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EGYPT CSW urges interim government to announce clear timeline for delayed elections and allow international observers

Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) is calling on Egypt's interim government to announce a clear timeline for campaigning and polling, and to allow international observers to monitor the election process.

In late July, the Supreme Council of Armed Forces (SCAF) initiated the formation of Egypt's Supreme Elections Committee, a crucial step toward parliamentary elections later this year. SCAF had previously insisted that elections would be held in September, however, they will now be held in October or November, and will be preceded by a designated timeframe for campaigning. The revised timeframe appears to be a concession to liberal and moderate calls for a postponement to the vote, but Islamist parties continue to press for September polling.

On July 20, SCAF announced a new law governing the electoral process which outlines the process of selection and prohibits international monitoring of the elections. Elections will be held in three stages with 15 days separating each stage. 504 representatives will be elected through a mixed system of single-winner contests and list-based candidacy. Political groups have voiced concern that the single-winner system will benefit members of the disbanded National Democratic Party and influential Islamists, while reducing representation among candidates from other parties. A quota system which guaranteed at least 64 parliamentary appointments for women was also discarded. The Supreme Elections Committee has expressed a commitment to stricter voting procedures, including judicial supervision and criminal prosecution for ballot tampering, a rampant problem in past Egyptian elections.

The new law also prohibits international monitoring of Egypt's elections on the basis that the presence of international observers threatens Egyptian sovereignty. Egyptian human rights activists have objected, suggesting that SCAF has effectively sided with Islamist groups that also oppose international monitoring, and that the military cannot guarantee fair elections. In May, international and Egyptian experts meeting with the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) in Cairo agreed that Egypt was not prepared to hold free and open parliamentary elections.

Representatives from 35 political parties and presidential campaigns have issued a formal objection to the new law and assert that their previous recommendations have been ignored. The Democratic Coalition, representing 28 political groups, signaled its intention to boycott elections if procedures are not revised. Presidential candidates Amr Moussa and Mohamed Selim al-Awa have called for a clear electoral timeline, while Mohamed El-Baradei has stressed the need for international monitoring and assurances that expatriate Egyptians will be permitted to vote.

CSW's Advocacy Director Andrew Johnston says, "CSW is calling on the Egyptian Prime Minister Essam Sharaf and his interim government to demonstrate clearly that electoral fraud and corruption have no place in Egypt's future, by allowing international observers to monitor the parliamentary elections alongside Egyptian judges and rights activists. CSW also urges SCAF to announce a clear timeline for campaigning and polling as soon as possible, and to work to implement effective voting procedures for Egyptian citizens residing abroad."