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## **Libya: Civilians at risk amid new mine threat**

Amnesty International has warned that anti-personnel mines could litter the Libyan coastal town of Misratah, amid new evidence that Colonel Muammar al-Gaddafi's forces placed them in residential areas during their battle with opposition forces.

More than twenty highly explosive anti-personnel mines were discovered last week in a residential neighbourhood south east of the city centre, Amnesty International's team in Misratah has learned, when two were accidentally set off by a passing car. The car was immobilized and no-one was hurt.

Opposition forces now control Misratah after weeks of street fighting and bombardment from al-Gaddafi's forces.

"The discovery of this deadly harvest is making it even more difficult for Misratah residents displaced by the conflict to return to their homes. It also raises significant fears of more mines being discovered in the city", said Donatella Rovera, Senior Advisor at Amnesty International.

"Anti-personnel mines are banned internationally and should not be used anywhere or under any circumstances. That these mines were planted in a residential neighbourhood indicates that al-Gaddafi forces were deliberately seeking to harm civilians. At the very least it is a flagrant violation of the prohibition of indiscriminate attacks", she said.

The plastic sandy-coloured mines were buried in a random pattern a few centimetres below the surface of a dirt road linking a house, which had served as a base for al-Gaddafi's forces, to the main road.

A search of the area led to the discovery of at least twenty mines at both ends of the road. The affected areas had to be searched by hand as metal detectors do not detect these anti-personnel mines. The mines used are made of plastic, with hardly any metal content, making the search exceedingly difficult and dangerous.

This is the second time that evidence is uncovered of use by Gaddafi forces of anti-personnel mines in or close to population centres. Last March such mines were discovered in the outskirts of Ajdabyia, in eastern Libya.

As well as anti-personnel mines, unexploded munitions (UXOs) continue to be collected around Misratah. UXOs still litter parts of the city and pose a danger to the local population.

"Forces loyal to Colonel al-Gaddafi must immediately stop using landmines. If they have planted landmines in areas from which they recently redeployed and which are no longer under their control, the authorities in Tripoli should immediately make their location public, so that these can be safely cleared", said Donatella Rovera.

"Libyan officials responsible for war crimes should be under no illusion that they could escape the

scrutiny of the International Criminal Court ", she added.

The military commander in charge of the camp where the cleared anti-personnel mines are currently kept told Amnesty International that they are awaiting international assistance to destroy the mines.

### **Background**

Libya has not ratified the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on their Destruction. Nor has Libya ratified the Protocol II on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Mines, Booby-Traps and Other Devices.