

Amnesty International details torture and murder in Libya

Patrick Martin
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A report from Amnesty International details widespread torture in the prisons and makeshift detention facilities in Libya, under the auspices of the regime established by the US-NATO war that overthrew and murdered Colonel Muammar Gaddafi. In at least 12 cases, prisoners were tortured to death, the group found.

The preliminary findings by Amnesty were reported late last month, while the investigation was being conducted. Amnesty delegates interviewed detainees and torture victims throughout January and early February, with the detailed results released February 15.

The savage practices documented by Amnesty investigators include beatings with whips, cables, metal chains and wooden sticks, electric shocks, extraction of fingernails, and rape. Militia fighters conducted these attacks brazenly, in some cases continuing to abuse prisoners while human rights advocates were present.

According to the Amnesty report, the National Transitional Council, installed by the imperialist powers, has not conducted a single investigation into the torture and abuse of prisoners, and the militias have uncontested authority to do as they please. No one has been arrested or prosecuted for war crimes except those who were on the losing side in the civil war, fighting for the ousted regime of Gaddafi.

The report declares, “The failure of the authorities to even begin to investigate with a view to bringing to justice former anti-Gaddafi fighters responsible for war crimes during the conflict and human rights abuses has perpetuated the climate of impunity for such crimes.”

The report makes clear the political motivation for the violent repression: “Militias took captive thousands of suspected al-Gaddafi loyalists, soldiers and alleged foreign ‘mercenaries,’ many of whom were tortured or ill-treated in custody, in some cases leading to death. Scores of suspected al-Gaddafi loyalists were unlawfully killed following capture, among them the ousted Libyan leader himself and one of his sons. Militias also looted and burned homes and carried out revenge attacks and other reprisals against alleged al-Gaddafi supporters, forcibly displacing tens of thousands of people.”

Since the overthrow of Gaddafi, the militias continue to operate without any restraint, seizing people and holding them

in secret detention centers, “without trial or any means to challenge the legality of their detention.” Detainees were not given access to lawyers and in most cases the “judicial” authority was actually the prosecution.

Amnesty delegates interviewed scores of torture victims who had been imprisoned in Tripoli, Benghazi, al-Zawiya, Gharyan, Misrata and Sirte, as well as families of those who died in custody after being tortured. Visible wounds and injuries, as well as medical reports, confirmed the testimony about torture. In many cases, victims were too afraid to tell their stories even when they showed their wounds.

Some 2,400 detainees are acknowledged at prisons controlled by the NTC, but many thousands more are held by the official Libyan military and by police and militia units operating entirely outside of any legal structure. Arrests continue unabated, despite a series of reports since the beginning of this year by Doctors Without Borders, Human Rights Watch and now Amnesty.

This well-documented brutality and murder is grounds for indicting on war crimes charges, not only the NTC leaders, but their imperialist masters—President Obama, British Prime Minister David Cameron, French President Nicolas Sarkozy, and the rest of the NATO gangsters who bombed Libya mercilessly for eight months and armed and organized the “rebel” forces under the leadership of mercenaries and agents of the right-wing oil sheikdoms of the Persian Gulf.

It also exposes the criminal character of the support for the US-NATO intervention in Libya by middle-class “left” organizations in the United States and Europe, who enthusiastically embraced the “human rights” pretext offered by the Obama administration and its NATO partners.

These political charlatans claimed that only an intervention by the Western powers could prevent an imminent bloodbath in Benghazi. They glossed over the real motive for the war: Libya’s vast oil wealth, now being handed over to the major oil companies. And they are now silent over the mounting toll of death, torture and wrongful imprisonment being meted out by the regime established by the imperialist “liberators.”

The chapter headings in the Amnesty report suggest the scope of the repression: Detentions Outside Legal Framework; Torture and Other Ill-Treatment; Deaths in Custody; Revenge

Attacks and Forcible Displacement; Continuing Scourge of Impunity.

The bulk of the report consists of grisly eyewitness testimony from torture victims, who are given letter designations rather than named, in order to protect them against likely retaliation from the militias. A few examples suffice:

A 29-year-old former soldier:

"... they forced me to lie on my back on a bed and my hands and legs were tied to the frame. In this position I was beaten with fists on my face. Then they beat me with a plastic hose on my feet. Later, I had to turn around face-down and was tied again to the bed. In that position, I was beaten again with a hose on my back and on the head. I was also subjected to electric shocks to various parts of my body including my left arm and chest. The instrument they used was a black stick about 50cm long. My cousin was also subjected to electric shocks."

A 25-year-old computer programmer from a family identified as pro-Gaddafi:

"They started beating me on the way to the detention centre. They also used swear words. At the detention centre I was suspended from the iron bars of a gate and was beaten with a stick and a cable. This lasted for some hours. Afterwards I was taken to another room for interrogation where they gave me electric shocks. They tied my legs while I was lying on the floor on my back. Two live wires were connected to the toes of my feet. I believe they used the electric current from the socket. They gave me electric shocks six or seven times. Then I was taken to a separate room where I stayed for three days."

A 26-year-old cigarette seller, detained in Sirte, Gaddafi's home town, and then taken to Misrata for interrogation:

"One person took a glass bottle and hit my head. Then they forced me to sit on the floor and tied my hands to the back. They kicked my head. They beat me all over my body with a hose, with a wooden stick and with a cable used for cars. They wanted information about people I do not know."

A 26-year-old soldier from Tawargha, a town near Misrata largely populated by black Libyans, which became a target for revenge killings by Misratan militia forces. The entire population has fled the town and is not permitted to return:

"There were about five men in civilian clothes in the office. I was insulted for being from Tawargha. I told them that I was based as a soldier in Sirte and did not participate in the fighting in Misrata. However, they did not believe me. They took turns beating and whipping me. They also beat me on my right hand which is now swollen and on my head. They suspended me from the top of the door by my wrists for about an hour and kept beating me. They also kicked me. I still have pain in my left side. They blindfolded me before they brought me back to the cell."

During a visit January 29 to the Wahda detention center in Misrata:

"Amnesty International observed three militia men beating and threatening some detainees whose release had been ordered and who were waiting in the courtyard to leave. One of the militia men kept kicking and threatening to kill an older detainee who was cowering, squatting against the wall, and crying. When the Amnesty International delegate challenged him, he responded that 'those Tawargha must not be released or we'll kill them'."

Other groups specially targeted for brutality include members of the Mshashiya and Qawalish tribes from the Nafusa Mountain area, as well as immigrant workers from sub-Saharan Africa, who were indiscriminately branded as Gaddafi "mercenaries," although they for the most part came to Libya to find employment.

At one prison visited by Amnesty, about 400 out of 900 detainees were foreign nationals, mainly from sub-Saharan Africa. Many of them described being tortured during their arrest and interrogation. Other African immigrants described being beaten without actually being detained, when they were trying to flee the fighting.

The report gives details on some of the 12 deaths by torture in custody, men ranging in age from 26 to 62, including a factory worker, a school director, a former policeman, a former army colonel and a former Libyan ambassador to France. Other killings include a violent assault on a protest by displaced Tawargha refugees, in which several children were among the half dozen victims.

There are also cases of extrajudicial execution, besides the murder of Gaddafi and his son Mu'tassim when they were captured outside Sirte October 20. Three days after that, the bodies of 65 men were found in and around the Mahari Hotel in Sirte, which had been the base of operations for NTC fighters attacking the city. Some of these bodies had their hands tied behind their backs and many had been shot in the head. There has been no investigation of this apparent mass execution.

The author also recommends:

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[4 February, 2012]



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