

Nothing is done overnight

Leading commentator Abdallah Al-Sennawi shares his take on the national dialogue with Dina Ezzat

It has been almost six weeks since President Abdel-Fattah Al-Sisi promised a national dialogue to allow for a consensus to emerge over ways to tackle pressing political and economic issues. Alongside the euphoria and scepticism articulated in political quarters, meetings and consultations with political parties, syndicates and state bodies have taken place with the aim of drawing up an agenda for the dialogue, a number of activists in administrative detention have been released and others who had received prison sentences have been freed after receiving presidential pardons.

Journalist and commentator Abdallah Al-Sennawi has been keeping a close eye on the developments.

Speaking to Al-Ahram Weekly over the weekend, hours after a fresh round of activists were released, Al-Sennawi argued that events already reveal the intentions of the executive and the possible path of the political process.

“There is a committee for the presidential pardons and it has clearly been working,” Al-Sennawi said before adding he would like to see more and faster releases “to allow us to turn a painful page”.

Many activists, said Al-Sennawi, “did not use violence or terror nor did they



incite terror”, meaning the charges against them can be qualified as being political in nature.

The whole issue, he suggested, could be resolved with a single decree, from either the office of the president or the prosecutor-general, the latter being the competent authority to order the release of people held in administrative detention.

“According to the information I have, the committee compiled a list of 1,074 names eligible for release” of which “250 [prisoners and detainees] are being released gradually. It is a process and some are on a priority list,” he said.

According to Al-Sennawi, any judgement on the work of the Presidential Pardon Committee and the rate of the release of activists must take account of the context — “the complex situation in the country and of the accumulations of recent years”.

The release process has been met with “aggressive resistance from some quarters” and must therefore be managed prudently and carefully. “The important thing is to keep the releases coming at a reasonable rate,” he said. While it would have been better for all of the releases to have happened at the same

time, given the constraints on the process one can only hope it continues as quickly as possible and “without any hiccups”.

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No dialogue with the Muslim Brotherhood

Political forces insist the Muslim brotherhood must be excluded from any national dialogue, writes Gmal Essam El-Din

Egyptian political forces preparing themselves for the national dialogue proposed by President Abdel-Fattah Al-Sisi on 26 April reject any participation by Islamists, particularly the outlawed Muslim Brotherhood.

The rejection followed a series of statements issued in recent days by a number of Islamists and Muslim Brotherhood officials living in Turkey and some European capitals.

The first statement came from Youssef Nada, a Muslim Brotherhood millionaire living in Switzerland. Nada said “the door of the Muslim Brotherhood group is open for dialogue with the regime in Egypt... We are ready for the possibility of dialogue with the Egyptian presidency and to forgive injustice without pre-conditions.”

Nada is a loyalist to the Muslim Brotherhood's wing in London, led by the group's de-facto supreme leader Ibrahim Mounir. In October 2021, the Muslim Brotherhood leadership split into two fac-



tions, one based in London and led by Mounir, the second based in Istanbul and led by the group's secretary-general Mahmoud Hussein.

Political analyst Abdallah Al-Sennawi said in a recent TV interview that the Brotherhood's London-based faction's approval of the national dialogue shows that its leaders recognised the group has lost enormous amounts of ground and sees the dialogue as a way of regaining the spotlight. He argued that Nada's statement was intended to test the waters and determined whether dia-

logue presents an opportunity for the Brotherhood to regain a toehold in Egypt's political life.

Al-Sennawi concluded that any invitation to Brotherhood representatives to participate in the dialogue was at best improbable, and any hopes the Brotherhood has of reaching some kind of deal hopelessly misplaced.

Fattouh Heikal, a political consultant with the London-based Trend Centre for Research and Consultations, pointed out that “this is not the first time the Brother-

hood's London-based faction directs a message of reconciliation to the ruling regime in Egypt.”

The Istanbul-based faction issued its own statement welcoming the dialogue as “a good political tool” while noting “confidence-building measures are a pre-condition for the success of the dialogue.”

Heikal views both factions' responses as symptomatic of the severe crisis affecting the Brotherhood. “Not only have they split into two warring factions, but they have been facing intense financial pres-

sure over the last two years. Some of their leaders have been expelled from Turkey and their Istanbul-based TV channels have been closed, while Qatar, which used to be a safe haven for the Brotherhood in the past, has chosen to mend fences with Egypt,” says Heikal.

A third statement, from the Islamist party Building and Development, the political arm of Al-Gamaa Al-Islamiya, saw the party's former chairman Tarek Al-Zomor say he welcomed participation in the proposed dialogue “with the stipulation it should be serious and leads to tangible political reforms.”

Al-Zomor was a member of Islamic Jihad which carried out the assassination of president Anwar Al-Sadat in October 1981. Al-Zomor and his brother Abboud were sentenced to life in prison following the assassination of president Sadat only to be released after the 2011 January Revolution.

In July 2013, when millions