

URGENT ACTION

OLDER SUFI SHEIKH FORCIBLY DISAPPEARED FOR A YEAR

Ailing 79-year-old Sufi Sheikh Muftah Al-Amin Al-Biju has been forcibly disappeared since his arbitrary arrest from his home in Benghazi on 4 February 2024 amid an intensified crackdown on Sufi clerics and activists by armed groups allied to the self-proclaimed Libyan Arab Armed Forces (LAAF), in de facto control of eastern Libya. Concerns over his health and wellbeing have been heightened by recent reports on the use of torture and other ill-treatment in Gernada prison, where he is believed to be held.

TAKE ACTION: WRITE AN APPEAL IN YOUR OWN WORDS OR USE THIS MODEL LETTER

Field Marshall Khalifa Binqasem Haftar
General Commander of the Libyan Arab Armed Forces (LAAF)
Email: pmoffice@libyangov.info

Dear Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar,

I am writing to express my deep concern over the ongoing enforced disappearance of 79-year-old Sufi Sheikh Muftah Al-Amin Al-Biju (hereafter Shaikh Al-Biju), since his arbitrary arrest from his home in the area of Bouatni in Benghazi on 4 February 2024 by heavily armed men in plainclothes. Sheikh Al-Biju's detention is part of a larger crackdown targeting Sufis not espousing the Madkhali Salafi ideology to which many powerful armed groups allied to LAAF adhere. A year on, the family has received no official information regarding his whereabouts, fate, or legal status.

Amnesty International learned that the some 20 armed men who arrested Sheikh Al-Biju also ransacked his home and stole some 150,000 Libyan dinars (33,270 USD) before driving away in six vehicles to the Security Directorates' Support Body base in the eastern region, located in the Ras al-Minqar area in Benghazi, and nominally under the oversight of the Ministry of Interior to the "Libyan Government" of Acting Prime Minister Ossama Hamad. Officials at the Security Directorates' Support Body denied having him in custody, and a complaint to the Attorney General of the Benghazi Appeals Court on 15 February 2024 regarding Sheikh Al-Biju's disappearance has gone unanswered.

Amnesty International learned that relatives were told by unofficial sources that Sheikh Al-Biju was being detained in Gernada prison, near the eastern city of al-Bayda, where his health has been deteriorating since his incarceration. Even prior to his detention, Sheikh Al-Biju had diabetes and a frail immunity system being a cancer survivor. A family member also learned of Sheikh Al-Biju's brief transfer to Cyrenaic Teaching Hospital, located in Shahat, in September 2024, but was unable to visit or obtain more information. Concerns about his wellbeing are mounting amid reports of torture and other ill-treatment in Gernada prison. Former detainees also recount cruel and inhuman detention conditions including exposure to extreme cold without climate appropriate clothing or bedding, and denial of adequate healthcare.

I urge LAAF to immediately disclose the fate and whereabouts of Sheikh Al-Biju; and release him immediately as his detention is linked solely to his exercise of his human rights, including to freedom of religion. In the meantime, the LAAF must grant Sheikh Al-Biju access to his family, lawyers and adequate healthcare, including in outside hospitals if necessary. He must be protected from torture and other ill-treatment and held in conditions meeting international standards. Finally, the LAAF must also allow independent monitors unfettered and unannounced access to Gernada prison and other prisons and detention facilities under its control in eastern and southern Libya.

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

According to information gathered by Amnesty International, Sheikh Al-Biju has been subjected to multiple threats by Salafi groups, including a failed assassination attempt in 2013, and the closure of his centre for teaching the Quran, located in the Gardens area in Benghazi in 2016, forcing him to teach from home. Amnesty International learned from informed sources that he was initially held by the Security Directorates' Support Body. The group, which according to information obtained by Amnesty International espouses a Salafi Madkhali ideology, is also holding several other arrested Sufi clerics and activists. The Security Directorates' Support Body frequently publishes videos on its social media channels depicting arrests for "witchcraft and sorcery". According to information received unofficially, Sheikh Al-Biju was subsequently transferred to Gernada prison.

In November 2024, The Supreme Council for Islamic Sufism in Libya issued a [statement](#) condemning the ongoing persecution of Sufi sheikhs and their followers in Libya, raising the alarm over the arbitrary detention, torture and other ill-treatment, deaths in custody, enforced disappearance and use of forced "confessions" to accuse several sheikhs in Benghazi of "witchcraft". It also pointed to the efforts by those espousing the Salafi Madkhali ideology to discredit and undermine the Sufi orders since the fall of Mu'ammarr Gaddafi's rule in 2011. On 9 January 2024, Libya's parliament, allied to the LAAF, approved a new law criminalizing "witchcraft and sorcery", with penalties ranging from imprisonment for up to fourteen years to the death penalty.

Amnesty International has long documented how armed groups allied to LAAF including the Internal Security Agency (ISA)- Benghazi and Tariq Ben Zeyad subjected actual or perceived critics and opponents of the LAAF to arbitrary detention, enforced disappearances and torture and other ill-treatment. Since January 2024, heavily armed ISA agents have arrested without a warrant dozens of people, including women and men in their 70s, from their homes, streets or other public places in areas of eastern and southern Libya under LAAF control. Those arrested were then transferred to ISA-controlled facilities, where they remained arbitrarily detained for months without being allowed to contact their families or lawyers, and none were brought before civilian judicial authorities, allowed to challenge the legality of their detention, or were formally charged with any offences.

On 16 January 2025, the Military Attorney General under the LAAF announced the establishment of an investigative committee to investigate reports of torture and other ill-treatment in Gernada prison, after videos showing detainees being subjected to torture and other ill-treatment, including beatings and flogging, in Gernada appeared online. According to information shared by the Libyan human rights organization Libyan Crimes Watch (LCW) with Amnesty International, at least five former detainees confirmed to LCW that the videos depict the so-called "administration wing" on the first floor of the prison, near the office of the prison director, and that some of the guards seen abusing the prisoners are donning uniforms worn by the military police of the LAAF. Amnesty International reiterates its calls on the Libyan authorities to conduct effective, impartial, independent, thorough and prompt investigations into allegations of torture and other ill-treatment in Gernada prison by civilian judicial bodies, with the view of bringing those responsible to account in fair trials, and removing those reasonably suspected of committing violations from positions in which they can repeat similar violations or interfere with investigations, pending the outcome of criminal investigations and prosecutions. Crimes under international law and human rights violations by members of the armed forces should not be under the jurisdiction of military courts. Since the announcement on the launch of investigations on 16 January, no further details about the progress or findings of investigations have been shared publicly.

Amnesty International has consistently documented torture and other ill-treatment in prisons and detention facilities under LAAF's control, including the "Internal Security Agency" and the "military" wings of Gernada prison. The most commonly reported methods of torture include beatings with various objects including water pipes (locally known as 'tubu PPR'), flogging, suspension in contorted positions, threats with rape and other harm. Families of those detained in Gernada have also long complained of the absence of visits, sometimes for years, and denial of communication, with their loved ones. Libya is currently divided between two entities competing for legitimacy, governance and territorial control. The Government of National Unity (GNU) controls Tripoli and most of western Libya, while the LAAF, a powerful armed group, is in de facto control of eastern and southern Libya.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: Arabic and English.

You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 4 August 2025.

Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

NAME AND PREFERRED PRONOUN: Sheikh Muftah Al-Amin Al-Biju (he/him).