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## Tawarghas must be protected from reprisals and arbitrary arrest in Libya

Libya's National Transitional Council (NTC) must do more to protect black Libyans, Amnesty International said today, after allegations that members of the Tawargha tribe were detained, threatened and beaten on suspicion of fighting for al-Gaddafi forces.

Some Tawarghas who have been detained in Tripoli are said to have been made to kneel facing the wall, and then been beaten with sticks and whips. Others have simply vanished after being arrested at checkpoints and taken from hospitals by armed revolutionaries (thuwwar).

"The NTC must put an end to such abuses, particularly against vulnerable groups like the Tawarghas, and send a clear message that Libya is no longer a place where torture will be tolerated," said Diana Elthahawy, North Africa researcher at Amnesty International, who is currently in Libya.

Tawargha, a western Libyan town that remained loyal to Colonel al-Gaddafi and was used as a base for his troops, is associated in the minds of Misratah residents with some of the worst human rights violations committed during the conflict.

"There is no question that al-Gaddafi forces were involved in war crimes and serious human rights violations in Misratah, and that some Tawarghas fought alongside al-Gaddafi forces," said Diana Elthahawy.

"But anyone responsible should be brought to justice in fair trials; not dragged out of hospital beds on the assumption that all Tawarghas are 'killers' and 'mercenaries'. The whole population should not have to suffer."

Most residents of the Tawargha region, about 40km from Misratah, fled their homes in August before the arrival of the thuwwar. Tens of thousands are now living in different parts of Libya – unable to return home as relations between the people of Misratah and Tawargha remain particularly tense.

Residents of makeshift camps near Tripoli, where displaced people from Tawargha are sheltering, told Amnesty International that they would not go outside for fear of arrest. They told how relatives and others from the Tawargha tribe have been arrested from checkpoints and even hospitals in Tripoli.

On 29 August, Amnesty International delegates saw a Tawargha patient at the Tripoli Central Hospital being taken by three men, one of them armed, for "questioning in Misratah". The men had no arrest warrant.

Amnesty International was told that at least two other Tawargha men had vanished after being taken for questioning from Tripoli hospitals.

One 45-year-old flight dispatcher and his uncle were arrested by armed thuwwar while out shopping in the al-Firnaj area of Tripoli on 28 August.

They were taken to the Military Council headquarters at Mitiga Airport just east of the capital. The men told Amnesty International that they were beaten with the butt of a rifle and received death threats. Both were held for several days in Mitiga and are still detained in Tripoli.

Even in the camps, the Tawarghas are not safe. Towards the end of last month, a group of armed men drove into the camp and arrested about 14 men.

Amnesty International spoke to some of their relatives; none knew of their fate or whereabouts.

Another woman at the camp said that her husband has been missing since he left the camp to run an errand in central Tripoli, about a week ago. She fears that he might have been detained.

One woman, who has been living in the camp with her husband and five children for about a week, told Amnesty International that she was terrified of going home:

"If we go back to Tawargha, we will then be at the mercy of the Misratah thuwwar.

"When the thuwwar entered our town in mid-Ramadan [mid-August] and shelled it, we fled just carrying the clothes on our backs. I don't know what happened to our homes and belongings. Now I am here in this camp, my son is ill and I am too afraid to go to the hospital in town. I don't know what will happen to us now."

In addition to Tawarghas, other black Libyans including from the central Sabha district as well as sub-Saharan Africans continue to be at particular risk of reprisals and arbitrary arrests, on account of their skin colour and widespread reports that al-Gaddafi forces used "African mercenaries" to repress supporters of the NTC.

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