

Egyptians Mourn Victims of Recent Violence

From VOA Learning English, this is In the News.

Tens of thousands of Egyptians on Friday answered calls for a “Day of Rage” with protests across the country. The marches were the idea of the Muslim Brotherhood movement of ousted President Mohamed Morsi. They took place two days after Egyptian police destroyed two large pro-Morsi camps in Cairo. The police operation left hundreds dead and thousands wounded.

The protesters were demanding that Egypt’s new government release the ousted president and other leaders of the Brotherhood. The Egyptian army has held Mr. Morsi since it removed him from office early last month.

In recent days, violence between civilian groups has increased. Christians reported that their religious centers were attacked on Thursday. Some Egyptians raided and set fire to two government offices in Giza, a city across the Nile River from Cairo. Government employee Fehmi Hassan says the attackers were supporters of the ousted president.

“Today, about a thousand supporters came and broke the exterior fence and hurled stones at the building, and they set fire to the governor’s office, the auditing office and all the governor’s cars.”

The United Nations Security Council held an emergency meeting to discuss the violence in Egypt. The Council expressed sympathy to the victims and regret for the loss of life. It also called for an end to violence by all groups in Egypt.

The United States and other countries have condemned attacks on Mr. Morsi's supporters. On Thursday, President Obama criticized the violence. He also cancelled a major joint military exercise with Egypt.

"While we want to sustain our relationship with Egypt, our traditional cooperation cannot continue as usual when civilians are being killed in the streets and rights are being rolled back."

Some observers have criticized Mr. Obama's statements on Egypt. They say the United States is showing support for the Egyptian military if it does not take stronger action.

Saba Mahmood is with the University of California at Berkeley. She says the United States can pressure the military-supported government in Egypt to end the violence.

"If the United States is actually interested in instituting any kind of democratic change, they hold a very crucial card in this, which is over \$1.8 billion of annual military aid that the United States gives to Egypt.

They can simply say that we will suspend that aid unless there is an immediate dissolution of this intense violence.”

Others see hope for the competing forces in Egypt to avoid civil war and carry out the reforms that Egyptians wanted in 2011. That year, Egypt’s military answered huge protests by supporting the ouster of long-time President Hosni Mubarak.

Stephen Zunes chairs the Middle Eastern Studies program at the University of San Francisco. He says civil society has been growing stronger in Egypt and across the Arab world.

“More and more people realize that they are ultimately those who must decide their own fate. And so as tragic as the recent events have been, it is just not the final word.”

Professor Zunes says it is not only the Islamists who are affected by the suppression of dissent. And he says democracy will come to Egypt not by suppressing Islamists but by organizing democratic forces.

“The younger generation of Egyptians do want a future that is based on democracy and social justice.”

And that’s In the News from VOA Learning English, written by Onka Dekker. I’m Steve Ember.