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Michele Dunne, Editor  
Julia Choucair, Assistant Editor

### **Kuwait: Interview with Dr. Badr Al Nashi, president of the Islamic Constitutional Movement (ICM)**

#### **How has participation in Kuwaiti governments since the 1990s affected the ICM?**

Cabinet formation is different in Kuwait than in democratic countries, where the cabinet is usually composed of members of the parliamentary majority. In Kuwait the Emir chooses the prime minister, who then nominates cabinet ministers, taking into account social classes and political orientations as well as the technical knowledge that some ministries require. Members of the ruling family occupy critical ministries such as the defense, interior, and foreign ministries. The ICM was more of a presence in the last cabinet due to the participation of Dr. Ismail Al Shatti, a member of the political office of the ICM who is also close to the Muslim Brotherhood. In general, the influence of the government on the ICM—the ICM on the government—depends on the specific individual from the Movement and the extent of his interaction with the other ministers.

#### **Have the priorities of the ICM changed due to its participation in the legislative branch since 1992?**

There has been no fundamental change in the movement's ideology due to its participation in the National Assembly, especially in regard to the implementation of sharia. A committee has been formed, directly attached to the Emir, to make preparations for completing the implementation of sharia. This is an example of how the ICM's work has moved from theory to reality.

I also believe that participating in the legislature has increased ICM interest in issues of political reform and development. Previously we focused more on general issues of morality and societal reform, but now we focus on specific issues such as educational reform, employment, the economy, and political issues such as electoral redistricting and reforming laws on publications and political parties.

## **How do you view relations and prospects for cooperation between the ICM and non-religious political groups?**

A national dialogue continues between the ICM and liberal groups, with all issues on the table. All political forces in Kuwait agreed months ago on a list of issues including reforming the electoral system, amending the publications law, passing a law of political assembly, and reforming the judicial system. In fact, the publications law has now been amended and an electoral redistricting law is under discussion by the National Assembly

The issues that the ICM and liberal groups disagree about are the application of sharia and personal freedoms. Liberal groups oppose complete implementation of sharia, while the ICM, Salafist Movement, and Shiite National Islamic Alliance support gradual Islamization of laws, which will affirm the social and moral values called for by Islam. This is not discussed as an issue of potential cooperation with liberals who believe, for example, that the segregation of sexes in the university imposes a limitation on society.

## **On which issues does the ICM focus regarding the application of sharia?**

We primarily focus on the moral issues and the Islamization of laws, specifically those laws that affirm the Islamic identity and values of Kuwaiti society. Among the most significant examples are: the amendment of Article 79 of the constitution that prohibits the passage of any law that contradicts sharia; the enactment of a law of Islamic punishment; the law of zakat (charitable contributions) and philanthropy; a law for fighting drugs; and other laws related to the socialization of children

There is a clear consensus among the deputies of the National Assembly as well as the Shiite, Salafist and tribal groups and various segments of the population on the application of sharia. This consensus does not include some liberals, although there are also liberals who agree with us on issues such as zakat, moral corruption, and narcotics.

## **What is the ICM's position on the rights of women to vote and run for office?**

Before the National Assembly voted on the law granting political rights to women the ICM added the phrase "according to the stipulations of sharia," which was subsequently added to the text of the law. The aim of this addition was to ensure that the law did not violate the Islamic identity of Kuwaiti society. For example, there should be separate polling places for men and women, as well as a law criminalizing the abuse by women of the right to vote. Either the Waqf (Religious Endowments) Ministry or Fatwa Council must issue a law or fatwa to organize the participation of women in elections.

## **If the ICM agrees to the participation of women, with stipulations, than why has it not placed any female candidates on its electoral lists for 2007 elections?**

The ICM believes that it is necessary to proceed slowly in this matter. The process should begin with the right to vote and later the right to run for office, after making the appropriate legal and social stipulations. Furthermore, we had completed the selection of our candidates before the passage of the new law. Also, we do not believe that the time is appropriate for female candidates from the ICM because the matter is in need of study. It is possible that the ICM will have female candidates after evaluating results of the 2007 elections.

### **What is the position of the ICM on succession and how it should be organized?**

There was a political crisis after the death of Emir Jaber Al Ahmed. The ICM has always approached the matter based on two principles. The first is that the ruling family has the right to determine the emir and his successor and there should be no external interference. The second is that in the event that the ruling family is unable to agree, there are legal and constitutional channels to resolve disputes. The ICM does not support one side against another, but when the recent crisis deepened the ICM did issue a statement requesting that Sheik Saad Al Abdullah step down due to his health. When the royal family failed to reach agreement, the ICM supported the government's request to transfer the issue to the National Assembly in order to remove Sheikh Saad and appoint Sheikh Sabah Al Ahmad.

### **Does the ICM view participation in the legislature as a viable strategy to reform Kuwaiti politics?**

The Islamic Constitutional Movement, by its name and its design, has faith in the constitution, and believes it to be the central pillar of politics in Kuwait. The recent succession crisis showed that the constitution is the true authority for dealing with the most important national issues, even those connected with the head of state. The constitution provides a spur to action to political forces in Kuwaiti society. We would like for it to stimulate the organization of political activity and parties, as well as movement toward a parliamentary form of government, in order to achieve comprehensive political reform.

*This interview was conducted by Amr Hamzawy, Senior Associate at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. It was translated from Arabic by Kevin Burnham.*