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Killing of captives points to war crimes by Libyan government forces

Amnesty International has today revealed fresh evidence of extrajudicial executions apparently committed by Colonel Mu'ammar al-Gaddafi's forces near the town of Ajdabiya in recent days.

Amnesty International researchers in eastern Libya yesterday saw the bodies of two opposition fighters who had been shot in the back of the head after their hands had been bound behind their backs.

Today they saw a body of another man who had been shot dead while his hands and feet were bound.

“Based on what our delegates have seen in eastern Libya over the last six weeks, the circumstances of these killings strongly suggest that they were carried out by the forces loyal to Colonel al-Gaddafi,” said Malcolm Smart, Amnesty International’s director for the Middle East and North Africa.

“The deliberate killing of captured fighters is a war crime. All those responsible for such crimes - those who ordered or sanctioned them as well as those who carried them out - must be left in no doubt that they will be held fully accountable,” said Malcolm Smart.

Amnesty International delegates saw the bodies of the first two men at a Benghazi morgue on 10 April. Both still had their hands tied behind their backs with metal wire. They had been shot in the back of the head and in other parts of their bodies. They had travelled from east of Benghazi to join the fight against Colonel al-Gaddafi's forces.

Morgue staff told Amnesty International that the body of another man, whose hands had been similarly secured when he was killed, had already been collected by his family for burial.

The forensic pathologist who carried out the post-mortem examination and morgue staff told Amnesty International that the men’s feet had also been bound together.

Amnesty International today saw the body of another man at Ajdabiya hospital whose wrists were tied behind his back with plastic handcuffs and were secured by rope to wire that was used to tie his ankles together.

This body, and another brought in with it but already removed for burial by the dead man's family, had been found at the eastern gate of Ajdabiya, which had been under the control of Colonel al-Gaddafi's forces a short time before.

It is not yet clear whether they too were opposition fighters or local people who had been taken prisoner then killed.

Amnesty International has separately received credible reports of four similar cases, where bodies of

captured fighters were reportedly found with their hands tied behind their backs and multiple gunshot wounds to the upper parts of their bodies.

Following the UN Security Council's unanimous decision on 26 February to refer the situation in Libya to the International Criminal Court (ICC), the ICC Chief Prosecutor opened a formal investigation into alleged crimes against humanity in Libya.

“Colonel al-Gaddafi’s forces have been repeatedly violating international law, and these new killings seem to be the latest example. Perpetrators of such abuses must be held to account by the International Criminal Court,” said Malcolm Smart.

“Individual criminal responsibility applies to those involved in such crimes at all levels of the chain of command, from the top military and political leadership to the soldiers who fired the shots. Acting under orders of superiors cannot be used as a defence by those who commit war crimes”.

In the course of its six-week investigation in eastern Libya, Amnesty International has found strong evidence that Colonel al-Gaddafi’s forces have deliberately killed unarmed protesters, directly attacked civilian residents fleeing the fighting, committed enforced disappearances and tortured detainees.

Background information

[View a photo of one of the bodies seen by Amnesty International \(warning: graphic image of a dead body\)](#)

The protection of civilians and other individuals, including fighters who are no longer participating in hostilities due to surrender, capture or injury, is a cornerstone of international humanitarian law, also known as the laws of armed conflict.

Deliberate killings of fighters who have been captured and are hors de combat (meaning “outside the fit”) are war crimes under the Geneva Conventions.