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Libya: No chance for dissenting voices

Amnesty International today is demanding that the Libyan authorities reveal the whereabouts of at least 100 professionals arrested in early June on suspicion of political opposition activities.

“This is yet another example of the culture of secrecy that cloaks the treatment of those who dare to express dissent in Libya,” Amnesty International said today.

“These people appear to have been arrested simply because they were suspected of supporting or sympathizing with the *Libyan Islamic Group* -- an underground Islamist movement which is not known to have used or advocated violence,” the organization said. “And now there is a danger that they may be tortured for their beliefs.”

Amnesty International is calling on the Libyan authorities to release immediately all those imprisoned solely for their beliefs.

Those arrested were mostly taken by security forces from their homes at night. They include university lecturers, engineers, medical doctors and civil servants. The arrests took place in a number of major cities, particularly Benghazi. Scores of others fled the country but family members left behind are said to be under constant harassment from the security forces.

The exact reasons behind this latest wave of arrests are not known but, according to some reports, those arrested, particularly the university lecturers, were said to have been suspected of being the main advocates for political change in a country where the government is experiencing increasing underground opposition. No information has come to light indicating that those targeted for arrest advocated or used violence.

Those arrested include Mohammad Faraj Al-Qallal. He is married with five children and an executive in a printing house in Benghazi and a graduate from the Institute of Administrative Sciences in Benghazi. He was reportedly arrested from his house on 5 June by a number of masked plain-clothes security men. He was not given any reason for his arrest and his whereabouts are unknown.

Ahmad Jaballah Al-Maghrebi was said to have been arrested near the Egypt-Libya border while trying to flee the country with his family. He was reportedly beaten in front of his family by the security men carrying out the arrest. Dr ‘Abdallah Ahmad ‘Izzeddin was reportedly arrested while he was giving a lecture at the nuclear engineering department in Qar Younes University in Benghazi.

Amnesty International is calling on the Libyan authorities to ensure that all those detained are humanely treated in accordance with international human rights standards, including being granted access to lawyers and relatives.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Since the beginning of 1995 there have been numerous sporadic armed clashes between the Libyan security forces and members of armed Islamist groups, including the *Islamic Fighting Group*. These have mostly taken place in north eastern Libya.

Thousands of suspected Islamist activists of varying trends are said to have been arrested in the last few years, most of whom are still believed to be held without charge or trial. Torture is routinely applied to detainees during interrogation to extract confessions. Methods include beatings (including falaqa-beating on the soles of the feet), hanging by the wrists from a ceiling or a high window, being suspended from a pole inserted between the knees and elbows, electric shocks, burning with cigarettes and attacks by aggressive dogs. Psychological torture and ill-treatment include death threats and threats of abuse against the prisoner and his family, particularly female relatives.

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