

Syrians call for more protests ahead of Al-Assad's expected speech

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Damascus/Cairo - Syrian activists called for fresh protests on Monday ahead of an expected address by President Bashar al-Assad.

Al-Assad's presidential adviser said on Sunday that he will give an address soon.

'We call for daily demonstrations and will not announce a place for protesters to gather because police will turn these areas into military zones,' activists said on the Facebook page The Syrian Revolution 2011.

On Sunday, the Interior Ministry urged Syrians Sunday not to respond to calls to protest near Damascus' Umayyad Square.

'These messages you are receiving on your phones are the work of the people who want to incite strife in Syria,' state television said.

Al-Assad pledged several reforms after unrest began in the country, but his efforts failed to appease protesters who are enraged after violent crackdown on demonstrations in several cities.

At least 61 people have been killed during crackdowns on protesters in and around Daraa since March 18, Human Rights Watch reported. Another 12 died in the north-western port city of Latakia.

Over 200 political prisoners were released, according to rights groups. Shortly after, authorities arrested several foreigners and accused them of helping to incite strife in the country. Several journalists are also missing.

Bashar al-Assad has been president since 2000, taking over after the death of his father, Hafez al-Assad.dpa