

Egyptians call for Tunisian-style revolution in 'day of wrath'

By Samer al-Atrush in Cairo 6:30PM GMT 25 Jan

Thousands of demonstrators calling for a Tunisian-style revolution in Egypt brought the centre of Cairo to a halt last night after a "day of wrath".

The anti-government protesters demanded President Hosni Mubarak to stand down as they descended on Tahrir Square in the city centre, clashing with police who fired plastic bullets, tear gas and water cannons to prevent them marching on parliament.

"Mubarak – Saudi Arabia is waiting for you," they chanted, a reference to the former Tunisian president Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali, who fled to the Saudi city of Jeddah in the face of anti-government protests 12 days ago.

The protest was the largest seen in Cairo for years, if not decades. Mr Mubarak, 82, has been in power for 30 years, even longer than Mr Ben Ali, who was ousted after an authoritarian 23-year rule.

He has not ruled out standing for re-election again this year, or passing on power to his son, Gamal.

There were also protests in Alexandria and Suez, where two people were killed.

Police normally stamp down quickly on dissent, but reacted calmly at first. "We are all Egyptians," said one senior officer.

But as protesters started hurling stones and stormed through barricades, police moved aggressively to contain them.

Many of those who took to the streets said they were first-time demonstrators, encouraged by the revolution in Tunis. "We should make a stand like men for once," said Akram Suleiman, 28, a lawyer.

Banners proclaimed: "Tunisia is the solution" while other chants included "Mubarak – take Suzanne and get out". Suzanne Mubarak is Mr Mubarak's wife.

A revolution in Egypt would be regarded with far greater concern by its American backers than events in Tunisia, where much of the anger was directed at the corruption of Mr Ben Ali's family and in particular his wife and her relatives.

Egypt's opposition, on the other hand, is dominated by the Muslim Brotherhood, who have found ready supporters among the country's poor, fast-growing population. Egypt also occupies an important strategic position as one of the few Arab countries to recognise Israel.