

Mufti holds Islamic Council elections despite opposition

BEIRUT: Grand Mufti Sheikh Mohammad Rashid Qabbani held the elections of members of the Higher Islamic Council Sunday despite the Shura Council's opposition to holding the polls.

The grand mufti declared that candidates for the council membership won uncontested in the Lebanese regions of Beirut, Sidon, Hasbaya, Akkar and Mount Lebanon,

The elections for the remaining 9 seats couldn't be held in Tripoli and the region of the Bekaa Valley because of a failure to secure a quorum of eligible voters, a source close to Dar al-Fatwa said.

By-elections in the two regions will be held at a later date, the source added.

After launching the polls, Qabbani said that the council's elections are legitimate and denied that the Shura Council had issued a decision to cancel them.

"The elections are one hundred percent legitimate... and the Shura council didn't issue a decision to cancel them, but suggested suspending the polls," Qabbani said.

"Such a suggestion is not binding," he added.

Opponents of the grand mufti held a meeting later in the day and issued a statement labeling Sunday's elections as "illegal."

"The elections are illegal, especially after the resolution issued by the Shura Council which stipulated that an agreement must be reached before holding the election," said the statement read by the council's deputy head Omar Miskawi.

“Some legal norms are required in the elections, such as announcing the presence of quorum and this was not available today,” he added.

Miskawi also saluted “the candidates who withdrew from the race and appreciated their boycott.”

21 out of the 32 member Higher Islamic Council said Sunday’s elections are illegal, arguing that Qabbani called for holding polls without consulting them.

A number of contestants for the council’s elections withdrew their candidacies earlier in response to a call by the Shura council to abide to a decision issued last month cancelling the polls.

The Higher Islamic Council convened earlier this week under its deputy and urged those still running for the polls, as well as voters, to withdraw their candidacies.

The director-general of the Islamic Endowments, Sheikh Hisham Khalifah, said last month that reports that the Shura Council issued a decision to cancel the polls were mere “rumors”, and denied receiving any such verdict.

Divisions within Dar al-Fatwa began to surface last year when the 32-member council extended its own term until the end of 2013, a move Qabbani deemed as illegal.

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