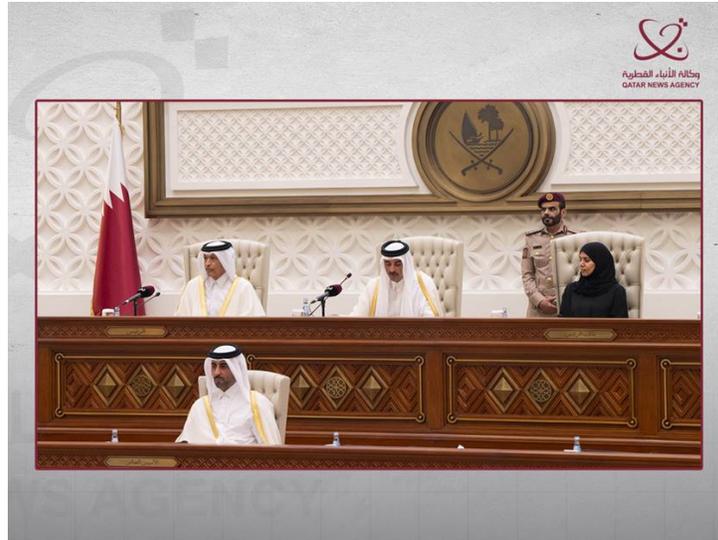


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## HH the Amir Inaugurates Shura Council's Ordinary Session



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Doha, October 15 (QNA) – HH the Amir Sheik Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani patronized the inauguration of the fourth ordinary session of the first legislative term, corresponding to the 53rd annual session of the Shura Council, at Tamim bin Hamad Hall at the Shura Council's headquarters on Tuesday morning.

The inauguration was attended by HH the Father Amir Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani, HH Personal Representative of HH the Amir Sheikh Jassim bin Hamad Al-Thani, HH Sheikh Abdullah bin Khalifa Al-Thani, and HE Sheikh Jassim bin Khalifa Al-Thani.

In attendance were HE Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim Al-Thani, and a number of Their Excellencies Sheikhs, Ministers, heads of diplomatic missions accredited to the State, and dignitaries.

HH the Amir delivered a speech on the occasion.

Following is an unofficial Translation of HH the Amir's speech at the inauguration of the fourth ordinary session of the first legislative term, corresponding to the 53rd annual session of the Shura Council.

In the Name of God, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful Dear Brothers and Sisters, I extend my sincere greetings and congratulations to you on the occasion of the start of the annual session of your esteemed Council, wishing you a successful legislative term. I also commend the efforts you made in your previous session in all fields within the framework of the state's legislative system.

Brothers and Sisters, As is customary in our annual meeting, I start my talk with you today by tackling the economic affairs.

Despite the expected growth decline between 2022 and 2023 for known reasons related to the completion of World Cup projects and the accomplishment of basic infrastructure projects and other reasons, the local economy continued to grow during 2023. Estimates indicate that the GDP at constant prices has grown by 1.2%, supported by the growth of the hydrocarbon sector by 1.4% and the non-hydrocarbon sector by 1.1%.

The International Monetary Fund estimates that the local economy will grow by 2% at the end of the current year, with growth rates jumping to 4.1% annually during the medium term (2025-2029) propped up by gas production expansion projects, manufacturing projects, and the Third National Development Strategy initiatives.

The inflation rate also continued to fall during the current year, reaching 1.4% by the end of July, against 5% and 3% during 2022 and 2023, respectively, reflecting the success of the fiscal policies and measures implemented by the state to ensure the stability of supply chains, the availability of basic commodities, and price control. The International Monetary Fund expects inflation rate to stabilize at 2% during the medium term.

The state continues to direct its general budget surpluses towards reducing public debt and increasing financial reserves to maintain ability and resilience to respond to financial challenges that may arise as a result of energy price fluctuations, or any other economic challenges.

The state has managed to reduce public debt level from nearly 73% of GDP in 2020 to less than 44% by the end of 2023.

The policies pursued have contributed to upgrading the state's credit rating according to international agencies while maintaining a stable outlook.

The state is keen to align balanced spending policy, which have improved its financial position over the past years and concurrently supported national growth and development where it allocated the necessary financial resources for government initiatives for the years 2024-2028 according to priorities and in line with the objectives of the Third National Development Strategy, which includes supporting the sectors of commerce, industry, research and tourism, digital transformation and information technology, developing financial and administrative systems and enhancing human development with the aim of achieving economic diversification and sustainability. We are serious about investing in these sectors. This interest must be coupled with a similar interest in developing human competencies and expertise in all fields, evaluating workers according to the standards of professionalism, efficiency and quality of outputs, and enhancing work ethics and ensure diligence on public affairs.

Brothers and Sisters, In the context of enhancing local production and opportunities available to the private sector, and after implementing the in-county value program (ICV) in government

procurement in August 2022, a directive was issued to target a growth rate of no less than 10% annually of the in-country value, develop plans to localize various economic sectors, and to work on developing mechanisms such as mandatory procurement lists and long-term contracts, while considering the need to take into account the quality of the local product and its competitiveness against imported products.

The state has acted to support the private sector through Qatar Development Bank and partnerships in private agricultural projects, as well as developing the real estate sector by supporting its development strategy, and launching the real estate platform of the State that enhances transparency through data and the use of advanced technology, all of which to encourage local and international investment in the real estate sector.

As part of the States commitment to its environmental pledges, the first sovereign green financing framework in the region has been launched as per the highest international standards in the fields of sustainable financing and green financing. This was followed by the issuance of government green bonds in global debt markets, which achieved IPO oversubscription by six times at the peak, with wide geographical and institutional diversity, confirming the global investors confidence in the countrys financial and economic performance and its future orientations.

Brothers and Sisters, We accord special importance to the relations with our brothers in the Gulf and to the advancement of the process of integration between us. In light of the State of Qatar's presidency of the current session of the Gulf Cooperation Council, we have spared no effort along with our brothers, the leaders of the Cooperation Council's countries, to support our Gulf march and push forward joint action, in a way that fulfills the aspirations of our peoples.

In general, with regard to our foreign policy, we have always been keen to establish it on fundamental basics and solid principles in sync with our values and reflective of our Islamic-Arab-Gulf affiliation, to achieve our goals and national interests and fulfil our international obligations and effective partnership with the international community in addressing global challenges for the good of mankind.

Apart from striking a balance between values, principles and interests, our foreign policy is also based on political realism and a realistic assessment of what we can afford to do. We pursue a dialogue approach and preventive diplomacy, support conciliatory political solutions and peaceful settlement of disputes, and engage in mediation when that is possible, and this requires the necessary flexibility to perform this role.

It is no secret to you that our region is passing through extremely sensitive and dangerous events and developments that threaten the security and stability of the region and the entire world.

The Palestinian cause remains at the forefront of our priorities. A year has passed since the beginning of the brutal aggression against our kindreds in Gaza and the West Bank; a year of destruction and genocide under the continued inactivity and failure of the international community to stop this ugly war that breached all values that unite humanity, as well as international conventions, norms, and religious canons. Israel, which is taking advantage of the international community's inaction, the paralysis of its institutions and the frustration of its resolutions in order to implement dangerous settlement plans in the West Bank, has embroiled in expanding its aggression to Lebanon.

We have stood up and are still standing with our brothers in Palestine, and called on the international community to stop the repetitive Israeli aggression and attacks and lift the unjust siege clamped on the Palestinian people. We stressed that this destruction will be of no avail vis-à-vis the steadfast Palestinian people bent on upholding their legitimate rights. After all this spree of killing and destruction, Israel will have no choice but to comply with what the international community has agreed upon regarding the two-state solution in accordance with the resolutions of international legitimacy, and to commit to implementing them and accepting a Palestinian state living side by side with it, and for the Palestinian people to obtain all their legitimate rights.

Qatar has made and continues to make intensive efforts with its partners to achieve a ceasefire, and we succeeded in reaching a truce agreement that was implemented last November. Despite the obstacles that hinder mediation efforts, we continue to make every effort to reach an agreement to end this war, stem the bloodshed of our brothers in Palestine, enable them to access aid, and release prisoners and detainees, as a prelude to a political path towards a just solution.

Regarding the Lebanese issue, we reiterate our condemnation of the airstrikes and military operations unleashed by the Israeli occupation forces against the sisterly Lebanese Republic, which have claimed the lives of thousands of civilians and led to the displacement of more than a million citizens. We have warned against this dangerous escalation of the Israeli aggression, which is snowballing day after day, and of its repercussions on neighboring countries and the region.

The easiest and safest way for de-escalation on the border with Lebanon was to stop the war of extermination in Gaza which is demanded by the majority of humanity. But Israel has deliberately decided to expand the aggression to carry out the pre-planned plots in other locations, such as the West Bank and Lebanon because it sees that as an opportunity to do so. We call for an end to the aggression against Lebanon and for the implementation of international resolutions, including Security Council Resolution 1701 of 2006.

Brothers and Sisters, Making thoughtful change is a reliable way to develop peoples interests, meet their aspirations and realize them. Undoubtedly, the permanent Constitution of the State of Qatar serves as the legal parameter of these ambitions and interests. As you all know, in my speech during the opening of the 50th annual session of the Shura Council in 2021, I referred to the assignment of the Cabinet to prepare the necessary legal amendments – including constitutionally-based legislations – to promote equal citizenship and to refer them to your esteemed Council.

The Cabinet has finalized draft constitutional and legislative amendments. Based on my responsibility and duty towards my country and my people for the good of the present and the future, I considered that these amendments fulfill the supreme interest of the state and promote the values of justice and equality in rights and duties among members of Qatari society, and I have directed that the draft constitutional and legislative amendments, including a return to the system for appointing members of the Shura Council, are to be referred to your esteemed Council for necessary action in accordance with the provisions of the Constitution. The Council of Ministers will take necessary measures on proposed amendments to laws and other legislative instruments in accordance with the law.

Two goals incorporate the constitutional and legislative amendments: Ensuring the unity of the

people on the one hand, and equal citizenship in terms of rights and duties on the other.

Equality before the law and to be treated on an equal footing under the law is the foundation of a modern state, as well as a legal, moral and constitutional obligation. It is the justice that Allah has enjoined us to do, and we do not accept anything else. Allah Almighty said: “Indeed, Allah commands you to return trusts to their rightful owners, and, when you judge between people, you judge justly.” As you know, our national unity has been the source of our strength, after the graceful success granted by Allah Almighty, in countering all the challenges we have gone through. Hence, we must always place our unity and cohesion above any other consideration when we review our experiences.

Brothers and Sisters, As for the election of the Shura Council, or to be precise, the election of two-thirds of its members, it was stipulated in the permanent constitution of the state since 2004, but has not been put into effect.

I declined to have provisions in the Constitution yet to be implemented. So, I took the initiative to call for elections. I frankly tell you that I called for elections despite the reservations on the part of many loyal citizens who believed there was a valid rationale for not implementing these provisions.

I said at the time from this podium and elsewhere that it was an experiment, and we will review it, evaluate it and draw conclusions from it. We did that and drew conclusions that led us to propose the constitutional amendments.

Our system is an emirate founded on justice, shura, which protects rights and liberties under the rule of law.

The Shura Council is not a representative parliament in a democratic system, and its status and powers will not be affected whether its members are chosen by election or appointment.

In Qatar, the people and the government have a direct civic relationship, and there are recognized norms and mechanisms for direct communication between the people and the governance. The honorable members of the Shura Council were only appointed or elected to debate laws and actions of the executive authority with impartiality and without ulterior or parochial interests, with wisdom and reason, and to present the recommendations to the Amir. You do this to the fullest, and this does not change by altering the mechanism of selecting the members of this council.

Shura is one of the most important forms of participation in public affairs, and it will so continue.

There are many channels for citizen participation, and we must increase, intensify and deepen them. Allah Almighty said: “And consult them in the matter. Then, when you have decided, then rely upon Allah. Indeed, Allah favors those who rely upon Him.” We are all one family in Qatar.

The contest between candidates for membership in the Shura Council took place within families and tribes, and there are different views regarding the repercussions of such competition on our norms, traditions, as well as the conventional social institutions and their cohesion. The contest assumes an identity-based character that we are not equipped to handle, with potential complications over time that we would rather avoid. The Qatari experience has shown that the positive aspects of our social institutions have not been an obstacle to progress but rather a contributing factor, forming a solid foundation that has enabled us to combine our authenticity with modernity.

After you debate these amendments, and after I receive the proposals of your esteemed Council, and out of our keenness to have all citizens participate with us in founding the monumental structure of national unity, acknowledging equal citizenship and enhancing popular participation in public affairs, the constitutional amendments will be put up to a popular referendum. Hence, I call on all citizens to participate in it.

Brothers and Sisters, On such days, I proudly remember our ancestors who clung to this land and strived to survive on it and spared no sacrifices whatsoever, some of whom have been martyred in defending it. However, they built a national entity against the backdrop of the bleakest environmental and economic circumstances. I recall the difficult trials that we successfully navigated together thanks to our faith, steadfastness and awareness of our common destiny. I relive the joy in the achievements and the smiles of our sons and daughters, while being mindful of our responsibility for their future. My conviction is strengthened that there is no alternative to combining strong will and wisdom, and that our values, morals, humility and patriotism are the sources of our strength and the justification for our confidence in the future.

Allah Almighty said: “ And those who have responded to their Lord and established prayer and whose affair is determined by consultation among themselves and from what We have provided them, they spend.” In conclusion, I can only extend my sincere thanks to you, wishing you all success and guidance in serving this country, our homeland.

May the peace, mercy and blessings of Allah be upon you.