

## **Yemen's ousted leader urges 'forgiveness' amid calls for prosecution in deaths during uprising**

**By Associated Press, Washington Post**

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SANAA, Yemen — In his first public speech in more than 18 months, Yemen's ousted autocratic leader Ali Abdullah Saleh pleaded for "forgiveness of the past" on Wednesday amid warnings of U.N. sanctions and calls for prosecution of those responsible for the deaths of protesters during the 2011 uprising.

His speech in the Yemeni capital of Sanaa marked the first anniversary of a transfer of power in 2012 that followed massive protests and sit-ins. With Saleh pictures and flags, tens of thousands of Saleh supporters gathered near the presidential palace, chanting "the people want Ali Abdullah Saleh." Saleh arrived in an entourage similar to the presidential convoy while a top Saleh party politician, Sultan al-Barakani, addressed the crowd by saying, "welcome the brother, the leader."

"We call for reconciliation, shaking hands and forgiveness of the past to build a new Yemen. Forget about the past and look at the future," he told the cheering crowd.

Saleh, who stepped down in 2012 as part of power transfer deal that gave him immunity from prosecution in return, appeared to be attempting to show that he still has the support of the masses, after the United Nations Security Council threatened to impose sanctions on him for allegedly trying to impede the country's democratic transition.

A day earlier, Saleh addressed members of his party — The National People's Congress — by saying the Security Council aims at "alienating us from life."

"As for the Security Council ... they want us to leave the country, alienate us from the chairmanship of the Congress party and then they want to alienate us from life," he said. He drew a comparison between his former ruling party and Iraq's ex-ruling party under Saddam Hussein which was excluded from political life by saying, "this is just like what happened to the Baath party in Iraq."

Saleh has been accused of trying to manipulate power through a network of relatives and supporters still in key positions. His successor, Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi, has several times reorganized state institutions, including the military, to remove Saleh's men from their posts. However, the military's loyalties remain divided, posing a threat to the country's stability as it battles al-Qaida militants in southern mountains and other areas.

In his Tuesday's speech, Saleh said his party would contest the country's upcoming parliamentary and presidential elections set for next year. The country's new constitution will be drafted in the coming months, no easy task given the strong separatist movement in the south.

Last Thursday, clashes between security forces and militants affiliated to the separatist movement broke out in the south, leaving four dead. The movement says the area has been marginalized for years and its wealth distributed unequally. The country's north and south were two separate states until unity in 1990.

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