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Libyan leader must end spiralling killings

Amnesty International today called on Libyan leader Mu'ammur al-Gaddafi to immediately rein in his security forces amid reports of machine guns and other weapons being used against protestors and a spiralling death toll in Benghazi, Misratah and other cities.

“Forces loyal to Colonel al-Gaddafi are using unwarranted lethal force against protestors calling for change and the result is a wholly predictable one,” said Malcolm Smart, Amnesty International’s director for the Middle East and North Africa. “Large numbers of people are being killed and the situation is escalating alarmingly. More than one hundred have been killed so far”

“It looks like Libya’s leader may have ordered his forces to put down the protests virtually at any cost, and that cost is being paid in the lives of Libyans.”

Amnesty International researchers have been told by eyewitnesses, lawyers and medical staff in Benghazi that at least 34 people were shot with live ammunition last Friday, mostly with bullet wounds to the head, chest and neck. Dozens more people were injured.

On Saturday, security forces are reported to have opened fire with live ammunition on thousands of mourners who gathered outside a Revolutionary Guards building on their way back from the cemetery and chanted anti-government slogans and denounced the Guards as “killers”, demanding that they leave Benghazi. Twenty people are reported to have been killed. Many others who were injured were evacuated to al-Jala hospital and other Benghazi hospitals.

Sources at al-Jala hospital said most of the victims had been shot in the head, chest or neck, suggesting that the security forces had intended to kill them. Doctors said they were struggling to cope and running out of blood supplies and medicines to treat the wounded.

Other protestors were reportedly killed when security forces opened fire on hundreds of people holding a sit-in in front of Benghazi's North Court. Those present included lawyers, doctors and members of the Abu Salim families organising committee, set up by relatives of prisoners killed in the prison by Colonel al-Gaddafi’s forces in 1996, for which no one has ever been held to account. More than a dozen others were reportedly gunned down in Misratah on Saturday, the first day of protests there,

“The latest reports speak of Libyans in Benghazi being shot down with machine guns and other weapons by tough new troops, including possibly foreign mercenaries, who have been ferried in to suppress the protests,” said Malcolm Smart.

“Colonel al-Gaddafi must immediately put a stop to this bloodshed. He and the others directing the crackdown on protesters, and anyone else involved in abuses, must know that they will be held to account.”