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Libya: Central government must protect Kufra residents from militia clashes

The Libyan National Transitional Council (NTC) must take steps to ensure that residents in the south-eastern city of Kufra are protected from reckless fire and receive immediate access to medical care, Amnesty International said amid renewed clashes between armed militias.

Fighting broke out in Kufra on Friday between armed militias after a Tabu man was killed by unidentified assailants. There have been 10 fatalities and more than 30 people injured, say local residents and medical professionals.

“The NTC must step up its efforts to put an end to these clashes which are taking a toll on residents of Kufra,” said Hassiba Hadj Sahroui, Amnesty International’s Deputy Director for the Middle East and North Africa.

“It must ensure that the wounded can access medical care without discrimination. If local hospitals are unable to absorb the rising numbers of injured, the most critical cases must be immediately evacuated to facilities where they can receive necessary treatment.”

Residents told Amnesty International that the predominantly Tabu neighbourhood of Qurdufai has been shelled by Arab militias, using anti-aircraft machine guns and mortars. Some also complained about disruptions to the electricity and water supplies.

Aisha Mohamed was killed on Saturday when her home in Qurdufai was shelled, according to local residents.

Medical professionals working at a makeshift clinic in the affected Qurdufai neighbourhood told Amnesty International that they were treating at least eight women and 10 children since the beginning of the violence, mostly for gunshot and shrapnel-related injuries.

A six-year-old girl from the Jaballah Ali family was brought into the clinic on Monday with shrapnel injuries all over her body, after her home in the Qurdufai area had been shelled.

Another clinic in a Tabu neighbourhood, Clinic Libya, is also struggling to cope with rising numbers of wounded, including an elderly woman suffering from shrapnel wounds.

Medical professionals and volunteers in both clinics have complained about severe shortages of medical supplies and trained medical staff, noting that injured Tabus avoided going to the main hospital in Kufra, fearing attacks from Arab militias.

In February, clashes between militias left more than 100 people dead in Kufra before reconciliation efforts and the involvement of the Libyan National Army temporarily put a halt to the violence.

Militias also clashed in the southern city of Sabha in March, leading to more than 150 deaths and 350 injuries according to humanitarian organizations.

During Mu' ammar al-Gaddafi's rule, members of Libya's black Tabu community faced state-sanctioned discrimination.

Tabu people have been subjected to forced evictions, arbitrary arrest and detentions. They have often been refused the renewal of their identification documents, driving licences and passports.

Some Tabus say they are still suffering discrimination from Arab communities.

Arab communities in the area have meanwhile accused non-Libyan Tabus from other countries like Chad and Sudan of meddling in the country's affairs and taking part in the fighting.