

Lebanese Opposition holds Beirut's largest rally

By [Global Research](#)

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Hundreds of thousands of Lebanese protestors massed in downtown Beirut on Sunday to press the Western-backed government to give more powers to the opposition or resign.

Correspondents say Sunday's rally, the largest Beirut has seen since the protests began earlier this month, attracted thousands of supporters of Hezbollah and its Christian allies.

"Change is coming," read banners carried by demonstrators as loudspeakers blared out speeches by Hezbollah chief Hassan Nasrallah, who has vowed that the protests would continue until there is a national unity government.

"We will stay for days, weeks or months. Whatever it takes to bring down the government," one protester, Nader Hafez, told *Reuters* news agency.

In addition to red-and-white Lebanese flags, some demonstrators waved yellow Hezbollah flags, as well as the green standards of the Amal movement and orange banners of Christian former general Michel Aoun.

At least 20,000 Lebanese troops were deployed on the streets, and around the government building where Prime Minister Fuoad Siniora has been holed up since the protests began on December 1.

Hezbollah security agents were also seen in the two squares where the rally is taking place.

As the deadlock deepened in a political crisis which many fear could spill over into sectarian strife, Siniora vowed to stand firm in the face of what he described as an attempted "coup" by Hezbollah.

Speaking from inside his besieged office, the Lebanese premier acknowledged that "our political and democratic regime is facing a challenge," but said: "Lebanon is a strong country — we will overcome this crisis."

The Lebanese opposition, which calls for a bigger share in cabinet, accuses the government of being weak and corrupt, and says it no longer represents the people after six pro-Syrian ministers belonging to Hezbollah and the Amal movement quit the government last month.

Under the Lebanese constitution, the death or resignation of another two ministers would automatically bring the government down.

Despite the resignation of the six ministers, the depleted government approved plans for an international tribunal to try suspects in the 2005 assassination of former Prime Minister

Rafiq Hariri, sparking the latest protests.

On Saturday, Lebanese President Emile Lahoud formally rejected the cabinet decision on Hariri tribunal, saying it should be “be reviewed by a legal, constitutional and consensual government.”

The opposition also accuses the government of failing to support Hezbollah during the conflict with Israel, which killed 1200 Lebanese civilians and ravaged parts of the country but failed to rein in Hezbollah.

Siniora refuses to step down to make way for a government that would include more of Hezbollah’s allies.

His cabinet came to office last year in the first election held after the withdrawal of Syrian forces following massive protests and intense international pressure triggered by the February 2005 assassination of former premier Rafiq Hariri.

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