

LEBANON PROGRAM PROFILE



History of Partnership

The House Democracy Assistance Commission approved a legislative strengthening partnership with the Lebanese parliament in March 2006. The Commission's work has focused on the areas of independent legislative research and analysis, legislative oversight, committee operations, constituent relations, and staff development. The Commission has conducted congressional visits to Lebanon, and training in the U.S. for Lebanese members of parliament and their staff.

Accomplishments

- Support to the parliamentary library as an independent source of legislative information open to all MPs.
- Consultations with committee chairs on the role of committees in legislation and oversight, particularly in economic policy.

Background

The Lebanese legislature is a 128-member Assembly of Representatives, whose seats are divided equally between Christians and Muslims. Parliamentary elections are held every four years, and in 2005 Lebanon held its first election in more than 30 years that was largely free from foreign influence. Four years later in June 2009, an estimated 55 percent of Lebanese voters participated in parliamentary elections.

Congressional Delegations

In September 2011, an HDP delegation traveled to Beirut for the Commission's fourth working visit since its partnership with Lebanon was initiated in 2006. The delegation began its visit with a call on Lebanese President Michel Suleiman to discuss the current state of politics in Lebanon, Lebanese-Israeli relations, and the crisis in neighboring Syria. The delegation also met with three Members of Parliament representing Speaker Nabih Berri, to discuss the future of the partnership between the House of Representatives and the Lebanese National Assembly. Former participants in HDP training programs met with the delegation and shared their thoughts on the future of Lebanese democracy. The Congressional delegation concluded its visit by meeting with Fouad Siniora, the former Prime Minister and current head of the Future Movement parliamentary bloc, who discussed his bloc's efforts to play the role of a "responsible opposition," in addition to U.S.-Lebanese relations and the role of the United States in the Middle East.

The Commission organized a delegation of six Members of Congress, led by Representative David Price, to Lebanon for a two-day visit in November 2009. The visit coincided with the formation of a new Lebanese cabinet after the country's June 2009 elections. The delegation met with President Michel Suleiman, Prime Minister-elect Saad Hariri, and outgoing Prime Minister Fouad Siniora to discuss

parliamentary reform and bilateral relations. A visit with the Lebanese National Assembly was the centerpiece of the visit. Members held roundtable discussions with their Lebanese counterparts on economic reform and legislative strengthening issues. Both senior parliamentary leaders and rank-and-file Lebanese MPs from various political parties participated.

In May 2007, Representative David Price led a delegation of four Members of Congress to Lebanon to meet with MPs and Prime Minister Fouad Siniora. The Commission representatives also met with Lebanese committee chairmen and MPs serving on the Budget and Finance, Justice and Administration, and Foreign Affairs Committees.

Representative David Dreier led the Commission's first delegation to Lebanon in July 2006. Three sessions with Lebanese MPs were held, focusing on parliament as an independent branch of government; legislative oversight of the executive; and budgetary oversight and the need for independent research analysis.

MP Seminars

In March 2011, Members of the Lebanese parliament visited Washington to attend an HDP seminar on committee operations. The Lebanese MPs met with a dozen of their counterparts in the U.S. House of Representatives to discuss the organization and operation of public committee hearings, the importance of committee oversight, legislative ethics, the support Members receive from agencies, such as the Congressional Research Service (CRS) and the Congressional Budget Office (CBO), and the role of a committee chairperson. The program began with an overview of the U.S. committee structure by CRS, and presentations by senior staff members of key House committees on how committees set their agendas in consultation with House leadership, how committee press operations are managed, how legislative drafting takes place, and how budget analysis is provided by CBO. In addition, participants also met with the Comptroller General of the United States, observed an Appropriations Committee hearing, and compared and contrasted their own committee systems with those of other participants.

The Commission also organized a weeklong program in April 2007 for visiting members of the Lebanese Parliament. The program began with an overview of the Congress by the Office of the Clerk and the Congressional Research Service. Participants were then divided into workshops on the role of politics in the legislature, the importance of a legislative research service, and budget analysis and oversight. A joint workshop on the role of committees was led by U.S. Members of Congress, who shared their personal experiences with their counterparts. At the end of the program, Lebanese MPs traveled to the congressional district of Representative David Price in the Research Triangle area of North Carolina to learn about local-federal relations and constituent service.

Staff Seminars

In December 2012, two staff members from the Lebanese National Assembly participated in a staff institute focused on committee operations. The seminar, which included participants from 12 HDP partner countries, was focused on developing the capacity of legislative committee staff and expanding the use of public hearings and committee oversight. The delegates met with representatives from the Congressional Budget Office (CBO), the Congressional Research Service (CRS), and former Members of the U.S. House of Representatives. Sessions were held on coordination between different committees, developing a committee agenda, nominations and confirmations, coordination with the executive branch, utilizing press to advance committee agendas, and legislative drafting.

In October 2012, two staff members from the Lebanese National Assembly participated in a staff institute to strengthen legislative budget analysis. Twenty-three staff from twelve partner countries participated in the program, which included meetings with officials from the Congressional Budget Office, the Congressional Research Service, and staff from the House Budget, Appropriations, Agriculture, and Ways and Means Committees. Participants also met with representatives from the Government Accountability Office, the World Bank Institute and the International Budget Partnership.

In January 2012, two staff members participated in a training seminar on legislative research and analysis. They were joined by colleagues from 12 other HDP partner countries. The parliamentary staff institute included presentations and discussions with Members of Congress and top officials from the Congressional Research Service (CRS). Current and former CRS staff provided the participants an overview of basic legislative research and analysis techniques including identifying sources of information, basic policy analysis, developing alternatives for the legislature, and conducting impact analysis.

In December 2010, Lebanese staff took part in a staff institute focused on committee operations. They met with CRS, staff from several House committees, and the Chairman and Ranking Member of the Commission. In addition, committee staff from the Republic of Macedonia shared their experience in developing procedures to begin using oversight hearings as an element of the work of their parliamentary committees.

Lebanese parliamentary staff attended a staff institute in December 2009 that was organized in conjunction with CRS. The Institute hosted 27 participants from 12 partner countries, who were mostly officials and analysts of their respective parliament's research services. The program focused on the role of a research service in providing independent information and analysis to members of parliament and their staff.

In August 2007, the director of the Lebanese parliamentary library visited Washington for a training program organized collaboratively by the Commission and the Library of Congress. The Lebanese librarian met with a range of staff from the Library of Congress, including the Law Librarian of Congress, the Assistant Director of Legal Research, legal analysts, curators, and various administrative personnel. She received an overview of the Library of Congress's operations and services, and training in new information technology resources like the Global Legal Information Network.