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Egypt's Judges Club slams bill to retire thousands of judges



The Egyptian Judges Club lashed out Monday at a draft law being discussed by Islamist-dominated upper house of parliament to retire thousands of judges.

Ahmed al-Zend, head of the Judges Club, said during a press conference held in Cairo that the Shura Council was not entitled to issue such a law concerning the judiciary.

The club threatened to “internationalize” what it said were threats against the country’s judges by the Muslim Brotherhood and the Islamist dominated parliament.

The liberal opposition National Salvation Front offered support for the embattled judges, calling for a protest in front of the Shura Council on Tuesday.

Former opposition presidential candidate Hamdeen Sabahi described the parliament’s draft law on the judiciary as a “crime.”

The draft law was proposed by the Brotherhood’s Freedom and Justice Party and seeks to send about 3,000 judges into retirement. This would be done by reducing the retirement age from 70 to 60 years.

Judges and opposition members say the law is an attempt to inject brotherhood members into the judiciary and ensure Mursi’s full grip on power.

The draft law came after Friday’s mass protests in Cairo which called for “purging the judiciary” following the acquittal of several top officials in the former regime.

Egypt’s justice minister submitted his resignation Sunday in a move that signaled strong disapproval of the president’s handling of a prolonged showdown with the country’s judiciary.

The resignation highlights how the judiciary has become a significant battleground. It is the sole branch of government not dominated by Mursi's Islamist allies, although he does have some backers among the judges.

The president has been accused by some judges of trying to undermine their authority, particularly after the judiciary dealt his backers several setbacks including dissolving the Islamist-led lower house of parliament last year and forcing a delay for fresh elections. Mursi's supporters engaged in violent street clashes Friday with opponents over calls to "cleanse the judiciary."

The president said he sees calls to purge the judiciary to fall in the framework of people's worries over acquittals of Mubarak-era figures.

Some fear Islamists would take over the courts and get rid of secular-minded judges, which could consolidate the power of the president's Muslim Brotherhood group.