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Libya: NTC must take control to prevent spiral of abuses

The National Transitional Council (NTC) must get a grip on armed anti-Gaddafi groups to stop reprisal attacks and arbitrary arrests, Amnesty International warned as it released a major report into human rights violations during the Libyan conflict.

The 107-page report [*The Battle for Libya: Killings, Disappearances and Torture*](#) reveals that while al-Gaddafi forces committed widespread crimes under international law during the conflict, forces loyal to the NTC have also committed abuses that in some cases amounted to war crimes.

“The new authorities must make a complete break with the abuses of the past four decades and set new standards by putting human rights at the centre of their agenda” said Claudio Cordone, Senior Director at Amnesty International.

“The onus now is on the NTC to do things differently, end abuses and initiate the human rights reforms that are urgently needed.”

“A top priority must be to assess the state of the justice sector and start its reform, to ensure due process and deliver access to justice and reparation for victims.”

Amnesty International found evidence that during the conflict al-Gaddafi forces committed war crimes and abuses which may amount to crimes against humanity, including indiscriminate attacks, mass killing of prisoners, torture, enforced disappearances, and arbitrary arrests. In most cases it was civilians who bore the brunt of these violations.

But the organization also documented a brutal "settling of scores" by some anti-Gaddafi forces when al-Gaddafi forces were ejected from eastern Libya, including lynchings of al-Gaddafi soldiers after capture.

Dozens of people suspected to be former security agents, al-Gaddafi loyalists or mercenaries have been killed after capture since February in Eastern Libya.

When Al-Bayda, Benghazi, Derna, Misratah and other cities first fell under the control of the NTC in February, anti-Gaddafi forces carried out house raids, killings and other violent attacks against suspected mercenaries, either sub-Saharan Africans or black Libyans.

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

Amnesty International warned that as fighting continues, with some parts of the country still contested, there is a danger these patterns could be repeated.

Foreigners from African countries continue to be particularly at risk, the organization said. Between a third and a half of all those in detention centres in Tripoli and al-Zawiya are foreign nationals – Amnesty believes that most of these are migrant workers and not fighters.

Amnesty International found that widespread rumours that al-Gaddafi forces used large numbers of sub-Saharan African mercenaries in February had been significantly exaggerated. But NTC officials have done little to correct false assumptions that sub-Saharan Africans were mercenaries.

The organization welcomed the fact that in May, the NTC issued guidelines for its forces to act in accordance with international law and standards and in August the NTC Chair called on anti-Gaddafi forces to refrain from reprisal attacks. The NTC also sent text messages to Libyan mobile users telling them to avoid revenge attacks and treat detainees with dignity.

Presenting a comprehensive “[*Human Rights Agenda for Change*](#)” to the NTC, Amnesty International called on the new authorities to immediately bring all detention centres under the control of the Ministry of Justice and Human Rights and to ensure that arrests are only conducted by official bodies rather than the “*thuwwar*” (revolutionaries).

Prison officials in Tripoli and al-Zawiya have told Amnesty International that they report to military and local councils rather than the Ministry of Justice and Human Rights.

Amnesty International, which has taken testimonies from more than 200 detainees since the fall of al-Zawiya and Tripoli, believes that hundreds of people have been taken from their homes, at work, at check-points, or simply from the streets.

Many have been ill-treated upon arrest, being beaten with sticks, backs of rifles, kicked, punched and insulted, at times while blindfolded and handcuffed. In some cases, detainees reported being shot after being seized.

The organization called on the NTC to prioritise the investigation of those on all sides of the conflict suspected of responsibility for abuses, with a view to prosecution in fair trials that meet international standards and ensuring reparation for victims.

“Those responsible for the dreadful repression of the past under Colonel al-Gaddafi will need to be held accountable.” said Claudio Cordone. “The *thuwwar* must be judged according to the same standards. Without this, justice would not be done and a vicious cycle of abuses and reprisals risks being perpetuated.”

“Libyans have had to endure great suffering for decades. They deserve to participate in the building of a new Libya where these kinds of abuses are no longer repeated and tolerated.”

Notes for editors:

[*The Battle for Libya: Killings, Disappearances and Torture*](#) is largely based on Amnesty International’s fact-finding visit to Libya between 26 February and 28 May 2011, including to the cities of al-Bayda, Ajdabiya, Brega, Benghazi, Misratah and Ras Lanouf. Amnesty International delegates returned to Libya in late August, days before opposition forces stormed Tripoli.

Spokespeople:

- From Tripoli: Amnesty International Senior Director Claudio Cordone (English, Italian) and Libya specialists Diana Eltahawy (English, Arabic) and Samira Bouslama (French, Arabic) are available for interview.
- From London: Donatella Rovera, Amnesty’s Senior Crisis Response Adviser, who was in Libya between February and May, is available for interview in English, French, Spanish or Italian.

Contact: For more information, to obtain an embargoed copy of the full report and “Agenda for Change” in advance, and to arrange interviews, please contact the Amnesty International Press Office on +44 (0) 20 7413 5566 or email press@amnesty.org