

AI Index: PRE 01/078/2012  
11 February 2012

## **Thousands rally in solidarity with Middle East and North Africa protesters**

Thousands of people rallied in cities across the world today to demand respect for human rights in the Middle East and North Africa as part of a global day of action organized by Amnesty International.

Activists, trade unionists, students and Amnesty International supporters gathered in countries from Morocco to Nepal in a day of "solidarity and defiance".

"Our message to the people of the Middle East and North Africa is that you are not alone in your struggle. We are with you," said Salil Shetty, Amnesty International's Secretary General, who led events in London's Trafalgar Square.

"Our message to the governments of the Middle East and North Africa is that you will be held to account. The world is watching."

Rallies were held in cities across Austria, Belgium, Germany, Finland, France, Italy, Iceland, Ireland, Luxembourg, Morocco, Netherlands, Nepal, Norway, Paraguay, Peru, Spain, Switzerland and the UK.

The event in London featured live pictures of protesters in the Syrian towns of Deraa and Idlib.

In Morocco Amnesty International and local activists staged a sit-in in one of Rabat's main squares.

Activists in Switzerland demonstrated solidarity with protesters in Egypt in an aerial art photograph spelling out the word Tahrir, while in France there were events in 13 cities across the country.

Despite the momentous changes in the Middle East and North Africa in 2011, Amnesty International said that governments across the region had proved willing to deploy extreme violence in an attempt to resist unprecedented calls for fundamental reform.

Despite great optimism in North Africa at the toppling of long-standing rulers in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya, these gains have not yet been cemented by key reforms to guarantee that human rights abuses would not be repeated.

Egypt's military rulers, the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF), pledged repeatedly to deliver on the demands of the "January 25 revolution" but Amnesty International has found that they have in fact been responsible for a catalogue of abuses that was in some aspects worse than under Hosni Mubarak.

In Syria, the armed forces and intelligence services have been responsible for a pattern of killings and torture amounting to crimes against humanity, in an attempt to terrify protesters and opponents into silence and submission.

Amnesty International has received the names of more than 5400 people believed to have been killed in the context of protests in Syria since mass protests began in March 2011.

Hundreds of people, the majority unarmed, have been killed by shelling and sniping in the opposition stronghold of Homs.

“We have documented a vicious pushback against human rights in countries such as Egypt, while elsewhere, such as in Syria, governments continue to brutally repress protesters,” said Salil Shetty.

“But the protest movements across the region, with young people and women playing central roles, have proved astonishingly resilient, and show few signs of abandoning their goals or accepting piecemeal reforms.”

“We stand here today to ensure that those responsible for violations – those who are opposed to human rights change - know that they will be held accountable for the abuses they have committed. Their attempts to stand in the way of human rights change must end.”