

Former Gaddafi official tortured to death in Libya

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A former Libyan diplomat who went over to the opposition National Transitional Council last year was detained and then tortured to death by a militia force based in the town of Zintan, according to a statement from the group Human Rights Watch.

Omar Brebesh was detained in Tripoli on January 19. His body was found at a hospital in Zintan, 60 miles southwest of the Libyan capital, the next day, with multiple injuries and fractured ribs. Evidence of torture included welts and cuts on Brebesh's body and the apparent removal of toenails.

Human Rights Watch said that the militia in control of Zintan, al-Shohada Ashura, which also has forces in Tripoli, was implicated in the killing. The group said in a statement that its representatives "read a report by the judicial police in Tripoli, which said that Brebesh had died from torture and that an unnamed suspect had confessed to killing him."

This same militia presently has custody of Muammar Gaddafi's son, Saif al-Islam, who was captured November 19, after the overthrow of the regime and the murder of his father. He is being held at a prison in Zintan.

On Thursday, the International Criminal Court in The Hague rejected an appeal from Aisha Kadhafi, Gaddafi's daughter, for help in obtaining permission to contact her brother. The ICC issued a warrant for Saif al-Islam last year, as part of the US-NATO campaign to bring down the Gaddafi regime, but it has since acceded to the demands of the NTC to try him on Libyan soil.

Brebesh, 62 years old, had been a cultural attaché at the Libyan embassy in Paris from 2004 to 2008, and served as acting ambassador for the last nine months of that period. He then returned to Libya to work as a lawyer at the ministry of Foreign Affairs, then went to

work for the NTC, which was installed in power by the NATO intervention last year.

Ziad Brebesh, the diplomat's son, told Human Rights Watch that his father had voluntarily reported to the Zintan militia's base in the Tripoli neighborhood of Crimea. He was summoned for questioning by a militia leader identified as Commander Khalid al-Blehzi.

The family learned of his death the following day. Another son, Mohammed Brebesh, said his father's jaw appeared to have been broken, among other injuries.

A statement from Human Rights Watch official Sarah Leah Whitson said, "These abusive militias will keep torturing people until they are held to account. Libya's leaders should show the political will to prosecute people who commit serious crimes, regardless of their role in the uprising."

Amnesty International and Doctors Without Borders have reported widespread torture and other human rights violations in the prisons of the new regime, most of them run by various town-based or tribal militias that hold power in most of post-Gaddafi Libya.

A report by Amnesty found: "Torture is being carried out by officially recognized military and security entities as well as by a multitude of armed militias operating outside of any legal framework."

On January 26, Doctors Without Borders halted work in Misrata, Libya's third-largest city and center of one of the most powerful militias, because it said that prisoners were being brought to its clinics after torture sessions so that they could be revived, patched up and then returned for more torture.

According a report by UPI, the head of Misrata's military council, Ibrahim Beitelmal, responded to the charges of torture by denouncing human rights groups

in terms that could incite violence against them. “I think that the people working under the guise of human rights organizations or Doctors Without Borders are Gaddafi’s fifth column,” he said.

According to the International Committee of the Red Cross, there are about 8,500 prisoners in 60 detention facilities in Libya, most of them controlled by militias rather than by the NTC.



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