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## **Libya: Detainees left to suffocate in crowded metal containers**

Pro al-Gaddafi forces left 19 detainees to die of suffocation while locked inside metal containers in the sweltering June heat in north-western Libya, Amnesty International has discovered.

Three survivors described how al-Gaddafi loyalists tortured them and then imprisoned them along with 26 others in two cramped cargo containers on 6 June at a construction site in al-Khums, 120 km east of Tripoli.

The detainees endured temperatures above 40 degrees Celsius and drank their own sweat and urine when the limited water supply ran out. Their captors shouted "rats, shut up," ignoring their cries for help.

This is the first report of the June incident, because al-Khums was off-limits to independent reporting until it fell under the control of the National Transitional Council (NTC) on 21 August.

"This is obviously appalling and inhumane treatment of a group of people who were mostly civilians," said Diana Eltahawy, North Africa Researcher at Amnesty International, who is currently in Libya.

It is a war crime for any party to a conflict to kill or torture prisoners.

Amnesty International's team have examined the two metal containers used to hold the detainees in al-Khums. Once the doors were locked shut, the containers had no windows and the only ventilation came from dozens of bullet holes along the metal walls.

The larger container held 19 people, 10 of whom survived. Only one person emerged alive from the smaller container, which measured 2 metres by 6 metres and was used to hold 10 people. Some had been held at the site since 20 May.

Guards eventually opened the containers late in the afternoon on 6 June, and the 11 survivors were transferred to other detention centres in Tripoli. They were freed on 21 August, and one later died of kidney failure.

It is unknown what happened to the bodies of those who died in the containers.

One of the survivors of the containers, school teacher Mohamed Ahmed Ali, a father of eight, described how armed men arrested him at his home on 20 May after he had taken part in anti-government protests in al-Khums.

The pro-Gaddafi forces forced him to kneel before electrocuting him and beating his head and back with metal wires. He was later detained in the larger container at al-Khums.

According to Mohamed Ahmed Ali, on 6 June some of the captives found it difficult to breathe and had been banging on the metal doors since early morning, crying out for ventilation and more water.

“People were falling on the floor all around me. Our clothes were dripping in sweat. Many were murmuring the shahada [a Muslim affirmation of faith which is recited when expecting to die]. We were screaming: ‘we will die in here, let us out’,” he told Amnesty International.

“Eventually, I couldn’t even see anymore, and I was getting increasingly weaker. Everything got so blurry. I lost consciousness.”

Another survivor, Faraj Omar Al-Ganin, 27, said that detainees were getting increasingly desperate as the hours went by. Several started drinking their own urine and sweat.

“For hours we were screaming for help; the detainees in the second container were doing the same,” Al-Ganin said.

“It then became eerily quiet. I realized that I was the only one still conscious. I screamed: ‘They have all died’. The guards finally opened the doors. They then made me drag the bodies out by their feet.”

Abdel Rahman Moftah Ali, 24, was the only survivor of the smaller container, and watched his fellow inmates die in front of him:

“None of us could stand up straight anymore. Foam was coming out of some people’s mouths... I saw my cellmates drop to the ground and become motionless one by one... I think I fell and hit my head... Eventually I regained consciousness, and was covered in blood...It was a day from hell.”