dealing with, and which is supposed to be part of parliament's specialization. In addition, the stable rule in parliamentary jurisprudence is that the origin or source contains its branches, consequently, permanent standing committees can perform the functions of Ad-Hoc or special temporary committees while the opposite is not true. In other words, permanent-standing committees can perform the functions of listening committees while the latter cannot be transformed into permanent committees or perform their functions. The following are the characteristics of listening special Ad-Hoc committees as a monitoring tool:

- The monitoring here is of the actions of the executive power and does not extend to the actions of the judiciary power.
- It is an important monitoring tool used by parliament to check and face the executive power and the government apparatuses.
- It is the monitoring tool that applies to the greatest degree the idea of collective action among MPs in their monitoring functions. This is why it is distinguished by its "democratic" feature.
- It performs its functions in a practical method and within an "on the field" framework, whether this takes place inside parliament buildings or outside them. In this, the mechanism of the listening committee has a particular feature in comparison to other monitoring tools such as parliamentary questions and discussions.
- It has a public feature in its actions. While we find that permanent standing committees tend to be based on secrecy, unless the government decides otherwise, the core of the listening committees meetings lies in their openness - unless otherwise decided.
- By their very nature these committees are open, the dates of their meetings are announced in advance and get full coverage from all sectors of the media.

H - The Monitoring Role of the Listening Mechanism

Monitoring methods have a special position in parliamentary action because their action represents a vivid example of people's monitoring of their governments.

However the person acquainted with the literature on parliamentary life in the Arab World notices two major things:

First: The concern with monitoring tools concentrates in the first place on direct methods, most prominent of which is interrogation. Interrogation reflects a direct accusation against the executive power, and may lead to a vote of confidence in ministers, even if this was only theoretical. What supports this, is that the government itself is most concerned, in its relation to

parliament, by interrogations. All the concerned ministers and the MPs initiating it, prepare themselves for this battle engagement. Public opinion, represented by parliamentary correspondents and the press, in general, and the opposition in particular, tend to follow closely the development of these interrogations; and start making predictions over the realities of the interrogation and the ability of the minister concerned to answer it. This happens despite the knowledge that the interrogation may only lead to no more than "moving to the other item on the agenda of action of the parliament" which is the decent way of saying that the interrogation has been refused and that the minister concerned and the government still have the confidence of parliament. In other words, the great concern with the mechanism of interrogation has more a dramatic impact and does not act as a real effective political monitoring tool.

This is despite the fact that these were prominent cases in which what is similar to real battles between MPs and ministers occurred, even if these battles were not balanced.

The other thing is that the listening tool does not at all have a fair share of parliamentary or media interest, despite its parliamentary importance and its features as a collective democratic method to monitor government action. There are three major ways to exercise the mechanism of listening, namely through the standing permanent parliamentary committees; through committees that undertake field visits and through a special Ad-Hoc committee formed particularly for this purpose. The parliament, in the latter case, aims at thorough research and listening to the various points of view pertaining to two subjects discussed.

The listening committees, as mentioned above, are characterized by being the most open tools for parliamentary monitoring. This means that those who participate in their work come from different backgrounds, whether in giving opinions or following their action. There are three types of active participants in these committees, namely the committee members i.e. the actual members of the Ad-Hoc committees or members of the parliament as a whole (The latter have the full right to attend the meetings of the committee and participate in laying down its agenda of actions and discussions); the specialists (Whether from government agencies or others) and there are the ones invited so that the committee can listen to their views on subjects covered by the agenda, and the citizens, who are following up the actions of the committee as media people or citizens concerned with the issue.

The essence in the effectiveness of the listening committee are the deliberations, following the general rule in parliamentary action which considers parliament a platform for discussions and deliberations so that this action does not become that of one administrative party working according to pre-written agendas prepared maybe by people other than MPs. There is no doubt that supplying committees with all the technical means necessary for them to perform their legislative and monitoring duties leads to an improvement in their performance and their ability to perform their task better. This is why parliaments try to help their committees through providing them with all the documents, data, information and studies which ensure success in the study of all aspects of the issues for which they convened. This also helps in preparing the reports which they present to parliament. (viii)

The committees should also be supported by specialized employees and researchers to assist in the accomplishment of their legislative and monitoring tasks in the best way possible. The

French Parliament is a good example to follow in this respect. In fact, the French National Assembly created in 1983 a directorate linked to it whose duty is to measure the applicability of scientific and technological findings and present reports on them to MPs, so as to help them make their decisions. (viii) The number of MPs in a listening committee is decided on the basis of its mission and its nature i.e. whether it is a standing permanent committee or a special Ad-Hoc one.

In reality, there are no regulations or material and human obstacles in Arab parliaments which could prevent the use of this important tool. Yet, it has not been sufficiently used and has not fulfilled its required role in parliamentary monitoring action; as is the case in the American Congress or the Czech Parliament or the Palestine National Council.

Maybe this is due to political or practical reasons which we will summarize as follows: First, political/cultural reasons, pertaining to the sensitivity of the issue of listening and the massive exposing impact which the listening tool could trigger when activated in its natural or imagined scopes. This exists in terms of the variety and differences in opinions it entails and in dealing with the opposition and rejectionists in all their possible varieties and the criticisms they could present to parliament, especially over controversial issues and at times when "the public good" necessitates the postponement of differences and requires the unity behind the present policies. This sensitivity becomes more acute when media coverage of the deliberations of the listening tool spreads out widely enough to include the various political elements and their party or ideological backgrounds and the positions, ideas and arguments they present, which could cause what some may see as "Chaos".

This political sensitivity also increases further and further when the listening committees unanimously agree after hearing the different views of government officials and other experts outside the governing apparatus. Anyone invited to participate in these committees' deliberations and is heard will feel that he got an official recognition of his expertise and influence. Sensitivity may result from listening to those concerned with the problem or issue being discussed i.e. the end users from the citizens and not only from the technocrats and experts, where it is expected and natural that hearing their views is accompanied by a request for accountability, particularly if the listening bodies move to where events happened outside parliament.

II. Practical Paradoxes and Problems

There are two types of practical problems, the first is related to the difficulty in dealing with information sources, particularly the official sources, namely ministries and concerned bodies. This information problem may be the result of fear and concern on the part of the source in question in providing the required information, and the refusal to give information that may put some blame on officials or convict them. Sometimes also it is the result of the absence of the parliamentary director or official whose major role is to provide information on the activities of the executive apparatus to the legislative apparatus in the political authority.

Second, it could be the result of difficulties encountered in performing deep collective action, where strengthening the tool of listening requires common skills and convictions between the varied parties so that results can be achieved. Among these are listening to others' views, the ability to change personal convictions and political stands based on positive interaction with information that was not available or ideas that were not known or accepted. The listening tool should not be reduced to just a means to convey political positions regarding the issue in question. The committees' mission should not just be limited to showing who supports the policy concerned and to what degree. The committees' work should result in deducing the possible alternatives to this policy and clarifying them and then present them to parliament for further review and feedback; and possibly for reversing pre set positions.

In addition, this tool should not become only a means for gathering information that was non-existent or vague. This is the job of the standing permanent committees and the continued responsibility of the government towards parliament.

No doubt all of this requires much concentrated collective action and common values among the parties (Between the members themselves on the one hand, and between them and whoever is listening to them, on the other). It also requires focusing on the subject of discussion and not simply presenting specific political or party positions.

1 - Practical Suggestions to Improve the Listening Committees Performance

The real value underlying the listening committee's work, from a parliamentary point of view, is to go over all the different existing and possible angles of the subject under discussion rather than submit the (quantitatively) highest number of subjects to parliament.

Here lies the vital and sensitive mission of the management of the committees' actions. This management has two functions to perform, first, it has to search for the various official and non official sources of information which contribute to enlighten parliament regarding the scope and the veracity of the subject under study and to attract experts to participate in the committees' work; and second to control the listening procedure undertaken by the committee and focus it on the subject of discussion; without going into what is not likely to achieve real results.

Parliamentary customary practice emphasized the use of two cooperating tools to control the work of listening committees for more fruitful results. (ix) First, the holding of a coordination meeting between MP members of the committee with the help of the technical secretariat of

parliament in order to lay down a strategy or a plan of action and draw up an agenda that will be followed by the committee to achieve what it was requested to do. In addition, this meeting will decide who is likely to participate in its action, the time framework and the place where the committee will hold its meetings and carry out its work.

The second tool centers around the division of the work of the committee into sub-areas in line with the various aspects of the subject under discussion. This allows treating the issue in more depth, and prevents drifting into side subjects not linked to the committees' agenda.

All these are preliminary steps for holding the general meeting of the committee (as a whole) and preparing its final report based on the reports of the branch committees. This report is then referred to parliament to be discussed by all MPs.

2 - The Development of Parliamentary Information and Research Units

There is no doubt that information and research are among the most important tools in the development of Arab parliamentary action and the increase in institutional capability of parliament. Parliament needs, more so than other political institutions, modern administrations, trained and specialized staff in the organization and analysis of information, to present it at the opportune time in the proper form to MPs to enable them to perform their varied parliamentary roles.

It can be said that Arab parliaments in general, are in need of an "information revolution" inside them, which does not stop at acquiring and installing computers, but goes further into the implementation and use of a modern technology in the sphere of parliamentary information, and the possession of technical abilities to store and retrieve this information. Added to this is the requirement to develop methods for administering information and making it available to MPs (and society) at the right time with a high degree of competence.

Parliamentary research has become a central element in the process of developing parliamentary action from two angles: First, on the demand level, regarding the services of parliamentary research, and this is represented by the necessity to develop the research services, and analysis capacities available to MPs. Increased demand can be seen in many areas like: the increase in MPs need for parliamentary research services and the analysis of information, policies and legislation, particularly from new MPs. In addition there is an increase in the demand for research on specialized subjects (scientific and technological), new discoveries (cloning and genetic engineering), comparison (economic models and theories and the experiences of economic reforms), the desire to invest in and make use of the new era of information and developments in communications and the flow of information between various parts of the world, the higher expectations on behalf of MPs towards the capacities of parliamentary research during the new age of information, the increased needs of MPs for these capacities to keep up with the challenges imposed upon them by public opinion.

The latter, in turn, has become more capable and wishful of following up the activities and performances of MPs to compare them to what is happening in the rest of the world.

Second, on the supply level, regarding the increased development in the experiences and programs of progress in parliamentary research itself, particularly through the use of modern technologies, which makes it a "subsidiary" system within the parliamentary institution. For this reason they are called: Parliamentary Research Services - PRS. These, in turn, depend on a complete technological system called Legislative Information Systems - LIS.

However, the development of parliamentary research faces great challenges, most important of which is financing and competition. There is no doubt that parliamentary research, despite increased interest in it, is being subjected to the pressures of the needs for a decrease in spending, as is the case with other units of the parliamentary institutions following the logic of economic rationalization which calls for the increase of investment in resources and decrease in spending, so that the performance is cost-effective.

On the other hand, the units and administrations responsible for parliamentary research face competition from centers of research outside parliament (local and international) which may offer faster, less complicated and cheaper research services because they do not require financing of administrative units or the employment of permanent researchers in the institutional structure of parliament. This is the predominant trend in most Western European contemporary parliaments, and in the actual European parliament itself.

In other words, in addition to the pressures from MPs in their demands for research and its development and the pressures for reducing expenditure over units of research in parliament, research is facing additional challenges from modern and specialized centers of research which are increasing in number on the market.

There is no doubt that the question of development of parliamentary research units in the Arab World is going through (or should realize that it is going through) a critical transitional period. It has to reconsider the structure upon which it is built and level of its performance and the criteria of assessing its products i.e. its services.

Parliamentary research units in the Arab World are faced today with the need to revise major issues in their work which are: The strategy of research, studies and legislative services, programs and scope of its action, policies and methods of response to MPs demands and the needs of parliament in the various areas (legislative and monitoring).

All this should take into consideration two principal matters, first the comparative study of what is happening in the world, to keep up with developments and increase competitive capacities (local and international) and second, be able to use the most modern techniques (In technologies, research and administration) to the rationalization of expenditure and increasing revenues.

In a comparative [2] study of the systems of parliamentary research in eleven different countries in the level of technical development, the economic circumstances and the nature of the political regimes, it is clear that the development of the operation of parliamentary research has become a matter of priority in parliamentary development and that of the support of institutional capacities to parliament.

The following are some areas of development being applied in some of the contemporary experiences.

A - Improving the Organizational and Administrative Structure of the Research and Information on Services

The parliamentary research and information services units are witnessing organizational developments along three ways. First, towards merging in structure and organization, second, towards division and variety and third towards coordination in services under joint supervision with the maintenance of organizational independence. In most instances, the aim behind the restructuring is to develop parliamentary research and information services and make them more custom oriented to the need of users to achieve what is called "one-stop shopping".

1 - Merging: In the Australian Parliament, the library and the research unit were merged into

one organizational structure. The same exists in the Canadian Parliament where the research administration lies within the organizational structure of the library, and in the American Congress where the Congress Research Department (CRD) is linked to its library and in the Indian Parliament where the library unit and the research and information and computer units fall within a united organizational structure (LARRDIS) which will be treated in more detail later on.

2 - Variety and Independence: In some countries, the research and organization roles are redistributed into different independent units (Stand-Alone Units) like in Egypt, where the Egyptian People's Council houses a center for information (computer) and a center for parliamentary research (to prepare studies over public political issues (internal and external) and present them to MPs) and a directorate for research which concentrates on preparing yearly reports on the activities of the secretariat as well as a directorate for conferences to help MPs scientifically and data wise to enable them to participate effectively in various conferences, particularly those held externally. It also includes a directorate for research services linked to the library which prepares data files over various issues and presents them to MPs and parliamentary committees.

3 - Joint Coordination: As for the third option, which is the most common, the focus is on coordination and joint supervision among research activities and parliamentary information services. In the American Congress, the department of Congress research relies on the method of the work-team that includes elements from the various branch directorates - research, library, computerized and technical information - for the purpose of methodological continuity of action and depends on a certain degree of cooperation between the various departments and independent directorates in Congress. In Poland, services are provided through a task force which varies on the basis of the subjects in question. These task forces include selected employees from the different directorates and sometimes committees of parliament, and act under the supervision of a "research bureau" whose director is the main official responsible for the preparation of the research and information services, as well as the financing of the task force and its activities.

There are around 25 thousand persons working in research data collection and analysis of cases and legislations in the American Congress.(x)

It should be noted, first, that this third coordinatory venue complements the expansion in the case of modern techniques in research and communication, where the main frames (principle networks of information) or Local Area Networks are used to achieve the required coordination. Consequently, it depends on the capacity of parliament to create complementary systems for the services of information and research as was accomplished by the Mexican Parliament (a complementary system of information and documentation). It may be possible to link this system to a wider network of national information sources, as in the case of the Estonian Parliament where its parliamentary information network is linked to the most important national library.

Another direction is linked to the production of a new type of research and parliamentary information services. In Germany, for example, the directorate of research created a new parliamentary research service via the telephone, while other countries, such as Poland and the United States and Mexico published a number of parliamentary documents as a consequence of the efforts of the different research and parliamentary information directorates. These were

issued as daily or weekly summaries or as periodicals regarding the most important events and developments, or as guiding manuals for MPs in the legislative and monitoring processes.

B - Improving Performance: Responding to the Wishes of the Client, Taking the Initiative and Doing the Job Promptly

Regardless of the nature of the organizational structure of parliamentary research services, the real challenge they face today is improving quality and providing the appropriate service and taking the initiative.

There is evidence that contemporary parliaments are moving from the traditional method of parliamentary research towards the modern approach. The first was seen to produce complicated research and studies characterized by too much detail and analysis, and concentrating on issues raised in the parliamentary agenda and distributing its studies to almost all MPs and committees. The modern approach, on the other hand, produces simplified research and information services, (not necessarily in-depth studies supported by complicated statistics and tables and too many sources and references, but they may be only background papers, or basic definitions and data or facts, or even summaries regarding findings of studies or verbal discussions). These services could vary in form and degree of depth of analysis depending on what was required by the MP requesting them and what his capacities are. They are produced proactively i.e. before they are included in the work agenda of parliament.

In an exploratory survey assessing MPs views on parliamentary research and information services in the British House of Commons, the American Congress, the Polish and Australian Parliaments it was found that the major complaints and reservations concentrated on two things: First, the formality of services, and the fact that they followed one pattern with all members without taking into account the differences between MPs (not only in terms of personal capacities, but also in time requirements and political ends behind the MPs request for these services, such as the passing of a decree proposal or practicing parliamentary monitoring). Second, the method of dealing with MPs, which failed to distinguish between members of parliaments and tended to consider them as a homogeneous group of individuals. In fact, it is necessary to treat them as clients having different aims, capacities, requests and tastes. Consequently, it becomes necessary to use different methods with each MP when presenting the same services.

As for the time factor, it is one of the most difficult challenges facing contemporary research and information services. It supposes the existence of specialized and highly trained research staff with special qualifies to keep in touch with the usual rhythm (irregular in most instances) of parliamentary action.

Sometimes new issues emerge suddenly where on the spot information and data are needed by the MP.

On the other hand, the pressures of cutting down on spending that parliamentary research departments usually face are partly linked to the belief that the services provided are not worth the money spent on them. Consequently, these directorates find that they have to prove their ability to rationalize expenditure, by giving faster and better services.

In addition to printed or written services, MPs require sometimes urgent telephone and verbal or E-Mail services from these departments, in many cases urgently and within hours or while the parliament is in session. The parliamentary information services in modern systems tend to resort to two actions to face these challenges and provide services within the required time and of the

requested variety:

First, develop a modern database on relying on advanced techniques which can supply the data required for the cases in question within the necessary time limit.

Second, the creation of new forms of research services and the training of people to use them.

In Congress's research department, researchers tend to develop their skills in varying the research and information product in three ways, namely by providing fast answers to questions (within hours or a day at the most and in one page or memo); and by drafting short summaries (5-6 pages dealing with specific urgent issues as issue briefs, similar to those presented to committees, which can be available in a maximum of three days); plus the exhaustive or general analysis (around 20 pages which handle wider issues in topical reports such as the ones presented to the general sessions of parliament. These could take up to three weeks).

It seems that most activities involving parliamentary research concentrate on answers to short specific questions which the MP requires within few hours. He may need them as short comments or by telephone or through a verbal presentation rather than in the form of in depth general analysis of an academic nature.

The kind of service mentioned above is a link between two parties, and requires special skills and specialized training on the part of both MPs and researchers. The MP needs to be specific about the subject he is requesting, the time limit and the form in which he requires the material to be handed over to him. The researcher should be able to help the MP formulate his subject and know where to get the information from, how to get to it and use it, and how to present it in the appropriate form based on the MP's needs (agenda, summary or verbal presentation).

C – The Improvement in the Scope of Parliamentary Research and Information

Research and information services should be equipped (from a human and information technology aspects) to handle most internal and external subjects, because parliament is a platform where various subjects are presented and discussed in all spheres. However the focus of contemporary parliamentary discussions revolves dynamically around particular areas (which should be the work agenda elements of the directorates of research and information in parliaments) without neglecting or ignoring other aspects.

It is evident that the current trend, in contemporary parliaments, concentrates on two subjects which are: the budget and the technical drafting or formulation of legislations.

For example, more than 70% of the work of the Congress Research Department concentrates on budget issues. This department has developed special sections in its Internet location to provide economic, financial and budget related information to those who request them. The Polish Parliament decided to create two new units which provide financial research and analysis which are: the group for financial analysis and the group for budget laws.

It is also apparent that most expert centers (Houses) interested in parliamentary action and support for the decision-maker in the contemporary world are interested in economic issues (xii). Regarding technical formulation of legislations, this subject has gained greater importance, particularly in parliaments of new and developing countries, due to the increased interest of MPs in the legislative process and the discussions linked to it. Increase in interest was also due to international agreements to which contemporary countries are adhering which impose a new set of regulations, criteria and standards in legislative formulation, or drafting of decrees, so that the latter become consistent with international standards and commitments. In most countries of Central and Eastern Europe, the subject of consistency with the standards of the European Union

plays a very important role in the legislative process, and with the centers (Houses) of external expertise. There are special units (such as the “Information Center of the European Union”) in most of these parliaments whose role is to enhance coordination and consistency between national legislation and European Union standards, as well as the adaptation of internal institutions and structures to be in line with the institutions and systems of The United Europe. In the Arab World, the Palestine National Council stresses the importance of the subject of technical formulation of legislations. A delegation of researchers in its legal department and a number of secretary generals and members of parliamentary committees were sent as part of a delegation to Egypt to deal with this subject from its various aspects, and to exchange experience with Egyptian specialists in the schools of law, parliaments and the Ministry of Justice. The Arab Center for Parliamentary Training which is part of the Association of Arab Parliamentary Secretary General is preparing to hold a series of programs and workshops on issues of legislation and the technical drafting or formulation of legislations.

D – The Development of New Research Tools

With the spread of the scientific revolution and the use of computers in the world, new horizons were open to parliamentary research and information services. These horizons provided new opportunities for creativity and improvement in performance and forced additional burdens on MPs and researchers.

The use of these new technologies in parliamentary action requires a full understanding of their possible uses and the way they should be used by MPs. They also require constant practice leading to enhancing and widening their use and the benefits they provide to parliamentarians and researchers and the whole administrative and technical apparatus of parliament.

It is worth noting that the most prominent use of computers in parliamentary research services of the contemporary world lies in three areas. First, in economic and financial analysis; second, in the formulation of the parliamentary database; and third in the simulation of parliamentary discussions in general, and the work of parliamentary committees in particular. In the Canadian Parliament, small models were developed for the simulation of the tax system in order to support the work of the economic analyst studying the development of tax tools and the tax system and the effect of changing them in the general budget.

The American Congress research department uses similar programs in the various sectors such as health insurance, salaries, grants and social assistance and unemployment benefits, to help the MP in the prior knowledge of the likely effects of changes in these general policies on the sectors most affected by them. This process was named the: “What If Questions.”

In the Polish Parliament legislations are stored in huge databases and the possible alterations to them can occur during parliamentary discussions. This experiment is being currently tried in Egypt through the legislative database called “LIS”.

The center for information thus aids the council of ministers, The People’s and The Consultative Council in taking decisions.

E – Developing Techniques and Methods of Work

Moslem techniques have become a major feature in different institutions, and a major element in the development of contemporary parliaments, starting from monetary, administrative and staff matters, passing through research and information services, storing documents and library work,

and ending up in the management of public sessions in parliament and the application of the system of electronic voting.

Regarding parliamentary research and information services, the use of modern techniques has become inevitable, not only from an objective and professional point of view; but also for economic reasons. These techniques are the ones that help in facing the dilemma experienced by these services namely the need to improve services, on the one hand; and cut down on expenses, on the other. The use of such techniques entails huge expenses, and requires special and continuous training for the researchers and technicians, but these expenses are an investment which realizes saving and returns in the long run.

The use of computers as networks of information and communication saves a lot of expenses in the areas of typing reports, preparing mission summaries and the purchase of stationary. It also reduces the time required for performing missions (which is also very costly).

In modern parliaments, the use of these techniques is spread in four major areas which are:

Personal computers (PCs), Internet, databases and CD-ROMS and local network (LANs) and E-Mail.

The use of these modern techniques saves on time cost. It helps to collect a huge amount of information at the lowest cost and times possible and in the best quality since it also helps improving the methods of research and analysis and the collection of information (local and foreign) and leads to the improvement in the skills of researchers.

Modern parliaments and many international institutions have given due importance to this matter. They prepared special Websites for themselves on the Internet network and linked these locations to other sources of information and databases. They enabled MPs to use LAP TOP portable computers, as in the American Congress and the Canadian, Japanese and Indian Parliaments.

On the other hand, the use of these modern techniques helps develop parliamentary research and information so that in turn it can serve MPs and even be ready for service before it receives an instruction for that. MPs can register their requests, and assessments of the information they get in an accumulative way. They can analyze the quality of the service, its positive and negative aspects over a period of time. This leads to the improvement of performance and better preparation for further service and even the possibility of offering MPs services without their request, in what is called Demand - Creation which makes information and research services early and pro-active.

F - Improving the Methods of International Parliamentary Cooperation

On the international level, there are important initiatives to use these modern techniques in parliamentary research and information, among which is the international network of legal information.

There is no doubt that the exchange of legal experiences between countries is a vital matter in the light of the present international changes and economic developments that are taking place. In addition, there is a need to enhance the benefits to be extracted from the huge advances in means of communication and their modern techniques.

Within the framework of international efforts to strengthen cooperation between the legal institutions and enhance the exchange of legal experiences and give an impetus to serious research in legal and constitutional systems, an international network for legal information was created called "The Global Legal Information Network - GLIN" and became one of the

important landmarks supporting the development in contemporary legislation. This network is currently a non-governmental system. It is not an American government system although it is currently based in the American Congress. It includes a number of stations or regional databases which exchange information between themselves and may make it available to others within the scope of international exchange in systems of information.

The organizational principles of this network rely on the regulations included in the Agreement of Brussels in 1886, which called for the exchange of legislative and legal information between countries of the world. This network was established to respond to the real needs of legislative institutions and legal jurisprudence in the world. In addition, it allows the exchange of experiences and facilitates research and studies of existing legal systems and strengthens the comparative method in legal research. The Library of Congress plays the role of the technical secretariat of the network, for the time being. It also ensures that technical assistance is provided to the countries included in this international network group (or family) which comprises 15 countries at present. Among them are the "sister" Arab countries of Kuwait, Tunisia and Mauritania.

This initiative aims at collecting and documenting legal, constitutional, judicial, jurisprudential facts and studies and making them available on the international electronic network. The aim is to serve the national legislator, legal institutions and researchers through the documentation of the national legal system itself and allowing its storage and retrieval through modern electronic techniques. In addition, the aim is the provision of free access to other countries' legal systems and regulations.

This international network is instrumental in allowing knowledge and access to the experiences of other countries in concluding international agreements in all spheres, such as economic cooperation and trade systems agreements and the process of issuing new decrees and their amendment or modification. It gives an overview of the various world experiences in terms of trials and legal apparatuses and in constitutional matters and the development of legal principles. It also allows reference to the jurisprudence culture in the various legislative and legal spheres. There is no doubt that the contribution of Arab countries to this network will enhance the Arab legislative and legal experiences and will strengthen the parliamentary links between Arab parliaments themselves on the one hand, and Arab parliaments and the world as a whole, on the other.

[2] These countries are the United States, Estonia, Canada, Mexico, Germany, Japan, Poland, the Czech Republic, Lithuania, Australia, Britain. For more information, see the activities of the 63rd conference of the International Federation of Libraries, FLA in [http, Ifla. inist. fr/1fla/iv](http://fla.inist.fr/1fla/iv).



3. Developing the Parliamentary Library

The legislator is becoming increasingly in need of an increasing amount of useful, documented and analyzed information.

The major source for such information in most parliaments of the world is the parliamentary library. The parliamentary library is a specialized library serving a particular client, who is the MP, as well as the group of researchers and assistants who help him. It also performs an archival role in storing parliamentary documents.

It is necessary to get in contact with the MPs at the beginning of each legislative session to introduce them to the library's services. The legislative body's library is considered part of any communication and public information system in a country. The legislative library may have direct links with the national public libraries, or it may be part of them because of its central role in the information system. It is also considered an important center for researchers from many fields; and the state's keeper of parliamentary memory.

Other parties who benefit from the services of the legislative library are all the media interested in knowing and following-up on the different parliamentary activities.

The parliamentary library aims at mobilizing information sources, in all their forms and origins, for the service of MPs. These include the collection of material regarding the sources of information and data in parliamentary action, irrespective of their forms and origins, the exhaustive enumeration of all the types of information services and the monitors of information and data as well as directing clients and beneficiaries towards the appropriate sources for the information they need.

In order to achieve this, the library should keep guides and indices and data orienting and monitoring systems regarding the studies, research, theses and reports it possesses. It should also keep a record of the government and international projects linked to parliamentary action, and the names of experts who can be called upon to prepare specialized reports or advice, as well as the lists of directorates and apparatuses with which cooperation in providing services can be achieved, in addition to all the relevant conferences and meeting and symposia.

MPs have a role in the administration of the library since parliamentary libraries are within the sphere of the legislative power. Some of these libraries fall directly under the supervision of the MPs through a special committee called "The Library Committee". In other instances, supervision takes the form of cooperation and continuous dialogue between the members of parliament and the management of the library regarding its services and the improvement of its performance.

Information is contained in libraries under a variety of forms such as various kinds of books, translations, official publications, periodicals (magazines, newspapers, newsletters...), reports and research, academic and scientific theses, analytical indices, parliamentary documents, original sources (such as encyclopedias, dictionaries, books of facts, statistical abstracts...). The organization of the library's possessions is usually in line with its administrative and

organizational structures. The parliamentary library is composed of two elements: Directory and guiding services regarding the information contained, and the information itself. Therefore its services are divided into: Directory or guidance services which answer inquiries and assist MPs in their dealing with the library and what it offers, the updated provision of information, the selective transmission of information, the internal acquaintance service, lending and photographing services.

The role of the library is not limited to collection, preparation and transmission of services, but also includes recommendations regarding the facts collected from the numerical databases and other data from official and semi official sources such as ministries and government directories and centers of research and scientific groups and organization, as well as, from professional associations, institutions, universities and centers of learning. This is why it is necessary for the library to establish strong links with parliamentary research. The library becomes a center of enlightenment regarding information whose aim is to serve MPs. This explains the need to establish a directorate for research services to be part of the library or linked to it.

In the modern age, it has become necessary to create institutions for information and data exchange to provide the most up to date methods of analysis (particularly in legal matters) to MPs and enable them to use the current technological means. It has become necessary for every parliamentary library to have a web page on the Internet. The following is a description of two models of parliamentary libraries, in India and Egypt as regards organizational structure and services provided by the library to support MPs.

A - The Model of the Library and Research and Information in India

The Indian Parliament adopts the system of merged research information and library units. The latter, plus the computer system were merged into a united organizational structure called: "Library and Reference, Research, Documentation and Information Service - LARRDIS". (xiii)

The idea of merging these units does not mean installing them geographically in the same place within parliament, but uniting them. Structurally and organizationally, even if they cannot be in one place for one reason or another. The aim lying behind the principle of unity is to coordinate the abovementioned services to facilitate the work of MPs and the response to their information needs.

This organizational structure includes branch units such as the library, the directorate of references, that of research and documentation and that of information. Other branch units perform particular technical tasks, such as the microfilm unit, the translation unit, the publication unit. It is set out in the following way:

1 - Library Services:

Most of units of the library fall within the Indian Parliament's building. Others are in adjacent offices and rooms. The library produces a weekly newsletter describing its new acquisitions in order to inform the MPs about them.

A special department exists in the library called "The Directorate of Services to MPs", this department provides research and information services when MPs request them in the required form and within the requested time limit. Such services include: providing published information and services to members, the collection and classification of data, statistics and information upon a written request presented by the MP, the preparation of summarized remarks over the questions and issues raised by the MP, the preparation of a short summary on the history and development of legislations under focus, the preparation of studies, background papers, summaries and newsletters on the major issues raised in the public sessions and their provision in special boxes available before the new sessions or sources of briefing, and finally answering specific questions addressed to the library by MPs.

A special "Bureau for MPs Information Requests" provides this last service. MPs have to fill special forms provided by this bureau to specify what they are requesting. There are specialized researchers who assist the MP in defining his exact requirement so that information regarding the answers can be gathered most promptly and satisfactorily. A professional supervisor looks over the work of these researchers to make sure that they are dealing properly with the MPs and to assess MP's responses with regard to this research service.

In general, researchers rely on the subjects, primary sources in gathering the information required by MPs. They prepare a brief summary in answer to a question. They can also provide data, statistics and tables or the appropriate comments and analysis regarding the subject. This fast research service has proved its worth in the functioning of the Indian Parliament and the support of MPs in parliamentary discussions. As a consequence, demand for its services increased on behalf of MP from 150 requests in the year 1950 to about 700 in 1970, to over seven thousand in the year 1997.

This directorate usually works and receives questions when parliament is in session and in between parliament's sessions. However, it is much more active during sessions and while MPs are actually meeting.

The answers to MPs questions are translated to the language used by them which was specified on the request forms.

This directorate also prepares files in big boxes including the books and reports related to the major subjects on the parliament's agenda, which are available for reference inside the library and cannot be borrowed for outside use.

An auxiliary service provides photocopying parts of this material if required for very minimal sums of money.

2 - The Computer Center:

There is a computer center that handles MPs requests of library and research information. This center includes a number of computers with the necessary programmings and varied databases which members can access and use in an electronic fashion.

The library introduced statistics, information and the contents of variety books and reports into these bases and linked them to terminals available in the library rooms and other parts of the parliament, and its major offices. This enables the largest number of MPs to get access and use this information. The database of the computer includes a number of major programmings most important of which is: the index of discussions and parliamentary questions, the legislative base presented by MPs and the government, the biographies of members of both houses of parliament, the decisions of the Head of State and Prime Minister and ministers, the electoral process, at the federal and provincial levels, the internal parliamentary elections, the story of legislations and the periods and phases through which each legislation went through, statistical data and table on the economic, agricultural, commercial, industrial and other spheres of development, the index of library contents of books, periodicals, reports and research.

Since 1993, the computer center has been developed along with its databases to make it directly available to parliamentary reporters thus facilitating their task of press coverage of parliamentary action. In addition, the computer center in the Indian Parliament was linked to the legislative councils in the administrative districts and provinces and municipal councils. The Indian satellite made this like possible.

3 - The Microfilm Unit:

The microfilm unit was created to document, store and retrieve the possessions of the main library, particularly its rare possessions. This unit was supplied with the necessary equipment and installations to enable it to photograph all the records regarding parliamentary discussions and keep records of the reports and activities of MPs in the different regional and international parliamentary conferences. It also includes the rare documents.

4 - The Audiovisual Unit:

An audiovisual unit was created to provide sound communication and screening of the various library possessions and to be made accessible to MPs. In addition, the action of parliament is filmed and transmitted. This also happens when important political occasions take place such as the speech of the President in parliament's opening session. Question hour discussions are also filmed as well as some sessions of the important committees. This unit tapes these films into videocassettes and keeps them in the library and enables MPs to have copies of them at cost price. A periodical is published and distributed to inform MPs about the possessions of the library in this regard.

5 - The Photocopying and Printing Service:

This service was created to provide MPs and committees and directorates of research with copies of the research and reports and files they require. It also copies books and documents which the MPs require for a small fee.

6 - Documentation Service:

This service was created to collect and print the parliament's agenda so that MPs know what is to be discussed in the sessions.

7 - Press Clippings Service:

This service is equally important for MPs and parliamentary researchers. It collects press clippings from major newspapers especially the major commentaries, files and important news to parliament. Afterwards, these clippings are kept and indexed. Brief summaries of the clippings are distributed to the various technical and research directories of parliament.

8 - Research Service:

This department publishes a number of summaries, reports, research, background papers, analyses and newsletters which are important for parliamentary action. This is one of the most important information and research activities provided for MPs to support them in parliamentary discussions.

This directorate provides other services, most important of which is the preparation of reports and summaries regarding the issues raised in international conferences in which MPs participate as well as background papers and facts regarding the countries they visit and the representatives they meet. It also gives suggestions on the issues that MPs tackle with the international public opinion and media.

9 - The Bureau of Parliamentary Information:

This bureau is the link with the local and international written and audiovisual media. It strengthens parliament's link with such media and with the government's institutions as well. This bureau publishes reports and announces declarations and press briefings and makes parliamentary information available to the media.

In addition, an electronic information network – service has been made available to MPs, including web pages containing facts about the various parliamentary activities. These are made immediately available to MPs and include the major activities that take place in parliament and at committee levels as well. Internal CCTV cameras also cover the bureau of the leader of parliament and a number of important spots in the parliament building such as the reference room in the library, the resting hall for MPs, the major rooms, and hospitality halls. Some of these places are filmed and transmitted on wide screens and can be seen in various parts of parliament.

B - The Model of the Egyptian People's Library

The Egyptian People's Council Library was created in 1924. At that time, the Egyptian Parliament included both the Senate and House of Parliament. Each of these houses had its own library. Later, the two libraries merged to form the "Nation (Umma) Library". This was in 1957. In 1971, the name was changed to "The Library of the People's Council". As of 1989, a sector of information encompassing the library and other directorates was created (xvi). The process of development of the library took place in two stages. The first stage came about in 1975, where modern systems were introduced to indexing and classification. The library since then began

performing the huge task of analyzing all documents regarding the Egyptian Parliaments (with varying names) from 1866 to date. Everything was put on microfilms and indices were prepared for it.

The second stage started with the early nineties. It was characterized by the use of information technology such as recording the Egyptian facts since 1883 on microfilms, as well as the official government newspaper (Al Jarida Al Rasmiah) since its inception in 1958. The Library also started collecting some periodicals and daily newspapers and storing them on microfilms and Microfish sections.. Presently, the preparation of a study to introduce computers and database items has been completed. The following items will be introduced: Database for books with bibliographic material for every book together with an objective analysis in the form of a summary with the possibility of retrieval by subject, author and the date of publishing, Moreover, a database on the press archive, a data base on information files, one on the services of internal and external lending will be added to it.

The contents of the Egyptian parliament library. exceed 7000 subjects and 300 periodicals, in addition to the press archive which is an objective collection of press clippings from Egyptian magazines and some Arab newspapers , the United Nations publications and the international agencies linked to it. In addition, it includes the publications of the Organization of African Unity, the Arab League, the International agreements and conventions plus local and international statistics on various subjects and information files over the most important local and international issues in the area, as well as academic theses in law, economics and politics.

The Library has been supplied with a number of personal computers and end user terminals linked to the basic network of parliament. An internal network linking all the sectors of information action has been attached to the principal parliamentary network and was also connected to the Internet since 1997.

The Egyptian Parliament's Library also includes a new and important unit which is that of the general directorate of research services. This department prepares information and scientific files on various political, legal, economic and social issues on the national and international levels. It produces the scientific level of research in two forms: An exhaustive file including all the various elements of the legal, economic and social subjects on the national and international levels as well as a condensed summary of the most important points dealt with by subject of research. The file including the scientific material remains always open for updating with new material depending on new discoveries and latest information so that it will be ready to perform its mission properly as and when it is required to do so.

In brief, the activities of the Egyptian People's Council Library include: Internal and external borrowing facilities, photography, current coverage, selective transmission of information, preparation of objective bibliographic lists, short filming, press archive (press clippings), presentation of the articles in periodicals, Internet services, sources services, information films on the most important local and international issues. A list of the current coverage is published including the most recent books, publications and periodicals stored in the Library.

The Egyptian People's Council has introduced a plan to modernize its library and the work in it, by providing it with the most recent technology, programs and applications, enabling it to further modernize its organizational structure and provide training for the staff. The first stage will modernize the administrative apparatus and the second will tackle the actual library facilities and the information and research services.



4. The Development of Parliamentary Training

Training is of crucial importance in institutional development in general, and regarding parliament in particular.

Since continuous training, at all levels, is required in economic institutions so as to increase their capacities in profit making, these institutions tend to allocate special budgets for research and development. Parliaments also have to lend focus to the training process for five major reasons:

First: Continuous training in its variety of scopes and levels represents parliament's window to what is happening in the modern world, and a means to benefit from the various experiences of development in world parliaments.

The competition between items on parliaments' agendas is increasing because parliaments' activities are becoming more numerous and tackling more varied issues. This renders the training to develop the capacities of elements of parliamentary action (MPs, technical staff and their assistants) very necessary to cope with new demands and enhance parliamentary performance in general.

Second: Parliament, because of its nature and definition is an institution with a complicated organizational structure. It includes the permanent standing committees, the special and Ad-Hoc committees, the technical, research and information directorates, the departments for financial and administrative affairs, the sections dealing with MPs and the needs they require from the supporting apparatus. Added to this is the relation with the executive power, on the one hand, and the electoral districts and citizens, on the other. All this requires an organizational structure and a team of assistants with a diversity of capacities and skills. The system of recruitment and personnel policies meanwhile, does not take into account the personal and qualitative differences between the members of staff while recruitment, assessment and incentives' policies are being laid down. They are treated as a homogeneous group, and their training takes into account the levels of their jobs in the hierarchy scheme and an attempt is made to improve their output on the basis of the nature of their jobs. They are rehabilitated and rechannelled in the positions most appropriate to their capacities.

Third: It is common for parliament staff to shift positions between directorates, committees and the various sectors during the period of their work. This follows many criteria, sometimes objective and at other times political. Consequently, continuous training is necessary which is in line with these shifts of tasks within parliament.

Fourth: MPs represent a non-homogeneous group. They are an active group with a variety of capacities, interests, intellectual and political allegiances. They do not sit in their seats for long periods of time nor do they remain in their positions for extended periods, while work in the technical apparatus of parliament is characterized by continuity and relative professionalism. MPs, therefore, require the technical know-how and assistance which is in line with the mobile nature of their jobs. This does not apply to the administrative, bureaucratic and economic institutions of parliaments where staff members and directors remain for longer periods in their jobs.

Fifth: The required skills of the technical team assisting MPs, and the expected abilities of the MPs themselves in improving their legislative and political monitoring performance, are both characterized by fast change and continuous development in some parts of the world. The MPs of today, and the technical apparatuses helping them, are expected to deal with a multiplicity of new and complicated issues which were not on the agenda few years ago. Among these are economic blocs formation, giant monopoly organizations, monetary and stock markets and commodities, cloning and genetic engineering, the society of information and transfer of technology, international agreements, new strategies and the New World Order, parliamentary diplomacy and the political roles of MPs and others. All this requires increased attention towards enhancing training in parliamentary action.

This matter gains importance due to the absence of parliamentary experience centers (houses) in the Arab World and the scarcity of consultative and policy-oriented research available to MPs in these domains and the sensitivity of dealing with extra parliamentary experience centers (houses) for understandable but not necessarily acceptable reasons.

In Jordan, the New Jordan Center faced the issue of political sensitivity when it attempted to become a center (house) of experience to the Jordanian Parliament. "The idea of having a particular specialized unit conducting parliamentary studies did not find enough encouragement from MPs who were cautious regarding its political implications, and the fear that it may become an outside "kitchen" preparing the action of parliament. The government may look at such a center (house) with caution just as it may consider it as a center of power. In addition some MPs refused to deal with such centers, and the general secretariat of parliament was opposed to the idea of cooperating or relying on centers for parliamentary studies, or experience (houses), in assisting MPs, parliamentary committees and the technical staff of parliament".(xv)

These givens are similar to the experiences of other bodies in Egypt, and maybe to a lesser extent in Lebanon (xvi). Hence workshops, symposia of dialogue and observation-study tours become more important locally and internationally.

A – The Experiences of Training Programs in Arab Parliaments

It should be noted that the majority of training programs for those working in Arab parliaments were divided into two types. The first, are those which coordinate with the parliament (may exist within parliament's buildings in under its direct or indirect supervision) and those which exist outside parliament (as an initiative from some (experience houses) or other training institutions, local or international, or through a special funding from non-governmental organizations or international bodies interested in parliamentary life in the Arab World).

In general, the preparation and implementation of the training programs in the first case i.e in coordination with parliament staff, is usually more successful and less complicated, and less subject to technical and organizational problems, in comparison to the second type of programs. This is partly due to the political sensitivity of parliament or the technical apparatus in it about dealing with institutions which lie outside the official framework of parliament itself. It is also due to the subjects of the training programs prepared by these non-parliamentary bodies, which may not agree with the priorities of the parliamentary action in question, and the political

circumstances in the country and the internal balances within the parliament. Through reviewing three training experiences achieved in coordination with the parliaments of Egypt, Jordan and Lebanon, it should be noted that the assessments of these programs were in general positive, and that the difficulties they experienced were of a technical and organizational nature. They are much less acute than when programs were suggested or implemented by bodies or organizations not directly linked to parliament.

In Egypt, a training program for those working in the People's Council and Consultative Council (the two houses of parliament) was undertaken by Cairo University's Economics and Political Sciences Department in coordination with the general secretariat of both councils. This training program emphasized three major venues which were the group of programs for improving and directing the leadership level of those working in top administrative positions in the two councils. They included discussion symposia or seminars on some political and economic issues or issues pertaining to administration, strategic planning, communication and the improvement of human resources. Second, the venue of parliamentary researchers which emphasized legal, economic and political issues and the legislative process as well as the preparation of research reports and the development of the regulations of parliamentary committees. Third, the venue of workers in administrative units and the officials of the library. These programs tended to be in most instances of a theoretical nature, and did not motivate those participating in them via monetary incentives or promises of grants to pursue specialization for those who excelled. The staff even found difficulty in securing full time commitment for these programs (xvii).

In Jordan, a training program was prepared in coordination with the general secretariat of the Jordanian National Council (Parliament) and the Institute of Administration. The participants were the staff of the directorate of research and studies in parliament, which was created in 1992. The program focused on developing the capacities of scientific thinking, the skills of conducting research and the use of the scientific method in preparing research and parliamentary studies.

The training proved quite useful particularly for participants who had been away from academic life and scientific research for a long time, and since their graduation years ago. It was also useful for the new staff of parliament.

It managed to combine the theoretical (lectures and discussions) with the practical (applied studies based on what had been learnt from the real world). From an assessment point of view, the most important lessons learnt in this program were the following: The importance of publicizing and spreading news about these training programs among staff to motivate them to participate, the necessity to prepare accurate studies regarding the training needs of parliamentary staff, the need to link the training programs to the real activities of the staff, the emphasis on the practical elements in the training program, the suggestion of enabling the staff and the technical secretariat to participate in the preparation and implementation of the training program, thus exerting more efforts to convince the higher administrative management of the importance of training programs, and the encouragement of those trained to use what they have learnt. In addition it was suggested that academic specialization of staff should be made less disparate in order to create a more homogeneous staff groups and to decrease the huge differences in ages of the staff members and consequently their experiences. They also urged their employees to allow the full time staff to pursue training programs and to make more use of

experienced research centers and “houses of experience” from outside parliament to prepare and coordinate these programs and to provide for continued financial support for them (xiii). In Lebanon, the International Management and Training Institute has been cooperating with the Lebanese Parliament since 1995 in applied training programs for the heads of directories, sections, reporters and parliamentary researchers.

During 1995 - 1999 this institute initiated and applied 10 training activities aiming at the introduction of new concepts for dialogue and exchange within a democratic framework and the enhancement of trainees skills in time management, organization of work, preparation of files as well as leadership and the improvement in methods of management in parliament.

The assessment of this experience reveals that it had a considerable success. The trainees were satisfied and MPs and parliament leadership looked at it positively. The negative aspect concentrated on resistance on the part of some trainees to change the methods of work they were used to, and the difficulties in the administrative climate surrounding them. Moreover, political considerations tend to have some influence in recruitment and promotion in the parliament's administration. To this is added the absence of a clear policy of reward and punishment regarding the staff. Furthermore, there are economic and financial difficulties due to the special conditions through which Lebanon is passing, because of the war, on the one hand, and the stumbling difficulties to which parliamentary and administrative actions are subjected to during this period, on the other. (xix)

B – Major Determining Factors in Training Programs for Parliament's Staff

Based on the above mentioned experiences it is possible to propose a number of major determining criteria to initiate and implement programs for institutional development and the improvement in Arab parliaments staff skills as follows:

- 1.** That the training is based on a plan and that the training plan should be adapted to the requirements of parliamentary work, in terms of timing, the types of trainees, the scopes and areas of the training programs. They should also be under the direct supervision of the parliament's general secretariat and should result in an overall scientific assessment of the trainees performance.
- 2.** The realization that training is a continuous process to improve the skills of trainees in the various areas of parliamentary action, and within the framework of the trainees jobs in particular. The aim is to elevate the level of competence in work performance. This is why the training plan should be cumulative, complementing itself, and subject to assessment (on monthly basis for example). This is called quality assessment administration.
- 3.** The training plan should help in the creation of a group of trainees within parliament, who could themselves conduct the training process later on, in what is called the training of trainers (TOT).
- 4.** The agreement that training is a major element in enhancing the use of information technology, computer systems and the information era; consequently, the inclusion of specialized training programs in information technology (using the computer, the Internet, E-mail) as well as designing training programs whose aims are to develop analytical skills by the use of these techniques.(like browsing through the computer, statistical analyses, data base etc...).
- 5.** Choosing the organizations for the implementation of training programs from the “houses” of

national experience, and the international bodies, when necessary, in addition to conducting the training locally with recourse to external training in the case of dire need, and after the approval of parliament. The training programs should be conducted in parliament itself or the implementing units, and should be conducted according to the work requirements within parliament and the nature of the programs themselves.

Examples of these organizations are universities, national research centers such as schools of law, economics and political sciences, documentation departments in libraries and the “houses” of national experience in the Arab world and abroad such as the Arab Parliamentary Center for Training or the Congress Research Center in the U.S. and others.

6. It is suggested, in this regard, that the training plan be divided into the following sectors based on jobs, objective and complementary tracks and not necessarily in line with the administrative framework of the parliament’s general secretariat.

(1) The Major Sectors

1. The Sector of Committees, which includes the workers in standing committees i.e. homogenous standing committees linked to one another (such as the economic group including economic and financial affairs, planning and budget, foreign trade, industry and technology...or the legislative and political group including legislative and constitutional affairs, local government and municipalities... or the foreign affairs and international affairs group etc...)
2. The Sector of Sessions, which includes those working in the administration of schedules, agenda, controls, the press and issues pertaining to members.
3. The Sector of Research and Information, which includes those working in libraries, research directories, computer centers (excluding technical specialized staff).
4. The Sector of Administrative and Technical Matters, which includes the staff of the technical committees of parliament leadership, directors and the secretary general and his assistants, the financial and administrative departments, the directorate of statistics, archives, documentation, services and maintenance.

(2) The Major areas of Training

These include interrelated venues which are:

- The area of “Legal and Parliamentary Knowledge” which is a primary venue for all staff (who need this knowledge). It includes training and general educational programs in the knowledge of the constitution, the law, the internal regulation list and the mechanisms of parliamentary action, and that of the work of the state and the government apparatuses and modern parliamentary life. Among the training issues tackled by this venue is : the interpretation of the constitution and of laws linked to parliamentary political and party life, the organization of the various powers in the country, the internal regulation list of parliament, the organizational framework and the internal order of action based on it, the legislative process within parliamentary action, the monitoring role of parliament in monetary affairs, the role of parliament in producing general policies in the light of modern development of parliament’s role, the administrative apparatus of the state (The ministries, official bodies, locals, central apparatus).

- The area of Improving the Action of Committees, which includes central training subjects such as : the role of committees in parliamentary action, the role of parliamentary committees in the legislative process, the types of parliamentary committees in contemporary world parliaments and their functions, the role of committees in supporting the work of members, the management of committee actions, the improvement in capacities of those working in parliamentary committees, the preparation of parliamentary reports and research for those working in committees, the use of the library and modern information technology techniques in the work of parliamentary committees.
- The area of Skills in Legislative Drafting. This is related to the basis of legislation, the legislative systems in the Arab world and some foreign countries, the relation between general policies and legislation, the language of legislation, the technical principles of formulating legislation, the paradoxes or problems in the technical and legal formulation of legislations: practical cases, the use of databases in the legislative process, the construction of legislative databases on computers, the role of the legislative/legal committee in legislation and formulation, the role of the legal directorate in the follow-up of the implementation of legislation, the organization and management of the legal apparatus in parliaments, the preparation of introductory, and explanatory briefings regarding legislation, the role of parliamentary committees in the initiation of legislation with emphasis on applied cases of legislation, such as financial and tax legislation, and labor and social and ecology legislation.
- The area of Technological skill and its Related Basic Linguistic Knowledge, which is a major venue for all those working in parliament. It aims at the eradication of computer illiteracy and strengthening the ability to use modern information technology. It includes training programs in the use of personal computers, the Internet and the ability to use the computer word program. In addition, it trains in the use of the English language with emphasis on parliamentary terminology and language, plus the use of other foreign languages based on parliament's needs. Among the most important training subjects in this venue are: the use of the personal computer, the use of the internal parliamentary network, writing and printing on the computer, the use of foreign languages and the legal and parliamentary technology.
- The area of Research, Administrative and Specialized Technical Skills, this is an advanced complementary venue for specialized people. It includes three types of programs: "The Programs for Research and Analysis and the Preparation of Report", in the area of preparation of parliamentary research, the preparation of parliamentary committees reports. It also includes the analysis and assessment of public policies, the response to requests for parliamentary information through electronic sources (using the Internet in parliamentary research), the preparation of working papers in international conferences.
Among the training subjects in this area are: the methods of research and scientific thinking, the preparation of research and the writing of parliamentary reports, the analysis of legislative documents, the analysis and assessment of public policies, the use of the library and information systems in parliamentary research and studies, the methods of field work and statistical and quantitative analysis in parliamentary studies, the preparation and discussion and assessment of the budget, planning and follow-up, the content analysis of parliamentary controls, the preparation of public policy reports and

recommendations from a parliamentary point of view, and the organization of administrations of modern parliaments.

- The area of the Administration Specialized in Communication, Time and Quality Management, Strategic Planning, the Development of Leaderships and Parliamentary Action. These programs are directed towards middle and upper management. They take the form of workshops, discussion groups and deal with the following subjects: the growth of human resources and the preparation of leaderships, creative thinking, the management of collective action, strategic planning and follow-up of performance, the policies of economic reform and complementary development, information and communication technologies.
- The area of Analysis of the Budget and Economic Policies, which emphasizes the use of modern methods of research and information technology in economic and financial analysis. Among the training programs here are: the technical methods of preparing the budget, the parliamentary reports regarding the budget, the assessment and review of the final accounts and the reports of the monitoring and accountability apparatuses, the use of imitation techniques in the preparation and presentation of the budget, the sectoral planning, the use of follow-up on performance measures.
- The area of Programs to Develop the Library; among the most important areas of training for parliamentary library staff is the training in the use of computers, the English language, marketing and information service, the modern library techniques, specialized sources, the Internet, indexing and references, classification, electronic dissemination, increasing holdings, exclusions, assessment selectively and storage, analysis of subjects, indices and summaries, follow-up of the needs of users, participation and organization of international and local conferences.

5. The Development of Parliamentary Information

There is nothing new in the realization that we are living in the age of informatics and the fast development in information technology, whether in the way information is collected and analyzed or in the rationalization of decision making based on it. It also goes without saying that the gap between nations is no longer linked to their underground natural resources, but rather in what lies in the minds of their citizens. The important thing here is the need to see information in our lives not as a collection of machines (for example computers) or accessories (telecommunication equipment in its various forms) but as a coordinated system emanating from a conviction in the role of science and aiming at improvement of social conditions to enable society to experience renaissance and progress.

In other words, informatics, from an analytical point of view, is a way of thinking and expressing a qualitative shift from reliance on intuition, personal preferences and value judgements to recognition of real facts and dealing with them to arrive at the best possible solutions (increasing return and decreasing expenses) regarding the problems in question. From here information is linked to decision forming and decision making. It does not revolve in vacuum, but is used for a specific end.

Informatics is a means of action that cannot accept division or selectivity that is not based on planning. It cannot be conceived for example that computers are lumped in administrations in huge numbers without this affecting the methods of work of the institutions involved. The aim should be to improve services or the final product (so that the work is faster and the performance is of better quality). This raises questions sometimes regarding the real role of information centers created in the different institutions and bodies. Thirdly, informatics has an important cultural significance. It is not only linked to the method of work, the quality of the product and the improvement of output. It has become a major means to reinforce the channels of communication between individuals, between society and the state, between society and the outside world (which is no longer an outside world).

Informatics has become a synonym of transparency and the means through which the latter can exist. It is no longer possible to leave planning for development exclusively in the hands of an elite of politicians or public employees. Nor should planning be one dimensional i.e. from government to people. It is not tenable either to implement development plans without measuring their effects on society and impact on individuals. The state should not have exclusive hold over the preparation of the political, economic, social and cultural agendas of society, nor should it have exclusivity over laying down its priorities, its major issues and how to deal with them... All this is no longer practical in the Third Millennium.

If informatics are necessary for the state apparatus and the institutions of society, they are inevitable for parliament. This is because of their mass oriented nature, deputizing tasks and legislative and monitoring roles. The development of communication means and information systems in parliament has become the infrastructure leading to the growth of the parliamentary institution, on the one hand, and the activation of a democratic climate on the other. Parliament does not work in vacuum, but is linked to the political and cultural climates surrounding it. It affects them and is in turn affected by these climates.

From here, the specification of a parliamentary information channel in Arab information policy is considered an important step in the foundation of this type of information, and consequently towards the consolidation of the culture and institutions of a democratic society.

The question raised regarding audiovisual media coverage of parliamentary action raises a number of issues and expectations: Does it only include an increase in the time limit of the transmission of sessions? Will the sessions be transmitted after they had been recorded and edited in a way that focuses on some issues or MPs more than others?

What is the agenda and work focus of this specialized channel? Will it only transmit sessions, declarations and official parliamentary visits or is it part of a total system of “Parliamentary Information”? The latter tries to elicit public consciousness regarding the regulations and practices of parliamentary democracy in the country concerned (Egypt) and the world. It also involves a critical analysis of parliament’s performance addressed to both listeners and MPs. Other questions asked are: Who runs this information channel?

Is it parliament itself or a group of specialized media professionals or a joint team? What are the means of assessing viewers and MPs evaluations of the performance of this channel? All this, plus other questions are raised. The following is an attempt at (clearly defining) crystallization of the framework for the creation of a parliamentary information channel in the Arab world:

A – The Tasks of the Information Channel

There are many sources of parliamentary information such as active newspapers, specialized centers of research, increasing radio and television coverage. Despite this, the level of parliamentary consciousness is still limited, whether that is intentional – a critical view of parliament itself – or not, or the result of the lack of information and experience. This is why the first task of this parliamentary channel is to work on widening information sources and developing knowledge of parliamentary life. Based on this premise, it should achieve three principle tasks which are:

(1) Data Rounding off and Spread of Information: The parliamentary channel is a modern and fast method to round off data and spread parliamentary information. It is possible for this highly sophisticated method to be an internal communication medium only, within parliament’s framework. It can also be internal and external, by linking it to the internal communication networks. In any case, this task is related to the important data in parliamentary action. The data in question here are the facts, figures and statistics that have to do with the degree of monitoring or legislative initiative of parliamentarians or the results of the local or international general elections, or the decrees and recommendations produced by regional or international parliaments, or even the dates of parliamentary sessions and its committees i.e. similar to a virtual newsletter being constantly updated.

What is meant by facts here are use the knowledge and data of some significance which are expected to have a direct effect on the behavior of the individual.

The channel can play a part in this educational role of both viewers and MPs regarding parliamentary practice and democratic life. It can do this by introducing the activities of other parliaments in the world, and presenting the works and recommendations of the International

Parliamentary Union which plays a vital role in developing parliamentary institutions in the modern world, particularly in the area of democratic transformation.

(2) Developing the Parliamentary Behavior of MPs: The behavioral tendencies of individuals are usually affected by a number of variables most important of which are the knowledge and information to which they are exposed and which are available to them. The more homogeneous, purposeful and linked to a cultural framework (adapted to the social environment), this knowledge and information are, the more they become a means to develop and enhance the individual's social behavior. The members of parliament usually represent the various groups and sectors of society. Naturally, it is expected to find differences in the experiences of members regarding parliamentary life in general and legislative action in particular. This is not only from the angle the degree of knowledge of the constitutional and legal frameworks for parliamentary action, but also from the perception and understanding of the basis of popular representation and interaction with government institutions in a political system.

From here, it becomes necessary to bridge the cultural and other differences between MPs and create a purposeful impact in their behavior. The end would be a common aim for the public good.

The parliamentary channel can play a role in creating such a purposeful impact identifying parliamentary regulations, in general, and indicating the proper use and application of these regulations.

Examples of this are: The identification of the duties, responsibilities and rights of an MP, particularly in vital matters, such as the conditions for the use of the various parliamentary monitoring tools (questions, declarations, suggestions, investigations, discussions). Another example is the explanation of the regulations and procedures of the legislative process, such as the request to speak, the presentation of a project proposal, the wish to review a matter, the ratification of covenants and international agreements, the nature of party commitment, the regulations regarding formation of political parties, electoral laws and the supervisory role of the judiciary over laws.

(3) The Support of a Legislative Decree: Modern organizations rely on up to date information systems regarding decision making. Whether they are political, economic or other they do this because the decision makers belonging to them are either short of information or have vague and imprecise knowledge or suffer from such an excess of it that he cannot analyze it and reformulate it.

It follows that the importance of the parliamentary channel increases as a source of support to decision making. It opens the door to discussion and permits the exchange of ideas and experiences over the issues presented to parliament, before a decision is taken. It also proposes the possible present and future alternatives to the different decisions taken (eg: anticipating the possible reaction to a law, could prevent many of its dangers and future controversy regarding it).

The more available the views and analysis are to the decision maker, the more he can – theoretically at least – know what to expect regarding a decision he takes. The legislative decree also follows this rule. It may be one of the areas where information systems are most useful in the support and service of decision making. Sometimes parliament has to choose between a number of alternatives in a very short time and with very little information, either because it is

difficult to obtain or because the subject is new or has arisen suddenly.

The parliamentary channel can supply MPs with information to enable them to take decisions in such circumstances and choose between the various alternatives. Thus legislative decrees are taken after MPs have analyzed the facts and elements behind them despite adverse conditions. The parliamentary channel thus becomes not only a means to inform citizens on how things are taking place in parliament, but also represents a bastion to support the parliamentary decision itself.

This is why the sources feeding the channel with information, knowledge and vision should be widened to enable it to present it to parliament in the following way:

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The strategic aim for developing the parliamentary channel is therefore: the provision of an additional chance to use information and scientific analysis in the process of creation of parliamentary decisions. This takes place through the use of a modern technique capable of attracting new users of its services and having great capacities to present information to these users and update its data. Consequently, this new technique becomes a meeting point for all information sources available in parliament.

B – The Contents of the Parliamentary Channel

It is suggested that the parliamentary channel include three major types of parliamentary data information and analyses namely:

(1) The Affairs of Parliament, such as :

1. Agendas of the general sessions, and committee meetings.
2. Important meetings of the leader of parliament and party leaders and heads of parliamentary blocs.
3. Activities of MPs which are of a parliamentary nature (their legislative initiatives, monitoring activity...)

(2) Political and constitutional issues such as :

1. Parliament activities of legislative, monitoring and financial nature.
2. Parliamentary precedents
3. Cooperation between parliament's two houses (if any)
4. The relations between the legislative institution and government
5. The most important constitutional regulations; important judgements of the higher constitutional court and major items in parliament's internal regulations.

(3) Information and Analyses. Information here means:

1. Statistics and figures and quantitative expressions having significance and importance (such as the situation of the national economy, the state of investment, the rates of population growth...)
2. The most important local and international events (eg., important conferences, the situation in the Middle East, general elections in the world).
3. Analysis of issues raised in parliament.

C – Assessment of Performance

From the beginning, it should be made clear that a parliamentary channel is a dynamic method of information, working according to the givens of the present and the aims of the future. It follows, that it should be constantly developed. But, this development should not occur in vacuum or be the reflection of the convictions and visions of few individuals, even if they are the ones overseeing its work. The needs and requirements of the recipients of its services should be taken into account (the public and MPs). It should include appropriate mechanisms by which the recipients can assess its work so that it can be developed on the basis of objective criteria and a scientific measure of its performance.

There are two complementary methods of assessing performance, either of which should not be excluded. The first is of a technical nature and in a limited scope and involves the creation of a steering committee composed of media people, MPs, technical staff and experts which meet periodically to follow up on its work. The second involves constant contact with the recipients through opinion polls or open programs in which the public participates and which is followed by an analysis of the public responses, and making the necessary recommendations in response to them. This channel could then become a means to support transparency and parliamentary development and change in the Arab World.



Epilogue: The Challenges and Important Domains of Institutional Development

Perhaps the most important lessons to be drawn from the attempts of institutional development in contemporary parliaments (particularly the new parliaments in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe) are the following:

- Among the most important basis of the effectiveness of the parliamentary institution is the opportunity it offers citizens to be acquainted with parliament's work. This is why the principle of publishing the proceedings of parliamentary sessions should be applied, except when very sensitive and dangerous issues, such as national security, have been discussed.
- When the proceedings of parliaments cannot be published, it is necessary to publish summaries of them, or at least give access to the media on what those proceedings were so that they can convey them to the public.
- It should be noted that the effectiveness of the legislative role of parliament is linked to the ability of citizens to gain access to the legislative proposals it makes. The latter should be available to the public and the media and at the right time.
- It is necessary to use the modern voting techniques, particularly electronic voting, mainly because of its transparency and the facility in recording the results of voting, and also for the possibility of publishing or conveying it to public opinion.
- Modern parliamentary democracies are concerned with developing the means of interaction and communication and exchange of information between MPs, on the one hand, and the public and civil society, on the other. In addition to media coverage of parliamentary sessions, the public and civil society should be allowed to attend these sessions.
- Serious challenges face the development of Arab parliamentary action and should be taken into account, most important of which is the delay in the development process itself. It has taken the aspect of an urgent intervention to improve a declining situation rather than a conscious act aiming at development and progress. Public opinion's evaluation of Arab parliamentary action is on the decline (internally and externally). Following is some evidence of this:

- The decline in moral stature of an MP because of scandals in which a number of MPs were involved, from corruption cases to others. In addition, the phenomenon of absence from parliaments sessions became quite common. The overall picture of parliament has been shaken, especially from the media point of view.

- The public's concern and expectations regarding changes in Arab political life touches first of all the political parties' activities and the structure of parliament as a whole.

- The dangers in the contemporary economic and communication changes and the inability of parliament to have an impact or to direct these changes. Parliament's role has been limited to approving laws of privatization and the market economy.

- A high degree of "class liquidity" i.e the incomplete representation of the various sectors of society. Questions were raised over the extent to which the political institutions actually represent the changing forces and social balances and over the fair (or unfair) representation of age, professional and gender groups in parliaments. It has been observed that businessmen (males) are over represented.

- The contradiction between legislative policies of Arab parliaments with the general world trends. This is observed in parliaments positions towards organizing and directing private activity and civil society on the one hand, and human rights, on the other.
- Among the clear paradoxes on the issue of developing Arab parliamentary action is that it is taking place while significant reforms are also happening in the executive power and while public policies are being modernized. The freedom of expression and the space for criticism in politics and the media are relatively widening which is improving the image of government towards public opinion in a number of countries. The judiciary's role in defending rights and public freedoms and monitoring the legality of legislation, is also increasing. All this delayed the necessary reforms and developments of the structure and action of the parliamentary institution.

It may be that the most important aspects in developing Arab parliamentary action lie in the following domains:

1) Supporting MPs Work

- The development of an institutionalized system regarding the relations of an MP to the electoral district in particular and citizens in general through two major actions:
First, the provision of adequate human and technical possibilities for members of parliament to be able to direct their relations to voters/citizens and the creation of offices for them in their electoral districts
Second, the concern for financing and the financial capacities of the MP, which will enable him to cover his different activities in his district, and pay for research and studies. Whatever reservations some may have, it is not logical not to trust the MP on the management and use of a limited amount of financing especially when he is entrusted to formulate and defend the laws governing society as a whole.
- The executive power should cooperate with parliament in the provision of information (which is an important matter). The executive branch is the major source of information for MPs and the more they can cooperate with it easily, the better will their legislative and monitoring performance be. It should also help in responding to voters needs and requests.
- The necessity to organize parliamentary overseas visits so that MPs can visit world parliaments and the different international organizations. These training or study tours are useful for Arab MPs and require good technical preparation through the provision of information on the countries of the world and their parliaments. Exchange of experiences should also take place with world parliaments through MPs themselves and the technical staff assisting them.
- There should be a concern with holding regional and international conferences to discuss the technical and administrative issues in parliamentary institutions. Such conferences could be held in coordination with international parliamentary institutions such as The International Parliamentary Union and the Mediterranean Parliamentary Forum, The Arab Parliamentary Union, the African and Islamic Parliamentary Unions. The latter have become important international organizations and Arab countries are participating in most of their meetings. These organizations are gaining wider importance in view of the contemporary world changes. Arab parliamentary institutions should be prepared to work effectively in them and develop their institutional capacities by participating in their activities. This should not mean just issuing declarations on foreign policy and regional issues. Within this framework, the responsibility of the Arab World should be emphasized. Some thought should be given to the creation of a section

or directorate in Arab parliaments which is specialized in enhancing Arab parliamentary life.

- The support of the role of women in parliaments. In this domain, two things are proposed: First, the widening of women's representation base, and second, the coordination between the activities of women MPs, such as the creation of an association or center for women MPs whose principle aim is to activate women's parliamentary role.

- The support for the creation of a Ministry for Parliamentary Affairs to be held by a minister or an MP, depending on the type of political system involved. The existence of this portfolio represents an important means in parliamentary development because it links the executive and parliamentary branches of government and makes them report to one another. It also produces continuity and reduces tension/alienation between members of the two branches. It reinforces the ethics of monitoring and balance and the institutionalization of political, legislative and monitoring roles of parliament in formulating public policies.

2) Institutional Development

- The development of internal regulations of parliaments to provide a degree of balance between the various political and party currents and to enable the effective running of parliament and distribution of leading positions within it.

- The development of committees' regulations and the modernization of their technical performance. The enhancement of their role in initiating legislation and the careful and patient study of legislation. The development of special committees' reports through recourse to scientific experts and their participation in the preparation of these reports regarding pressing issues.

- In addition to this is the need to ensure full cooperation between the various committees and their concern for their legislative role and its implications.

- Concern for parliamentary information and creating chances for public opinion to pursue parliament's work whether through physical attendance or via modern technological and communication means.

- The continuous and serious training of those working in parliament, particularly those working in research and development, with special emphasis on the art of legislative formulation. Members of parliament should be knowledgeable on the skill of legislative formulation which is considered the major obstacle against serious discussion of proposals of laws and the performance of their legislative roles in general.

- The creation and development of a directorate of training in the technical apparatus of parliament and its support with all the human, material and administrative facilities.

- Concern for information and technical support for parliamentary action (such as: electronic voting, a modern method of archiving documents, setting out and issuing guidelines, the creation of channel for direct broadcasting of parliament's action (in both houses where they exist).

3) Research, Information and the Media

- Access to centers of research, ("Houses of experience") and the institutions of civil society.

- The creation of a nucleus for Arab parliamentary research. This will represent an initiation to the idea of Arab "Houses of experience" in parliamentary action. It is not known whether there are such specialized "Houses" based in the Arab world, or whether there is such a concern in academic forums (such as the Arab Association for Political Science) or in civil society

organizations or Arab universities. (xx)

- Despite the existence of a number of Arab and regional reports on economic, literary and political matters (human rights, strategic issues), there is not one Arab report on parliamentary life. The idea of preparing “the Arab Parliamentary Report” will represent an important means to support the development of Arab parliamentary action and simplify parliamentary life for the public and bringing parliamentary studies and research to the public level.

- The expansion of the activities of parliamentary media information, through broadcasting the sessions and organizing student visits to parliament and model programs such as the youth parliament, the small parliament and vanguard parliaments. (xxi)

Annex 1: Table of Committees Comparison

Argentina - The Senate - Chamber of Deputies	41 38 (Plus 4 common committees)	In both houses the leader is delegated to form committees and he takes into account proportional representation and the strength of the parties.
Bulgaria - The National Council	18	Reflects the political weight of strong parties.
Canada - The Senate - House of Commons	13 20	Nine members are appointed at the beginning of the session by the classification committee to form the standing permanent committees. Special and ad-hoc committees are chosen by the House of Commons
Costa Rica - Legislative Council	6	The structure reflects the relative strength of the leading party and the party divisions.
El Salvador - Legislative Assembly	14	Same as Costa Rica
France -The Senate -The National Assembly	6 6	In both, the formation of committees reflects the proportional weight of the ruling party
Germany - The Senate - Chamber of Deputies	Chooses 24 Chooses 24	In both cases, the choice and proportions reflect the strength of parties
Hungary - The National Assembly	11 standing permanent committees and 6 special ad-hoc ones	Reflecting the proportional representation and strength of parties
India - The People's Council - The Council of Provinces	12 9 Plus 7 common committees and 17 permanent specialized	In both cases, appointment or election is made by the council through proposal or designation or candidacy through the leadership office

	committees	
Ireland - The Senate - Chamber of Deputies	3 (by choice) 3 3 common committees	Choice of committees is made on the basis of designation by a classification committee appointed by the House which takes into account the relative strength of parties and non-party groups
Japan - Consultative House - Chamber of Deputies	17 20	In both, positions on committees are assigned by the leadership office on the basis of relative weight of parties
Jordan - House of Notables - Chamber of Deputies	17 20	Election of members takes place in a secret ballot
Namibia - National Assembly	4 standing permanent committees	Candidacy is made via parties and announced by an official spokesman
Portugal - Presidential Council	12 permanent committees	Proportion of members in committees reflects the strength of the parties
Romania - The Senate - Chamber of Deputies	14 14 plus one intelligence committee	Proportional representation in committees reflects strength of parties. Then each party decides who will represent it in each committee
Russia - The Duma Council - The Federal Council	23 13	In both the proportions are in line with party strength
Senegal - The National Assembly	11	The appointment is by the Assembly based on proposals from heads of parliamentary blocs
Thailand - House of Commons - House of Lords	15 13	In both, election takes place and on the basis of the relative weight of each party

<p>United Kingdom -House of Commons - House of Lords</p>	<p>30 14 plus 10 permanent branch committees</p>	<p>In the House of Commons, the Selection Committee picks the standing permanent committees and proposes 14 members to choose the branch committees which are to be appointed by the House. In the House of Lords, committees are formed on the basis of the advice given by the selection committee, except in the case of the reconciliation committee which is chosen upon the advice of the Chairman of the House of Lords.</p>
<p>United States - The Senate - The Lower House</p>	<p>16 permanent, 3 chosen, one special committee 19 permanent, 2 chosen 4 common committees (Four common between the upper and lower houses)</p>	<p>In both houses, election takes place and is based on the relative weight of the parties</p>



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- (xv)** Hani Howrani “*The Experience of the New Jordan Center of Studies*”. A paper presented to the Workshop on “ *Parliamentary Studies in the Arab World* “, organized by the Arab Institute of Studies and Communication in cooperation with the School of Economic and Political Studies in Cairo, 14 -15 October, 1999.
- (xvi)** Nijad Al Bur'i “*The Experience of the Parliamentary Observatory Dialogue Forum in Lebanon*”. Two Papers presented to the above-mentioned workshop.
- (xvii)** Dr. Salwa Juma'a “ *The Experience of the Training Program in Egypt*”. A paper presented to the above-mentioned workshop.
- (xviii)** Dr. Nizam Barakat “*The Experience of the Training Program in Jordan*”, A paper presented to the above-mentioned workshop.
- (xix)** Jean El Hage “*The Experience of the Training Program in Lebanon*”. A paper presented to the above-mentioned project.
- (xx)** The School of Economic and Political Studies in Cairo University has created a Diploma in Parliamentary Studies as of 1999/2000, which is a higher diploma, accepting university

graduates those especially working in parliaments , or researchers in higher studies and parliamentary journalists.

(xxi) Like the Experience of Egypt in this respect started by the Ministry of Youth in cooperation with the People's Council as of April, 2000.

(xxii) Source: a summary from a study undertaken by: The National Democratic Institute for International Affairs, “Committees in Legislatures: A Division of Labor”, Legislative Research Series, Paper # 2,1996.



