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Libya: Decree integrating Radaa forces into a new security apparatus overlooks need for accountability

The Government of National Accord's efforts to integrate militias and armed groups into the security sector must not overlook the groups' records of serious human rights violations, Amnesty International said today. The GNA's latest attempt to incorporate the Radaa Forces, a militia on government payroll into consolidated security forces, will empower them to commit further abuses unless accompanied by robust vetting, oversight and accountability.

The Presidency Council of the GNA on 7 May issued Decree No. 555, dissolving the Tripoli-based Radaa Forces, also known as the Special Deterrent Forces, and integrating the militia into a new security force called the "Deterrence Apparatus for Combating Organized Crime and Terrorism" (DACOT). According to Article 13 of this decree, all Radaa Forces members and property, including weapons and equipment, will be integrated in the newly created DACOT.

Given that Libya's competing militias sporadically clash with each other and have operated outside the law, there is a clear need for a consolidated security sector to provide better security for Libyans, Amnesty International said. But blindly integrating militia members into institutionalized security forces without ensuring accountability for past abuses risks ensuring that abuses will continue, the organization said. Absent effective checks to ensure vetting and accountability, the GNA should withdraw the decree, Amnesty International said. Amnesty International has documented grave human rights abuses—including abductions, arbitrary detention, torture and other forms of abuse—carried out by members of the Radaa Forces. As a formally recognized security force, the GNA has for years paid the salaries of all Radaa Forces members and has provided it with equipment and uniforms, yet has made little apparent effort to ensure judicial oversight over their actions.

The GNA must ensure that the Office of the Public Prosecution is able to perform its role in investigating allegations of crimes committed by members of armed groups, including those affiliated with the GNA. Until prosecutors are able to conduct independent and effective investigations into complaints against members of the Radaa Forces and all militias and to supervise their prisons and detention centres, the cycle of impunity and abuse will continue, Amnesty International said.

Abduction for ransom:

Radaa Forces regularly conduct arbitrary arrests and abductions of people from their homes and workplaces. Victims have been targeted apparently for their regional origin, perceived political opinions, profession, or perceived wealth in order to extract cash ransom, Amnesty International research shows.

For example, on 14 July 2017, masked Radaa Forces members abducted Fathi, a 55-year-old contract editor from his office in the Tripoli neighbourhood of Ben Achour, and detained him in Matiga Prison, on Tripoli's eastern outskirts, for 45 days. Fathi died shortly after being released. His brother Tayeb told Amnesty International that while Fathi was in prison, the family had contacted the Public Prosecutor, who provided them with a letter for visitation addressed to Radaa forces. "Although we had obtained the letter from the Public Prosecutor, Radaa forces denied my mother access when she tried to visit him," Tayeb said.

Three weeks later, the Radaa Forces allowed Fathi's wife to visit her husband. When she saw him, he asked her for his checkbook and then wrote a check for 195,000 Libyan dinars (139,958 US dollars) to a member of the Radaa Forces. Fathi was released three days later, but he was sick and exhausted. During his time in detention, Radaa Forces had denied him access to his diabetes medicine, which Fathi's doctor told the family contributed to his death less than three months later.

Abduction to intimidate critics:

Radaa Forces have at times also used abduction as a means to exert political pressure on opponents. On 8 September 2017, masked and armed men from the group raided the family home of Ibrahim Jadhnan, the former commander of the Petroleum Defense Guards and a well-known political figure. The men took captive six members of Jadhnan's family: two men, two women, a three-year-old child and a three-month-old baby. Radaa forces released the women and children ten days after, but continued to detain the two men in Matiga Prison without charge or access to their family or lawyers.

Khaled Jadhnan, whose brother Fares was among those detained that day, told Amnesty International that he had spoken to former Matiga detainees who told him, "They are detained in inhuman conditions. The cells are overcrowded. They barely have food or water. The sanitary conditions are terrible."

Khaled said the Jadhnan family approached the Public Prosecutor's office for assistance, who initially told them that there was little they could do but eventually provided the family with a letter addressed to the Radaa Forces requesting the transfer of the detainees to the Public Prosecutors' office for investigation.

"We sent a lawyer to see [the Radaa forces], asking to speak to the detainees, but they told him to go away and that if he came back, they would put him inside with the detainees," Khaled told Amnesty International.

Radaa Forces have also used abductions to intimidate and threaten those who criticize the militias and armed groups. Alaa, a former resident of Tripoli, was active on Facebook, criticizing the militia's grip on Tripoli. Radaa Forces on 4 December 2017 abducted him and took him to Matiga Prison, where he was held and repeatedly beaten for 15 days, until he signed a declaration promising to stop criticising the group on social media, Alaa told Amnesty International by phone from the country where he is now seeking asylum.

"The day they released me, they made me sign a commitment that I will never speak out again on social media," Alaa told Amnesty International. "They told me that if I said anything again, even in passing, they would have my head."

Background:

The Radaa Special Deterrence Force was created by the Council of Ministers' Decree No. 224 of 2013 to operate under the Ministry of Interior, with a mandate to ensure security and combat crime in Tripoli. The group is led by Abdel Rauf Kara, who identifies as an adherent of the Salafist Madkhali doctrine. By 2014, the Radaa Forces had established themselves as one of the largest and most powerful militias in Tripoli, acting, in practice, as a security force for the city. They have arrested people on suspicion of smuggling, selling alcohol or drugs, of being members of the armed group Islamic State (IS), or committing crimes on behalf of rival armed groups. In 2016, the Radaa Forces endorsed the GNA, and the following year further bolstered their power by taking control of the Matiga complex, which includes western Libya's largest prison and Tripoli's only operating airport. In an [April 2018 report](#), the UN Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights found that most of the roughly 2,600 men, women and children held in the prison were detained with no judicial process, and that many suffered violent deaths, torture, and denial of medical treatment by their jailers. http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/LY/AbuseBehindBarsArbitraryUnlawful_EN.pdf