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Egypt: Justice for victims means fair trial for former president

The trial of former Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak must be fair, transparent and reveal the full truth about unlawful killings of anti-government protesters during this year's mass protests, Amnesty International said today.

Former President Mubarak, former Interior Minister Habib Ibrahim El Adly and six other former senior officials are due to go on trial on Wednesday in Cairo.

They face charges of premeditated murder and attempted murder, arising from the shootings of demonstrators by security forces in January this year before Mubarak was ousted from power. If convicted, they could face the death penalty.

"This trial presents a historic opportunity for Egypt to hold a former leader and his inner circle to account for crimes committed during their rule," said Malcolm Smart, Amnesty International's Director for the Middle East and North Africa.

"But if the trial is going to be a meaningful break with Egypt's record of impunity, it must be both fair and transparent – justice demands no less. Not only must the trial be fair but it must be seen to be fair, not least by the families of those who died during the protests."

At least 840 protesters were killed and thousands of others were injured in January and February this year, after police were reportedly ordered to fire on anti-government demonstrators calling for an end to President Mubarak's rule.

After Mubarak resigned in February, families of the victims campaigned relentlessly for the former president and those responsible for the killings to be held to account.

The families returned in their thousands in July to Tahrir Square, the centre of the January protests, to demand that the military authorities and caretaker government speed up the trial process.

Amnesty International welcomed the judge's decision to agree to live TV broadcasting of the trial, but also urged the court to ensure that those attempting to attend the hearings are not mistreated.

To maintain order in the court, the presiding judge is requiring applications in advance from those wishing to attend the trial in person, including lawyers, media and families of victims. This has prompted fears of violence if victims' relatives are forcibly turned away by the security forces.

"The authorities must ensure that the security forces do not resort to excessive force to deny access to the trial proceedings," said Malcolm Smart.