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Both sides in Libya conflict must protect detainees from torture

Both sides to the ongoing conflict in Libya must ensure that detainees in their custody are not tortured or otherwise ill-treated, Amnesty International said today.

The call followed reports from Amnesty International's delegation in Libya on Tuesday, which has gathered powerful testimonies from survivors of abuse at the hands of both pro-Gaddafi soldiers and rebel forces, in and around the town of Az-Zawiya.

TESTIMONIES OF ABUSE COMMITTED BY REBEL FORCES:

- **Against fighters loyal to Colonel Gaddafi**

On Tuesday, Amnesty International met officials at Bir Tiras School which is now being used to detain pro-Gaddafi soldiers, alleged foreign mercenaries, and suspected Gaddafi loyalists.

The officials said that they would not repeat the human rights violations of the former regime. They vowed to uphold the rights of the detainees to be treated with dignity and afforded fair trials.

In an overcrowded cell, where some 125 people were held with barely enough room to sleep or move, a boy told Amnesty International how he had responded to calls by al-Gaddafi's government for volunteers to fight the opposition.

He said that he was driven to a military camp in Az-Zawiya, where he was handed a Kalashnikov rifle that he did not know how to use.

He told Amnesty International: "When NATO bombed the camp around 14 August, those who survived fled. I threw my weapon on the ground, and asked for refuge in a home nearby. I told the owners what happened, and I think they called the revolutionaries [*thuuwar*], because they came shortly after.

"They shouted for me to surrender. I put my hands up in the air. They made me kneel on the ground and put my hands behind my head. Then one told me to get up. When I did, he shot me in the knee at close range. I fell on the ground, and they continued beating me with the back of their rifles all over my body and face.

"I had to get three stitches behind my left ear as a result. In detention, sometimes they still beat us and insult us, calling us killers."

A member of the al-Gaddafi security forces, told Amnesty International how he was apprehended by a group of armed men near Az-Zawiya around 19 August as he was bringing supplies to pro-Gaddafi forces.

He said that he was beaten all over his body and face with the backs of rifles, punched and kicked. He bore visible marks consistent with his testimony. He told Amnesty International that in detention, beatings are less frequent and severe, but take place intermittently depending on the guards on duty.

- **Against migrant workers**

Detention officials in Az-Zawiya said that about a third of all those detained are "foreign mercenaries" including nationals from Chad, Niger and Sudan.

When Amnesty International delegates spoke to several of the detainees however, they said that they were migrant workers. They said that they had been taken at gunpoint from their homes, work-places and the street on account of their skin colour.

None wore military uniforms. Several told Amnesty International that they feared for their lives as they had been threatened by their captors and several guards and told them that they would be "eliminated or else sentenced to death".

Five relatives from Chad, including a minor, told Amnesty International that on 19 August they were driving to a farm outside of Az-Zawiya to collect some produce when they were stopped by a group of armed men, some in military fatigues.

The armed men assumed that the five were mercenaries and handed them over to detention officials despite assurances by their Libyan driver that they were migrant workers.

A 24 year-old man from Niger who has been living and working in Libya for the past five years, told Amnesty International that he was taken from home by three armed men on 20 August.

He said that he was handcuffed, beaten, and put in the boot of the car. He said: "I am not at all involved in this conflict. All I wanted was to make a living. But because of my skin colour, I find myself here, in detention. Who knows what will happen to me now?"

TESTIMONIES OF ABUSE COMMITTED BY PRO-GADDAFI FORCES:

Amnesty International's delegation uncovered evidence of rape being committed against inmates of Tripoli's notorious Abu Salim Prison.

Former detainees said they witnessed young men being taken from their cells at night – returning several hours later visibly distressed.

Two boys told cellmates that they had been raped by a guard. According to one former detainee: "One of the boys was in particularly bad shape after being brought back to his cell. His clothes were torn and he was almost naked. He told us that he had been raped. This happened to these two boys several times."

Thousands of men, including unarmed civilians, "disappeared" during the conflict, taken by pro-Gaddafi forces. Their relatives lived through months of anguish not knowing their fate.

Those recently freed brought back with them stories of torture and other ill-treatment in al-Gaddafi detention facilities in Sirte and Tripoli. They told Amnesty International how they had been beaten with metal wires, sticks and batons and electrocuted

Amnesty International delegates also met several men who said they had been shot by pro-Gaddafi forces after they had been caught, and clearly no longer posed a threat.

One man taken near the eastern frontline close to Ajdabiya on 21 March told us that his captors had inserted the barrel of a rifle into his anus, while he was blindfolded.