

Flood-hit Iran getting no financial aid from abroad due to US sanctions - statement

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GENEVA: US sanctions have prevented the Iranian Red Crescent from obtaining any foreign financial aid to assist victims of flooding that has killed at least 70 people and inundated some 1,900 communities, the group said on Sunday.

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said last week that Washington was ready to help via the Red Cross and Red Crescent, but accused Iran's clerical establishment of "mismanagement in urban planning and in emergency preparedness".

"No foreign cash help has been given to the Iranian Red Crescent society. With attention to the inhuman American sanctions, there is no way to send this cash assistance," the Red Crescent said in a statement.

It said the group had received some non-financial help from abroad which had been distributed to flood victims.

Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said last week that US sanctions – reimposed after Washington quit a 2015 nuclear deal between Iran and six world powers – were impeding aid efforts to flood-stricken towns and villages.

"Blocked equipment includes relief choppers: This isn't just economic warfare; it's economic TERRORISM," he said on Twitter.

The flood disaster, arising from exceptionally heavy rainfall since March 19, has left aid agencies struggling to cope and seen 86,000 people moved to emergency shelters.

The government has told citizens, and especially flood-affected farmers, that all losses will be compensated.

Iran's state budget is already stretched under US sanctions on energy and banking sectors that have halved its oil exports and restricted access to some revenues abroad.

Iran acted on Saturday to evacuate more towns and villages threatened by floods after continued rain in the southwest.



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[Egypt court clears indigenous Nubians of protest charges](#)

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CAIRO: An Egyptian court on Sunday cleared eight members of the indigenous Nubian minority of charges related to a protest staged nearly two years ago, a judicial official said.

The case involving 32 defendants dates back to September 2017 when dozens of Nubians held peaceful demonstrations in the southern city of Aswan demanding their right to return to ancestral lands.

Nubians are an ethnic group indigenous to northern Sudan and southern Egypt who trace their roots to an old civilization.

They were evicted in the 1960s after their shoreline was flooded with water from Lake Nasser following the construction of the Aswan High Dam. The eight acquitted on Sunday were cleared of charges including inciting protests, blocking roads and disrupting public order, the judicial official told AFP.

Twenty-four other Nubians received conditional fines of 30,000-50,000 Egyptian pounds (\$1,733-\$2,890) which would only be enforced if the defendants commit future crimes.

Nubians have been calling for decades for their right to return to their historic villages along the Nile.

The ethnic minority's incessant calls culminated in recognizing their right of return to their original lands in Egypt's 2014 constitution for the first time.

Egypt has effectively banned protests under a law passed following the 2013 military ouster of former Islamist President Muhammad Mursi.

General-turned-president Abdel Fattah El-Sisi, who led Mursi's ouster, came to power in 2014.

He secured a second four-year term in March 2018 with over 97 percent of the vote.

Under his rule, Egyptian authorities have launched a broad crackdown on dissidents jailing Mursi's Islamist supporters as well as liberal, secular activists and popular bloggers.



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[Dozens of neglected animals evacuated from Gaza zoo](#)

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GAZA CITY: Dozens of neglected animals were evacuated from a ramshackle Gaza zoo on Sunday in the fourth and largest such rescue mission in the blockaded Palestinian enclave.

Vets and volunteers from Four Paws International transported some 40 animals into Israel from the neglected zoo in the southern town of Rafah. The animals, including lions, foxes, monkeys, pelicans, wolves and ostriches, will be resettled in sanctuaries in Jordan and South Africa.

"The zoo has been in a bad situation in recent years due to economic and political turmoil," said Amir Khalil, a veterinarian from the Vienna-based organization. "Most of the animals had a sort of traumatization."

Many of the animals were smuggled into Gaza via tunnels beneath the southern border with Egypt, which along with Israel has blockaded the territory since the Hamas militant group seized power there in 2007.

The blockade and three wars between Israel and Hamas have made life miserable for Gaza's 2 million residents. Animals kept in captivity have suffered from a combination of neglect and lack of resources on the part of zookeepers. Some died of cold and hunger in makeshift zoos as keepers failed to provide adequate care, while others were killed during the 50-day war in 2014.

In January, four lion cubs died in the Rafah zoo. The owner later released grisly footage showing a lioness being declawed, in an apparent effort to push the organization to speed up the evacuation process. The owner was compensated for the animals, but the amount paid has not been publicized.

Four Paws International has carried out four rescue operations and has sent numerous medical missions to treat animals and birds in Gaza. Two zoos have closed since Four Paws removed their animals, while animals are still being held in poor conditions at three other zoos.

The latest evacuation was scheduled last month, but a round of cross-border violence between Israel and Gaza militants forced the organization postpone it.







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[Banners and posters flood Egypt's streets ahead of referendum](#)

Author:

Sun, 2019-04-07 01:46

CAIRO: Banners and posters have been put up across major Egyptian cities, ahead of a proposed referendum on significant amendments to the country's constitution.

The changes, approved by the Egyptian parliament in February, would see presidential terms extended from four to six years, as well as alterations to the number of terms presidents can serve.

If passed, the proposals would allow the incumbent President Abdul Fattah El-Sisi, to remain in office until 2034.

Posters and signs have been erected in Cairo's Tahrir Square, scene of

several symbolic political protests and upheavals in recent years, and the surrounding areas of the capital. They have also been spotted in Mokattam, Giza, Al-Falaki and elsewhere.

Most bear the insignia of the Nation's Future Party (NFP), the pro-military faction who support the amendments. Many feature slogans including "Do the right thing" and "Share your opinion, say yes to a better future."

Senior official Imad Saif told Arab News that the party was keen to find as many ways as possible to raise awareness of the impending changes among the general public, stressing that it had organized seminars and conferences to explain them and their importance for the country.

His colleague Ahmed Dokak added that participation in the forthcoming referendum would be a demonstration of the public's support for the direction the country was moving in, and a de facto endorsement of El-Sisi himself.

The date of the referendum has yet to be announced, and the final draft of the amendments has also not been confirmed.

A government source told Arab News they expected it to be "between April 21-23," but that this would be subject to Parliament agreeing on the wording of the draft.

Critics have raised concerns, however, over the amount of power the referendum will hand the president if it goes in his favor.

There have also been questions raised as to the source of financing for the banner and poster campaign, with a lack of clarity as to whether funds have been raised through individual donors, or from the coffers of the NFP.



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[Algerians abroad return home, seeing hope in protest movement](#)

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ALGIERS: For weeks, expat Algerians have been streaming home, some just for the weekend, to play their part in the historic changes sweeping the country. "I took unpaid leave to come and march in Algeria, to be here physically,"

said Chahrazade Kaci, who arrived back from London just days before president Abdelaziz Bouteflika resigned in the face of huge protests.

"It's a duty," said Kaci, 52, who has spent almost half her life in the British capital since going into exile at the height of Algeria's 1990s civil war.

Sports shoes on her feet and an Algerian flag draped over her shoulders, she held aloft a sign in English: "Call to all Algerians living abroad – return home and support our citizens in their struggle to build the 2nd republic."

Kaci was one of many returnees among the immense crowd that filled the streets of Algiers on Friday, the first mass demonstration since Bouteflika announced on Tuesday he was stepping down after two decades in power.

Flying in from Europe, the Gulf and North America, some have used up annual leave or taken extra time off work to take part.

"Since February 22, I haven't been able to sleep," Kaci said, referring to the day of the first mass protests against Bouteflika's bid for a fifth term in office.

"I'm addicted to the Internet, I follow developments 24 hours a day and I don't miss anything on social media," Kaci said.

She was joined in the crowd by her former husband Salah Allali, who had flown in from Qatar, while her daughter Nada, who was born in Britain, and nephew Yazid Nait-Ladjemil had both come from London to take part in the protest.

Kaci herself arrived back in Algiers the previous Friday and "joined the march right from the airport," she said.

Following Bouteflika's resignation, protesters are now pressing on with calls for sweeping reforms and the departure of key figures in the 82-year-old's entourage.

Bouteflika's departure was "just the beginning," Kaci said. "Still to come is the departure of the rest of the 'gang' and the building of a second republic."

Protesters say they want to see the resignations of the powerful "3B" – Senate speaker Abdelkader Bensalah, head of the constitutional council Tayeb Belaiz and Prime Minister Nouredine Bedoui.

Born in Algiers, Kaci studied marine biology, but like many Algerians, left the country when it plunged in the early 1990s into a decade-long civil war that left at least 200,000 people dead.

Back in Algiers, returned expats say they are surprised by the country's new-found freedom of speech and the strong presence of women at the vast, largely peaceful marches.

Kheira, 65, also took unpaid leave from her job as a teacher in Montreal to take part in "these historic marches."

She had moved to Canada in 2000, to be reunited with her children after sending them there at the height of the civil war.

"My children have everything there, but they are ready to come work and invest in their country," she said.

Former trade unionist Salah Allali, who also sought refuge in Britain in the 1990s, took an extra week of holiday without pay to be able to head home.

"The regime must understand that this revolution must end with its departure," he said.

Yazid Nait-Ladjemil, who has lived in London for the past two years, took part in several demonstrations organized by Algerians in the British capital, but also returned home to play a role in the protests on the ground.

He said he would not rule out a return to his country. "It's a rebirth – before, (Algeria) was a bit depressing," he said. The demonstrations "give me a sense of hope."



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Algeria's tidy revolutionaries: Cleanup after mass protests
Algerian intelligence chief sacked, protests continue