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Libya: 30 years on -- time for action

At a time when Libya seeks to end its isolation and develop its international diplomatic, cultural and commercial ties, it has yet to take steps to improve its human rights record, Amnesty International said today on the 30th anniversary of Colonel Mu'ammar al-Qaddafi coming to power.

"After three decades of gross human rights violations, even the most basic safeguards have yet to be put in place. Libya must demonstrate to the international community respect for basic international standards of human rights," Amnesty International said.

The human rights organization remains deeply concerned about the detention of prisoners of conscience and hundreds of political prisoners -- some of whom could be prisoners of conscience -- detained without charge or trial and several cases of people who have "disappeared". In addition Amnesty International continues to receive reports of torture, deaths in custody and incidents of houses being demolished as a collective punishment on political grounds.

The organization has recently written to the Libyan authorities asking for clarification of the circumstances surrounding the deaths in custody of two political prisoners, Al-Wafi Nbiyya, a former ambassador, and Mohammad Ali Bakoush. Both were held in Abu Salim prison in Tripoli and died in July and August 1999.

Al-Wafi Nbiyya was sentenced in January 1997 by the Supreme Military Court to several years' imprisonment in connection with an army rebellion in Misrata in 1993. Mohammad 'Ali Bakoush was in detention since February 1989 without being charged or tried.

To demonstrate its commitment to human rights Libya must implement the recommendations of the UN Human Rights Committee and the UN Committee against Torture -- in particular guaranteeing fair trial procedures and protection against torture, bringing to justice those who have committed acts of torture, implementing measures to reduce the length of pre-trial detention.

At the moment Amnesty International members worldwide are sending appeals to the Libyan authorities on behalf of hundreds of political prisoners held for more than a decade without charge or trial.

Background

Among the recommendations made in April 1999 by the Committee against Torture (CAT), was recommendation 13 stating that: "Those who committed the offence of torture should be subjected to a prompt and impartial investigation and rigorously prosecuted in accordance with the law."

The UN Human Rights Committee (HRC) in November 1998 stated in recommendation 12 that the application of the "Charter of Honour" should "be suspended without delay and that steps be taken to repeal it."

Recommendation 13 of the HRC states: "The Committee reiterates its concern about the excessive duration of remand in custody and undue prolongation of pre-trial detention and urges all necessary measures be taken to reduce the length of such detention and to improve judicial oversight."

In March 1997, a law, known as the "Charter of Honour" was passed that allowed collective punishment for communities deemed to have protected or helped those responsible for "terrorism". Forms of punishment include house destruction and depriving villages or tribes of access to electricity and water supplies.

On 10 December 1993, the human rights defender and former Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mansour al-Kikhiya, was abducted in Cairo. Amnesty International has called on the Egyptian and Libyan authorities to carry out a thorough investigation and make their results public.

Five prisoners of conscience, convicted in 1973 for membership of the prohibited *Islamic Liberation Party*, continue to serve life sentences, reportedly in Abu Salim prison in Tripoli.

Since 1969, opponents of the revolution, critics of the government, senior officials and former members of the government have been imprisoned, extrajudicially executed or have "disappeared".

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