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LIBYA: AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL CALLS FOR AN INDEPENDENT INVESTIGATION
AND URGES AGAINST THE USE OF THE DEATH PENALTY.

Amnesty International has urged Colonel Mu‘ammar al-Gaddafi to ensure that a prompt, thorough and impartial investigation is set up to establish the circumstances in which scores of political prisoners and detainees were killed in Abu Salim Prison in Tripoli at the beginning of July.

“The findings of the investigation and the names of all those killed should be made public as soon as possible,” the organization said.

According to reports received by Amnesty International scores of political prisoners and detainees in Abu Salim Prison in Tripoli were killed during a one-week mutiny which reportedly started on 5 July 1996. The mutiny was said to have been caused by the appalling conditions in the prison. Political prisoners had reportedly complained on a number of occasions to the prison authorities about the lack of medical care, the inadequate hygiene, overcrowded cells and the poor diet. Some prisoners were said to be suffering from various diseases, including skin diseases, and had not been treated.

A number of guards were allegedly taken as hostages by the prisoners who refused to release them until their demand for an improvement in the prison conditions was met. Special security forces allegedly stormed the prison and deliberately shot at prisoners and the hostages, which led to scores of deaths.

The human rights organization also wrote to Colonel Mu‘ammar al-Gaddafi urging him to reduce the use of death penalty and to commute all death sentences in Libya.

In an announcement broadcast by Libyan Television on 16 July 1996, the General People’s Committee for Justice and Public Security stated that the death penalty will be applied to those ‘who speculate in food, clothes or housing during a state of war or blockade and may be applied for crimes related to drugs, alcohol and speculation in foreign currency. The new laws were reportedly drafted at the general conference of the General People’s Congress on 15 June 1996 and were published in the official gazette on 15 July, the date they came into effect.

“There is no evidence that increasing the number of offences punishable by the death penalty is an effective deterrent to any such crimes,” Amnesty International said.

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