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Libyan civilians must be protected amid Tripoli fighting

Amnesty International has today urged all sides in Libya to protect the rights of civilians and safeguard them from attack as forces of the National Transitional Council (NTC) continued to battle for control of the capital, Tripoli.

NTC forces said earlier that they had captured some of Colonel Mu'ammarr al-Gaddafi's sons, including Saif al-Islam who, like his father, was recently indicted for alleged crimes against humanity by the International Criminal Court (ICC).

"These are momentous but extremely dangerous days for the people of Libya. All forces must respect the rights of civilians and ensure that the fighting in Tripoli and elsewhere does not result in reprisals," said Malcolm Smart, Amnesty International's Middle East and North Africa Director.

"NTC forces must make sure that Saif al-Islam al-Gaddafi is treated humanely and handed over safely to the ICC without delay to face trial, as should Colonel al-Gaddafi be if he is captured or surrenders."

Forces loyal to Colonel al-Gaddafi are involved in heavy fighting with NTC forces around the Colonel's compound in Tripoli.

There have been scenes of jubilation among NTC supporters across the city but also reports of revenge attacks against al-Gaddafi loyalists, with the NTC's spokesperson today making a call for calm.

"The NTC must ensure that its members and supporters do not carry out revenge attacks or other reprisals against alleged al-Gaddafi supporters and sub-Saharan Africans accused of being mercenaries," said Malcolm Smart.

The NTC has reportedly secured the release of some political prisoners who had been detained by al-Gaddafi forces.

"The reports of releases are welcome, but urgent steps must also be taken to clarify the fate of victims of enforced disappearance held in Colonel al-Gaddafi's jails," said Malcolm Smart.

On 27 June, ICC judges approved warrants for the arrest of Colonel al-Gaddafi, Saif al-Islam al-Gaddafi and military intelligence chief Abdallah al-Sanussi for alleged crimes against humanity, including murder and persecution.

Mu'ammarr al-Gaddafi is accused of ordering a wave of killings and enforced disappearances of suspected critics of the government after protests against his rule began in February in Benghazi, inspired by mass protests across the Middle East and North Africa.

"Colonel al-Gaddafi and others who are accused of orchestrating the bloody crackdown in Libya must be held to account in accordance with international law," said Malcolm Smart.