

Students strike

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Al-Azhar University students protested against the detention of their colleagues, reports [Reem Leila](#)

More than 2,000 students at Al-Azhar University's Faculty of Medicine ended their demonstration on Sunday which began inside the campus on 6 December to protest against the detention of 22 of their colleagues.

The protest ended after 11 of the students were released. All the students are members of the Muslim Brotherhood belonging to Al-Azhar University's Faculty of Education. They were detained on 5 December during a dawn raid for being active in the MB. Al-Azhar University President Ahmed El-Tayeb added the students were a likely threat to the country's security and stability.

The protesters, who claim the remaining students are being held without charge, demanded that the security authorities release them immediately. Throughout Sunday's two-hour-long demonstration, students condemned what they called the deliberate interference of the authorities into students' affairs and blamed the university as well as the dean of the Faculty of Medicine for neglecting them. In turn, security authorities told university security guards to cease full-body searches at the university's entrances and gateways. Trucks full of Central Security Forces had cordoned off the university for three days during the demonstrations in preparation for possible violence.

"This escalation in the crackdown on the Muslim Brotherhood has worrying implications for anyone who peacefully campaigns for change," said Ahmed Abdel-Rahman, a 20-year-old student who had been demonstrating.

El-Tayeb said the detained students had been taken into custody outside the university's premises. "Despite that, I exerted great effort to release 11 of the students in order to save their academic future," El-Tayeb said, adding that the government was keen on protecting the students while at the same time not condoning practices of those who break the law. El-Tayeb, who believes that the lowest ranking security guard "must be obeyed", said the remaining MBs are still behind bars. "They were involved in more serious matters after which the security authorities could not release them," he added.

"Although the students were notified that almost half of their colleagues will be released, some students wanted to escalate the situation," the university president said.

On Saturday morning a number of students rushed into El-Tayeb's office complaining that a police officer had stormed into the auditorium of the Faculty of Medicine in search of students belonging to the MB. They also lashed out at the position of the university administration towards their colleagues who are still in detention. "I demonstrated in support of Abdel-Aziz El-Rantisi [the former second-in-command official in Hamas who was assassinated by Israel in April 2004] and for the freedom of Palestine," said 19-year-old Mohamed Abdel-Zaher.

"But this time, I am demonstrating to have my colleagues released because they were unfairly detained. I am furious, of course, but I realise that even if we speak what will happen? I feel that the university and government have no say," he added.

Towards the end of Sunday's protest, the students issued a list of demands, among them requesting the university president to pressure security authorities into releasing the detained students, and demanding that the authorities stop interfering in their affairs. The students also criticised the handling of the fire that broke out in Al-Azhar's female campus in Sharqiya governorate on Saturday which killed four students and injured 130.

El-Tayeb said the students who had been freed had pledged not to interfere again in security matters "or else I will not help," El-Tayeb added.

"Al-Azhar University has officially informed the parents of the students who were released and those still in detention in order to help the university prevent other students from being caught up in similar action and to refrain from joining the MB," added El-Tayeb.

In the same vein, Mohamed El-Qousi, Al-Azhar University's vice-president for students affairs, said he was informed by El-Tayeb and other officials that a committee will be formed to discuss the proper measures "that will prevent the students from becoming occupied with political issues and to ensure respect for the university and its campus." Speaking to *Al-Ahram Weekly*, El-Qousi said each member of the committee would put forward a separate report on all possible means to stop the students from joining demonstrations that might affect their academic future.

"This is not about violating the regime or the university's regulations," said Yehia Rashed, an Al-Azhar student. "We are condemning both the administration and the government in our gatherings, but more so, we are mourning."