

# Tahrir Square women's march marred by rival protest

March to coincide with International Women's Day intimidated by group opposed to calls to allow a female president in Egypt

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guardian.co.uk, Tuesday 8 March 2011 20:26 GMT



Egyptian women in Tahrir Square take part in the anti-government protests last month that led to the downfall of Hosni Mubarak. Photograph: Pedro Ugarte/AFP/Getty Images

There have been ugly scenes in Tahrir Square as hundreds of women, many of whom had recently faced tear gas alongside men during the protests that toppled Hosni Mubarak, attempted to hold a "Million Women's March" in Cairo to highlight their hopes of playing an active part in building a new Egypt.

They were harassed and intimidated by a counter-protest made up of mainly men objecting to the call for a new constitution allowing women to stand for the Egyptian presidency.

As the women, who were marching on International Women's Day, found themselves surrounded they chanted "the people want to bring down women" – a variation on the "the people want to bring down the regime" chant that became the Egyptian revolution's battle cry.

"Women were caught in the middle and groped," witness Ahmad Awadalla said.

"When I tried to defend them they said, 'why are you defending women? Are you queer?'" These scenes were repeated until the army dispersed the crowd.

In the Sudanese capital Khartoum, riot police armed with batons and tear gas arrested more than 40 women as they protested against rape and rights abuses following the arrest and alleged rape of Safiya Eshaq, 24, a supporter of anti-government activist group Girifna.

A planned march in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, organised by the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions to mark the day was also disrupted, despite the organisation gaining a high court order saying it could take place, when police arrested 16 women at the ZCTU offices. The women were released after being briefly detained.

In Iran pro-opposition protesters gathered in scattered groups in Tehran to mark the day clashed with the riot police who used tear gas and wielded batons to disperse the crowd.