

Nationwide doctors' strike in Egypt

By Harvey Thompson
13 May 2011

A nationwide doctors' strike began May 10 in governmental clinics and hospitals. Doctors are calling for the improvement of the medical care system in Egypt despite the refusal of the head of the Doctors' Syndicate to support their struggle.

The doctors' demands include the resignation of the health minister, providing adequate security at hospitals, a fair system of wages and the raising of the general budget of health care in the country from 3.5 percent to 15 percent of the national budget.

The strike call was issued by a decision of the extraordinary General Assembly of the Doctors' Syndicate on May 1. The committee organizing the strike decided to refer syndicate President Hamdi al-Sayyed to a disciplinary council for opposing the strike.

The strike included all staff except emergency and dialysis operations, emergency surgeries, deliveries and intensive care. A number of universities and private hospitals participated.

Some reports showed that 80 to 90 percent of doctors in many governorates started the strike. In Cairo, 60 percent of doctors participated, accompanied by dentists and nurses, and the strike was also supported by many patients. Port Said, Ismailia and Suez reported 100 percent of its doctors on strike.

A doctor at Cairo's Al-Mounira Hospital, Mohamed Shaaban, said, "Everyone participated in the strike, even those who disagreed with the idea. Patients were angry at the beginning but we convinced them that it was for their good.

"No single patient who was in need of urgent medical care was affected by this strike. We have been postponing the decision to strike for three years, but the terrible security situation at hospitals was unbearable."

On May 9, the Supreme Committee overseeing the doctors' strike submitted a request to the board of the Doctors' Syndicate to open an investigation into

Health Minister Ashraf Hatem, after claims that he threatened doctors in hospitals to prevent them from carrying out the strike.

Al-Dostour newspaper reported May 6 that Mona Mina, a coordinator of the group Doctors Without Rights, announced that she had submitted an urgent complaint to the Ethics Committee against syndicate president al-Sayyed, who has stated that he does not support the doctors' strike and does not approve of the dismissal of the health minister.

Cited in the May 10 edition of *Daily News Egypt*, Rashwan Shaaban, spokesman of Doctors Without Rights, said, "This is the first strike in Egypt's history that doesn't call for sector demands but was organized for the sake of the whole society; we want better health care for the Egyptian patient."

According to the paper: "Organizers said that there have been no major clashes between patients and doctors and that patients have been cooperative and understood the reasons behind the strike.

"However, the manager of Mahalla General Hospital, in the Delta governorate of Gharbiya, complained to the military police who threatened doctors on strike with arrest if they don't go back to work."

An open-ended strike is planned for May 17.

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