

Egypt Warns of Crackdown on Referendum Protesters



Cairo, January 14 (RHC)-- Egyptian Interior Minister Mohamed Ibrahim has warned of a harsh crackdown on supporters of ousted President Mohamed Morsi as the country prepares for a controversial referendum.

Ibrahim said on Monday the army has been put on high alert to deal with anyone attempting to disrupt the vote on a new draft constitution on Tuesday and Wednesday. He said more than 350,000 police and army personnel backed by armored vehicles and helicopters have been deployed across the country to secure the vote and encourage a high turnout.

The vote comes amid ongoing tensions in the country, with supporters of Morsi pledging to step up their protests on voting days. Several political groups and youth movements have already challenged the process. The Muslim Brotherhood and its allies, which have been leading protests demanding the reinstatement of Morsi, have already said that it will boycott the “illegitimate” vote and are planning protests during the next two days.

Once the referendum is approved, presidential and parliamentary elections will be held sometime in the middle of this year. Egyptian army chief Abdel Fattah el-Sisi has expressed his readiness to run for president, a move that can turn the clock back to the pre-revolutionary days.

Egypt has been experiencing unrelenting violence since July last year, when the army ousted Morsi's government, suspended the constitution and dissolved the parliament. It also appointed the head of the Supreme Constitutional Court, Adly Mahmoud Mansour, as the new interim president.

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