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Egyptian Vice President must halt attacks on peaceful protesters

Amnesty international has called on the Egyptian Vice President, Omar Suleiman, to stop the violence unleashed by pro-government supporters in Cairo and across the country amid fresh reports of a renewed crackdown on journalists and activists.

Journalists have reportedly been detained and activists harassed by security forces following violence yesterday that saw at least five killed and several hundred wounded in the fighting between pro- and anti-government supporters in Cairo's Tahrir Square.

"The Egyptian authorities must ensure that protesters, journalists and human rights activists are protected. The lack of police on the ground responding to the violence is a blatant sign of the complicity of the Egyptian government in the violence, or at best the total abdication of responsibility for law and order at a moment of national crisis," said Salil Shetty, Amnesty International's Secretary General.

"Peaceful demonstrations must be allowed, whatever the views expressed, and peaceful demonstrators must be protected, and regardless of any political negotiations taking place."

Amnesty International staff present at the Hisham Mubarak Law Centre, a key Egyptian human rights organisation, said it had been raided by the security forces.

The Amnesty International fact-finding team in Egypt also reported yesterday that the violence then appeared to be orchestrated in part by the authorities to suppress continuing mass protests calling for political reform.

The organisation also called on other states to use their influence to urge the Egyptian authorities to rein in their supporters.

"Vice President Omar Suleiman has been appointed to handle the current crisis. As such he must show true leadership now by responding to the organize violence that we are seeing on the streets," said Salil Shetty.

"He must act if his stated commitment to reform is to have any credibility, at home and abroad."

"At the same time it is incumbent on countries with close ties to Egypt to exert influence on the Egyptian authorities to stop the violence.

"They need to make clear that the failure to protect peaceful demonstrators from violence, arbitrary arrest and other violations will severely damage Egypt's relationship with these countries"