

## Baroud: Proportional representation best path for reform

Daily Star staff

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BEIRUT: Proportional representation is the best way to preserve Lebanon's diversity, said Interior Minister Ziyad Baroud on Sunday during the launching of a workshop concerning electoral laws. The workshop was held at Hotel Le Crillon in Broumana and was organized by the Civil Society Movement with the collaboration of the Friedrich Ebert Foundation.

Minister Baroud thanked the Civil Society Movement, saying he was pleased the issue of the electoral law was being discussed immediately after the legislative elections and not at the last minute before the upcoming municipal election, as politicians usually did. He added that the law for the 2009 parliamentary elections did not satisfy the people's ambitions and shouldn't be adopted for the next elections.

Baroud then explained that the best law to adopt in order to eradicate political sectarianism was a law of proportional representation. "One of the biggest disappointments of the 2008 electoral law was the lack of proportional representation," he said.

Baroud added that Lebanon was in need of a law that rightly represented the people and secured political stability. This law would, on one hand, tackle the electoral system, and on the other, provide a series of electoral reforms. According to Baroud, the best solution for a country as diverse as Lebanon was a system of proportional representation. Political stability, he added, required reviewing not only electoral laws but also the Constitution. "We are primarily facing a constitutional crisis," he said.

As for the electoral reforms, Baroud said 20 percent to 30 percent of the anticipated reforms were included in the present electoral law. The right of expatriates and handicapped persons to vote and the use of pre-printed ballot papers were among the mentioned reforms. Baroud added that he hoped an election supervisory commission would one day replace the Interior Ministry in taking charge of elections, reminding the audience of his earlier remarks: "I hope to be the last Interior Minister to manage general elections and I hope that an independent commission would handle this task."

Baroud also referred to the coming municipal elections, saying electoral laws for municipalities needed to be amended. "The mayor should be elected through direct voting and not by the voting of the members of the municipal council because it is more difficult to influence a large group of people than it is to influence the municipal council," he said.

Baroud also tackled the issue of the government formation, warning that the delay could lead to a setback in the municipal elections scheduled for the spring of 2010. He added that administrative decentralization, the parliamentary electoral law and the municipality electoral law were the three fundamental laws to guarantee Lebanon's future. Baroud also stressed on the role of civil society during elections, saying "a vote doesn't have any value without the collaboration of civil society and public institutions." – *The Daily Star*