

Mass celebrations in Egypt one week after Mubarak downfall

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19 February 2011

Millions of people attended victory celebrations throughout Egypt yesterday, marking one week since a massive wave of popular protests forced Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak from office.

The rallies also served as memorials to those killed, largely in violence by pro-Mubarak thugs, during the 18 days of protests. According to official figures from Egypt's health ministry, 365 people were killed and 5,500 more injured during the protests. There are hundreds more missing and also several hundred political prisoners still being held by the military government, which is trying assert its power in the face of continuing strikes and protests.

"We are going today to commemorate the martyrs and in doing so we are awaiting justice," protest organizer Mohammed Waked told *Al Jazeera* in Cairo. "If those detained during the protests are not released, let alone the older political prisoners, it would be a bad sign."

Egyptian state media estimated that two million people attended the celebrations in and around Tahrir Square—the central intersection in Cairo which protestors guarded in defiance of Mubarak's police during the demonstrations that forced his departure. People attending the Tahrir square celebration played musical instruments, listened to a sermon by Islamic scholar Yusuf Al-Qaradawi, and saw fireworks.

They also chanted political and social demands against the Egyptian military government. These included: "the People demand the trial of the regime"; "Every Egyptian citizen has the right to human rights, housing, and good treatment"; and slogans calling for civilian government.

Protest banners in Cairo's Talaat Harb Square read: "All remaining elements of the old regime must be removed," and "The revolution continues until all its

demands are met."

Slogans at the rally also denounced the repression of mass anti-government protests by US-backed dictatorships in Bahrain, Libya, and Yemen. There were also calls for the release of Palestinian prisoners held in Egyptian jails under the emergency law, as part of the Mubarak regime's collaboration with the Israeli state.

Celebrations took place in cities around the country. Over one million people attended rallies in Egypt's Mediterranean port city of Alexandria, according to *Al Jazeera*. Tens of thousands marched in Alexandria's avenues along the Mediterranean. A delegation of protestors delivered a message to the Libyan consulate in Alexandria to express their solidarity with the Libyan people.

In Arish, in the northern Sinai peninsula near Israel, a rally of 20,000 demanded an end to the state of emergency under which the military is ruling. They chanted that if the state of emergency were not lifted, they would not let police back into the Sinai.

In Damanhour, 3,000 people demanded the removal of symbols of the existing regime. A rally in Marsa Matrouh called for higher wages and an end to corruption.

These demands on wages, social conditions, and political freedom come amid massive strikes and labor struggles shaking the entire country. Banks and government offices were shut last week by mass strikes of their employees. Strikes have closed down textile plants, chemical and pharmaceutical factories, the Cairo airport, and service operations at the strategic Suez Canal.

The army, which functioned as the critical prop for the Mubarak regime, is stonewalling demands by the working masses for political reform, refusing to

abrogate the emergency law or release political prisoners. Instead, it is insisting that it alone will draft the constitution that will replace the Mubarak regime's old constitution, whose abrogation was demanded by the protests.

The US government is backing this attempt to keep Mubarak's state machine alive. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton announced Thursday that Washington would give \$150 million to the Egyptian government to "support the transition there." Two US envoys, US Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs William Burns and White House advisor David Lipton, will travel to Egypt next week.

Clinton said the two would "consult with Egyptian counterparts on how we can most effectively deploy our assistance in line with their priorities."

Under conditions of mass popular protest, however, the military has announced the detention of three ex-ministers and a prominent businessman, steel magnate Ahmed Ezz, closely connected to Mubarak's son and one-time heir apparent, Gamal Mubarak. The ministers are former Interior Minister Habib el-Adli, former Tourism Minister Zuhair Garana, and former Housing Minister Ahmed el-Meghrabi. The four await trial on suspicion of wasting public funds.

The general prosecutor has also called on the foreign minister to contact European countries to freeze their accounts.

At the same time, political divisions are growing inside protest groups that called the anti-Mubarak demonstrations last month, as the gulf separating the US-backed regime from the masses' social and political demands becomes more evident. Groups and political organizations that previously supported protests are rapidly developing their ties with the Egyptian political establishment, amid criticisms from other protestors.

Wael Ghonim, a Google executive who helped call the initial protests, is now reportedly in negotiations with elements of Mubarak's National Democratic Party (NDP), including former NDP chairman Hossam Badrawy, to form a new political party.

Badrawy commented, "The party issue is all in an early stage and premature to confirm." Saying that he had not met directly with Ghonim in the past week, Badrawy added that he "would love to involve him."

Abdel Moneim Imam, a friend of Ghonim, said his

own group—which supports former International Atomic Energy Agency chief Mohamed ElBaradei—was in negotiations with Naguib Sawiris, the chairman of Orascom Telecom holdings SAE, about forming a party.



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