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## Egypt protests: Hosni Mubarak's concessions rejected



*The BBC's Jim Muir says the crowds in Tahrir Square are the largest for a week*

*Hundreds of thousands of Egyptians have poured into Cairo's Tahrir Square for the latest protest calling for Hosni Mubarak's government to step down.*

*The BBC's Jim Muir, in the Egyptian capital, says it is the biggest demonstration since the protests began on 25 January.*

*It comes despite the government's announcement of its plans for a peaceful transfer of power.*

*President Mubarak has said he will stay until elections in September.*

*In Tahrir Square, attempts by the army to check the identity cards of those joining the demonstration were abandoned because of the sheer weight of numbers.*

*Our correspondent says the message to the authorities is simple - there is huge support from all walks of Egyptian life for the protests, and the government's concessions are not enough.*

*This latest demonstration, as the protests enter their third week, comes as normal life is returning to the streets of Cairo.*

The protesters are continuing to call for Mr Mubarak to leave office immediately, and say they are sceptical about any transition managed by the government.

In his response to the protests, President Mubarak has set up a committee to propose constitutional changes, and another is being formed to carry the changes out.

Vice-President Omar Suleiman, who announced the formation of the new committees, said he had briefed Mr Mubarak on recent talks with the opposition, and the president had welcomed the process of "dialogue" and "national reconciliation".

"The president also underlined the importance of continuing [the process] and moving from guidelines to a clear map with a definite timetable" for a "peaceful and organised" transfer of power, he said.

Among the key expected changes are a relaxation of presidential eligibility rules, and the setting of a limit for presidential terms.

A third committee, expected to begin its work in the next few days, would investigate clashes between pro- and anti-Mubarak groups last week and refer its findings to the prosecutor-general, Mr Suleiman said.

He also said President Mubarak had issued directives to stop repressive measures against the opposition.

## **Fierce clashes**

The BBC's Yolande Knell reports that some of the protesters in Tahrir Square concede that plans to make constitutional changes - which the opposition has long called for - are a positive step, but others are sceptical about Mr Suleiman's intentions.

"We don't trust them any more," Ahmed, one young Egyptian queuing to get into the square, told the BBC. "How can Suleiman guarantee there'll be no more violence around the election after all the attacks we've seen on young people."

A middle-aged protester, Mustafa, said: "We are asking why there is no committee for young people. He has to ask the young people what they want - this is all about the young people."

The unrest over the last two weeks has seen fierce clashes with police, and pitched battles between protesters and Mubarak supporters.

Human Rights Watch (HRW) researchers say they have confirmed the deaths of 297 people since 28 January, based on a count from seven hospitals in the cities of Cairo, Alexandria and Suez. No comprehensive death toll has been given by the Egyptian government.

## **At the scene**

**Yolande Knell** BBC News, Cairo

The determination of people queuing to get into Tahrir Square in the late afternoon sun has not been dented by officials' announcements of a series of concessions.

"We don't care what they are promising. Our demand is the same: Mubarak must leave," says Mariam defiantly.

A man standing behind her says the authorities have ignored the views of young people for too long. "I am 55 years old, I have tolerated this president for 30 years. This young generation is braver than mine. They have motivated us," he insists.

Some demonstrators concede that plans to make constitutional changes - which the opposition has long called for - were a positive step. They say release of the Google executive and blogger, Wael Ghonim, was another boost. Now the hope is that more can be achieved by keeping up large numbers in the heart of Cairo.

Some economic activity has resumed, but authorities have delayed reopening the stock exchange until Sunday. On Friday it was estimated that the paralysis resulting from the unrest had been costing the economy an average of \$310m (£193m) a day.

The number of those on Tahrir Square has been swelling each day and dropping back overnight.

Meanwhile, **leaked US diplomatic cables** carried on the Wikileaks website have revealed that Mr Suleiman was named as Israel's preferred candidate for the job after discussions with American officials in 2008.

As Egypt's intelligence chief, he is said to have spoken daily to the Israeli government on issues surrounding the Hamas-run Gaza Strip via a secret "hotline".