



Libya: Militias Terrorizing Residents of ‘Loyalist’ Town ^[1]

Beatings, Shootings, Deaths in Detention of Tawerghans

October 30, 2011

(New York) – Militias from the city of Misrata are terrorizing the displaced residents of the nearby town of Tawergha, accusing them of having committed atrocities with Gaddafi forces in Misrata, Human Rights Watch said today. The entire town of 30,000 people is abandoned – some of it ransacked and burned – and Misrata brigade commanders say the residents of Tawergha should never return.

Human Rights Watch interviewed dozens of Tawerghans across the country, including 26 people in detention in and around Misrata and 35 displaced people staying in Tripoli, Heisha, and Hun. They gave credible accounts of some Misrata militias shooting unarmed Tawerghans, and of arbitrary arrests and beatings of Tawerghan detainees, in a few cases leading to death.

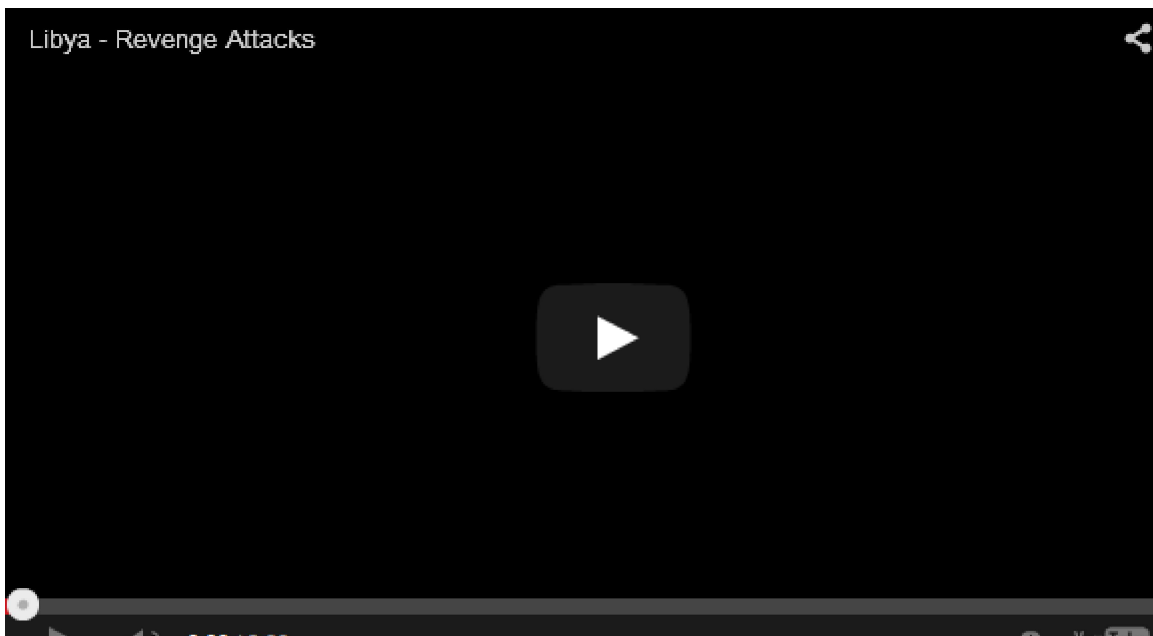
“Revenge against the people from Tawergha, whatever the accusations against them, undermines the goal of the Libyan revolution,” said [Sarah Leah Whitson](#) ^[2], Middle East and North Africa director at Human Rights Watch. “In the new Libya, Tawerghans accused of wrongdoing should be prosecuted based on the law, not subject to vigilante justice.”

The National Transitional Council (NTC) should bring central command and control, as well as accountability, to the more than 100 armed groups from Misrata, Human Rights Watch said. Anyone abusing Tawerghans, or preventing their return, is committing a criminal offense.

The people of Tawergha mostly fled in August to the Jufra region, south of Misrata, according to the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), which put the number of displaced Tawerghans there at 15,000. Local officials in Hun, a town in Jufra, said 4,000 Tawerghans had sought shelter in three camps there as of early October, and an unknown number are in the town of Sokna and nearby agricultural settlements. Since then, at least 5,000 Tawerghans have moved from Jufra to Benghazi and Tripoli, and other groups are in Tarhuna, Khoms, and the far south.

When Human Rights Watch visited Tawergha at the start of October, it appeared emptied of its residents and most of the buildings had been ransacked. Over three days between

October 3 and 5, 2011, Human Rights Watch saw militias and individuals from Misrata set 12 houses aflame in the town.



On October 25, Human Rights Watch spoke with a Misrata brigade that claimed to be “guarding” Tawergha. The deputy commander said his forces were “protecting the place from arson and looting.” At the same time, trucks full of furniture and carpets, apparently looted from homes, drove past with men on the trucks honking and waving. Brigade members failed to intervene, arguing passionately that Tawerghans should never return after “what they did in Misrata.”

On October 26, Human Rights Watch saw four more homes burning in the town, and a freshly lit fire in an apartment block next the brigade’s base.

Most of the Tawerghans interviewed by Human Rights Watch said they had fled between August 10 and 12, as Libyan opposition forces led by fighters from Misrata approached and entered the town. More than 100 civilians stayed in Tawergha after that date but said that militias quickly forced them out.

“They came outside my house, and told us we had to leave our homes,” said 80-year-old Muhammad Grayra Tawergi, a retired date farmer. “We were unarmed.”

The local authorities and residents of Misrata widely accuse Tawerghans, the majority of whom say they are descendants of African slaves, of having committed serious crimes in Misrata with Gaddafi forces, including murders and rapes.

Gaddafi forces used Tawergha as a base for attacks on Misrata and the surrounding area

from March until they fled in August. Many Tawerghans supported Gaddafi, whose government claimed that Libyan opposition fighters would enslave Tawerghans if they took power. Hundreds of Tawerghans joined the army, both Misrata and Tawergha residents said, during the heaviest attacks on Misrata between March and May, when the city was besieged and repeatedly subjected to indiscriminate rocket and mortar attacks. Misratan fighters successfully defended the city and began to defeat Gaddafi forces in the area, with help from NATO airstrikes.

Since the defeat of Gaddafi's forces, the Tawerghans have reported serious abuses, including arbitrary arrests, beatings, and some killings. Two cousins who fled the town told Human Rights Watch that they were gathering firewood in mid-September near where they were taking refuge in Lode, in the Jufra district, when they were captured by six armed men from a Misrata brigade. The brigade members handcuffed the two men, beat them, shot them, and left them abandoned on the side of the road.

"The first bullet hit my leg," one of the men said. "Then they started shooting all over, and two bullets hit my side and one in my cousin's leg. They were telling us to extend our hands to take off the handcuffs. I could see the bone in my leg so I fainted." The other cousin, interviewed separately, gave the same account (see below), stressing that both men were unarmed and in custody when they were shot.

In some cases, arrested Tawerghans have been subjected to torture and severe beatings, sometimes leading to death. Two witnesses told Human Rights Watch that on August 20, they saw guards in a Misrata detention facility on Baladia Street beat to death Emhamid Muhammad Shtaywey, commonly known as Faraj, a 42 year-old garbage truck driver from Tawergha, who they said had been tortured to confess to rape.

"They hit him with everything, all over his body: a hose, a leather belt, a stick; they even kicked him on the chest," one witness to the beating said. "He was lying on his back and they hit him hard."

On August 20 or 21, guards at the Zaroug School detention facility in Misrata beat to death a mentally ill man from Tawergha named Ashraf Salah Muhammad because they wanted the pass code to a walkie-talkie, two witnesses said.

"They started whipping him at 10 a.m. with a horse whip," one said. "It lasted forty-five minutes. He was dead by noon."

On September 25, Human Rights Watch witnessed the abuse of detainees at the Wahda detention facility in Misrata. Around midnight, a group of guards forced four injured

detainees to run in the courtyard and to walk on their knees with their hands behind their heads.

“We do this every day,” one of the guards said. “It is sport before they go to bed. They committed rape.”

Sulaiman Fortia, one of three Misrata representatives on the NTC, denounced the deaths in custody and the mistreatment of Tawerghans in Misrata prisons.

“This is wrong, and it shouldn't happen,” he told Human Rights Watch.

Fortia said the problem stems from the lack of civilian control over the hundreds of Misrata brigades and militias operating in Misrata, Tripoli, and until recently in Sirte.

Ibrahim Yusuf bin Ghashir, another member of the NTC from Misrata, said that the passions aroused by alleged atrocities, especially rape, make the return of Tawerghans to their town unlikely.

“We think it would be better to relocate them somewhere else – Tripoli, Benghazi, the south – give them housing and compensation for their losses in Tawergha,” he said. “These cases cannot be forgiven, and it would be better to resettle them far away.”

Gaddafi forces subjected the civilian population of Misrata to serious abuses during the war, Human Rights Watch said, especially during the siege between March and May. Gaddafi forces repeatedly launched indiscriminate mortar and Grad rocket attacks ^[3] into the town, killing civilians. In April, Human Rights Watch documented the government's use of cluster munitions ^[4] in the city.

But forcing all residents of Tawergha to resettle permanently in another part of Libya ^[5] would amount to collective punishment and would constitute a crime against humanity for deportation or forced transfer, Human Rights Watch said. The NTC and Misrata Council should instead ensure the investigation and prosecution of Tawerghans accused of crimes and allow others to return to their homes and live in safety.

The NTC should also hold detained Tawerghans outside of Misrata, due to the abuse many of them are experiencing in the city, Human Rights Watch said.

“The entire town of Tawergha should not be punished for the crimes of some individuals,” Whitson said. “Prosecutions of people who committed serious crimes are the way forward, with respect for victims' privacy, not the forced expulsion of the entire town.”

Deaths in Custody

Two witnesses, interviewed separately, reported the death in custody of Emhamid Muhammad Shtaywey, known as Faraj, a 42 year-old garbage truck driver from Tawergha, at the Misrata security committee detention facility on Baladia Street at about 8 p.m. on August 20. They said that guards beat him to death. One of the witnesses said that guards and visitors badly beat Faraj throughout most of the day in the Baladia Street facility:

They hit him with everything all over his body: a hose, a leather belt, a stick; they even kicked him on the chest. He was lying on his back, and they hit him hard. Three or four people entered every half an hour and started beating him... He had confessed to rape. I asked him, "Why did you say that?" He said, "They made me." I said, "C'mon, thirty girls, the youngest eight-years-old?" [He said,] "I had to say that so they would stop beating me..." They were cursing and swearing at him: "You rapist, you are with Gaddafi." He wasn't answering, and he wasn't moving. They said, "Wake up, wake up." I saw his chest; it wasn't moving.

The second witness said he saw Shtaywey badly beaten but still alive, and then later saw his dead body.

"They put him out in the hallway," the man said. "He was dead... The guards were touching and feeling him, and they said he had died."

Two witnesses, interviewed separately, described another death in custody of a Tawerghan resident in the basement of the Zaroug School, a makeshift detention facility in Misrata, on August 20 or 21. The facility has since been closed, the witnesses said. One witness said he saw the guards beat the man, and then saw the dead body. The other said he overheard the beating and then saw the dead body. Both witnesses said that the victim, Ashraf Salah Muhammad, in his early thirties, was mentally ill. He was beaten repeatedly in his cell to divulge a pass code to a walkie-talkie, both of the witnesses said. One of the witnesses said:

They started whipping him at 10 a.m. with a horse whip. It lasted forty-five minutes. He was dead by noon... They whipped him on his back and neck... Two guards put thick brown tape around his wrists and mouth. They asked him for the code of his walkie-talkie. That was their only question. He only said, "Have mercy on me. I will kiss your hands so you will leave me be." Over and over again. I don't know why they were asking him this. After they finished torturing him... we went to sleep because of the fasting in Ramadan. After an hour-and-a-half, we woke up and found that he had died. We touched his pulse and didn't feel anything. We knocked on the door and said that someone here had died.

The guards covered him with a blanket and took him away. The guards didn't say anything to us about what happened. They just pulled him out and that was that.

Shootings

The harassment by Misrata brigades of Tawerghans includes shootings of unarmed men, sometimes in custody. In one case armed men from Misrata killed a displaced Tawerghan in the camp where he was taking shelter. In two other cases, Misrata brigade members shot Tawerghans in their custody and left them by the side of a deserted road.

Three witnesses told Human Rights Watch that a member of a Misrata brigade killed an unarmed man from Tawergha named Ihsam Omar Sa'ad in late September. They said that Sa'ad, a nurse at the Tawergha hospital, was shot once in the back and once in the leg at the military rest house in Hun, a facility being used as a camp for nearly 1,800 displaced Tawerghans.

One of the witnesses said he entered the camp with Ihsam as members of the al-Adiyat Brigades were separating the young male Tawerghans from the old men, women, and children:

[A Misrata fighter] came with his gun and told me to go back [into the courtyard where the other camp residents had been collected]. He was hitting us with the back of the Kalashnikov. He hit me in my chest. As we were going, one of the Misrata fighters fired two bullets – one hit Ihsam in the back and one in the leg. There were more shots. I looked back. He fell.

A cousin of Ihsam said he was also walking with Ihsam into the compound and saw the shooting. One of the bullets that hit Ihsam went through the jacket that the cousin had draped over his arm, he said. He showed Human Rights Watch the bullet hole in the jacket and the place in the compound where he said Ihsam was shot. The cousin said he attended Ihsam's burial the following day.

In mid-September a Misrata brigade apparently shot and wounded two unarmed cousins from Tawergha, who said they were in the hills gathering firewood a few kilometers from where they were staying in Lode. The men, interviewed separately, said that when they approached the road, six armed men stopped them and handcuffed them to each other. The fighters beat the cousins and asked whether they had fought as members of the Gaddafi forces, as soldiers or volunteers, and whether they had weapons. One of the cousins described how the fighters shot them and abandoned them by the side of the road:

They put us in the car and then changed their mind. They put us on our knees. One of the rebels kicked my cousin on his nose with his boot. One of them tried

to point the gun at me, so I was running toward him so he wouldn't shoot at me. One of the guys said they should put us under the car and run us over. We were standing in a corner, and one of them had a 14.5mm pointed at us and the others with their Kalashnikovs pointed... My cousin was crying because his nose was broken, and I just surrendered. When I looked the other way, the first bullet hit my leg. Then they started shooting all over, and two bullets hit my side and one in my cousin's leg. They were telling us to extend our hands to take off the handcuffs. I could see the bone in my leg so I fainted... My cousin was awake, and they pulled me by my neck and pulled us to the edge of the road. I was wearing a gray t-shirt and shorts. My cousin had a red vest and a pair of trousers. They tore his shirt off.

They left us at the edge of the road, put a blanket over us and then started swearing, "You are dogs, hope you die." There was a farm nearby, so my cousin started pulling me so we could hide at the farm... My cousin said to hold on to his shoulders... But my wound was very bad, unlike him. I fell again. I said, "Just leave me, I am going to die." Everything went white. I couldn't see anything. I could just hear his voice but I couldn't understand what he was saying.

The cousin with the lighter bullet wounds said he was able to crawl to safety within 10 days, surviving off irrigation water from nearby farms. The other cousin said he was rescued after about two weeks, also surviving on farm water, at which point one of his wounds had been badly infected. Human Rights Watch interviewed this man while he was still in the hospital, as well as the doctor who was treating him. The bullet marks in the bodies of both men were consistent with their statements, and the medical records for the hospitalized man said he had been admitted to the hospital on October 3 for gunshot wounds.

In another case, Human Rights Watch interviewed a Tawerghan man who said that Misrata fighters opened fire on him and his friend, Abdel Majid Faraj Ali, while they were searching for firewood, hitting Ali in the back. The man said that he and Ali had fled Tawergha and taken refuge on a farm near Lode. On August 22 they went searching for firewood in the area. Near a highway, five unidentified men from Misrata in two pickup trucks stopped and ordered them to approach, the man said. Ali ran and the group of men fired AK-47 rifles in the air, forcing Ali to stop, the man said. The armed men then pulled a Tawerghan detainee who had been badly beaten from one of the trucks. The detainee said he knew Ali.

"Ali got afraid, and so did I," the man said. "We started to run among the date trees. They started yelling 'slaves, slaves' and fired at us. They hit Abdel in the back and he fell." The man said he managed to get away despite the shooting and hid in a family farm. He did not know Ali's fate.

Prisoner Abuse

Human Rights Watch documented the abuse of Tawerghans and other detainees in the custody of militia fighters, both in Tripoli and in Misrata. Abuse included the use of electric shock and beatings, including beatings on the soles of the feet (*falaga*).

Misrata brigades single out Tawerghans to extract confessions, many victims and witnesses said. One Tawerghan detainee told Human Rights Watch that the first question Misratan captors ask is, "Where are you from?" When they say they are from Tawergha, the Misratan immediately asks, "Did you rape? Did you kill? Did you steal?"

According to head counts that Human Rights Watch conducted during visits to four detention facilities in September and October in Misrata, civilian and military authorities in the city are holding well over 1,300 detainees. Tawerghans held in custody by brigades from other cities did not appear to be singled out for mistreatment.

In late September Human Rights Watch interviewed 50 prisoners in four Misrata prisons, including 22 Tawerghans and 10 non-Libyans. Human Rights Watch also interviewed three Tawerghans who had been released from detention. Human Rights Watch found evidence of mistreatment in three of the four facilities. None of the detainees alleged mistreatment in the Sadoun School facility since May, when the director of the facility, Sheikh Abdulhafith Abu Ghrain, fired those who had committed abuses, according to one detainee who said he had been subjected to electric shock there.

Human Rights Watch found Tawerghan detainees in all four of the detention facilities it visited. In two, Tawerghans constituted the majority of detainees. Most of the Tawerghan detainees reported beatings at the time of their capture, both in Tripoli and Misrata. Most reported beatings at both transitional detention facilities and the de facto prisons. Because of the possibility of reprisals against the detainees, Human Rights Watch is not providing their names.

One Tawerghan man said that in the Sikt detention facility near Misrata in August, members of the Murdaz Brigade from Misrata tried to force confessions of rape:

They wanted me to say I had raped. They ask most people from Tawergha to say that they had raped. They beat me. They used an electric stick on my back and my stomach... they did it over and over. And some of them beat us on our feet twice... They put me in a room by myself and asked me if I raped; I said no. They asked me where the orders came from in Tawergha. "Where were the weapons?" I said, "I am a civilian... I know nothing about the military." They told me to confess that I raped five people. I don't know why five people. They hung me

with a pole between my legs and my arms. They beat me up. They used a whip for horses and told me to confess... That lasted five hours. They whipped me on my feet, my legs, my hands. There were lots of different people in civilian clothes. They were taking turns. The investigator was giving orders. After I was beaten, I passed out for five minutes. When I woke up they were standing over me, spitting and cursing at me, and saying, "We will send you back to Africa."

The man showed Human Rights Watch pronounced scars all over his body consistent with his account.

Another Tawerghan detainee described the nightly routine he said he endured at Sikt:

They beat me on my feet every night for 15 minutes, and some people hit my backside and my back. For four days I couldn't sit. They poured cold water on top of me, then took an electric stick and put it on my shoulders, back, and arms each night for ten minutes. It shook me. I can't describe it... They used an engine belt, a plastic hose, a wooden stick, a horse whip.... I had blood in my urine for four or five days.

The man showed Human Rights Watch scars on his body that were still red and protruding one month after the abuse.

Two Tawerghan detainees captured together on August 11, both with visible injuries two months later, said Misrata fighters broke their bones in Misrata. They said that their captors repeatedly hit them with heavy rubber cables and forced them to admit to rapes. A third man said interrogators applied electric shocks to his thighs during an interrogation on August 11, after he was found with weapons in his home in Tawergha.

Another Tawerghan detainee said his Misratan captors repeatedly beat him on the head until he passed out after he had been transferred from Tawergha on August 12 to an unknown location in Misrata. He said the men accused the people of Tawergha of rape, although they did not specifically charge him with wrongdoing. Interviewed in October, he showed Human Rights Watch welts on the top of his head that he said came from the beating.

Another Tawerghan detainee said Misrata fighters captured him in Zawiya, west of Tripoli, on September 20 and took him to a farm where his captors twice put him against the wall and fired bullets near his body as they told him to confess to killing three people in Misrata. He said his captors took him overnight by truck through Tripoli, where he was displayed briefly in Martyrs' Square while chained to the bed of the truck.

Several witnesses at one Misrata facility told Human Rights Watch that they saw guards whip one dark-skinned Tawerghan detainee while forcing him to run around a courtyard and then telling him to climb a pole while shouting, "Monkey needs a banana."

One Tawerghan detainee said that the Misrata fighters who captured him in Tripoli took him to a private building there and beat him with whips and rifle butts.

"I confessed to raping women because I thought that would get me released," he said. "But the beatings continued [in Misrata]." The man's captors said they would take him to "Hotel Jenat," [Hotel Hell] the man said, which is Misrata slang for the local cemetery. The man displayed fresh gashes on his face and arms, and blood was visible inside his mouth. During the interview, the man lost consciousness for about one minute.

While Human Rights Watch was interviewing detainees at the Wahda detention facility in Misrata around midnight on September 25, a group of guards forced four detainees, all of whom were injured, to run in the courtyard and to walk on their knees with their hands behind their heads. When the researcher confronted the guards about the mistreatment as it happened, one guard said: "We do this every day. It is sport before they go to bed. They committed rape."

Human Rights Watch spoke to witnesses who said that the guards had previously beaten other detainees. The supervisor of the prison, Ali Garman, claimed not to be aware that this abuse was taking place there every night, although he was present at the time the witnesses were forced to run and walk on their knees.

Sedik Bashir Bady, deputy head of the Misrata Council, told Human Rights Watch that the council has ordered prison guards and fighters to halt the mistreatment of prisoners, but that guards and fighters had ignored the demand.

"We have made it clear that there must be no abuses," he said. "They don't respect orders. They do what they want."

Omar el-Qayed, a member of the Misrata Military Council, told Human Rights Watch that top officers "do not give license" to abuse prisoners or other Tawerghan people. "But even on the battlefield, the revolutionaries are hard to control," he said.

Forced Displacement

The population of Tawergha, roughly 30,000 people, has fled to other parts of Libya. Most left as anti-Gaddafi forces approached the town in mid-August; at least 140 people who remained were forcibly expelled by members of a militia.

The largest known group took refuge in Jufra, a region 200 miles south of Sirte. In Hun, a town in Jufra, as of early October units of the Al Jazeera Brigade from eastern Libya were guarding about 4,000 displaced persons in three compounds, where the Tawerghans were free to come and go. The brigade had begun transferring some Tawerghan families voluntarily to Benghazi for their protection. On October 5, Human Rights Watch visited the three refugee compounds in Hun and spoke unimpeded with 22 displaced Tawerghans. By October 27, 2011, at least 5,000 Tawerghans had gone to Benghazi.

Al Jazeera Brigade officers told Human Rights Watch that members of brigades from Misrata have tried to enter the camps in Jufra with the intention of rounding up male Tawerghans.

"A few days ago, a Misrata group came to this gate and demanded to go in," one officer said on October 5. "I said no, and one of them shot at the ground at my feet. Everyone loaded up and the confrontation ended. But they might come back." The Misratans have come four times in two weeks demanding to come in, the officer added.

"Mainly they are looking for stray Tawerghans in the street," he said. "They're on a hunt." A committee of Tawerghans in one of the three facilities gave Human Rights Watch a list of more than 50 youths missing from the area over the previous month.

Displaced families in the Hun camps were in crowded, unsanitary conditions. Tawerghan authorities in the camp said that sewage water was leaking into the courtyard and that many of the children had diarrhea. Human Rights Watch noticed a putrid smell in the courtyard area. Men apparently did not have access to indoor toilets.

Tawerghan families told Human Rights Watch that they were running out of money. Although the local community helped them with food, they were buying many of their supplies at the local stores and cooking outside on fires. There were shortages of blankets, children's shoes, and clothes for the fall and winter. Tawerghan authorities in the camp said that a civilian truck from Misrata recently stocked the camp clinic with medications.

In other areas near Hun, Tawerghans had taken refuge in agricultural settlements and had refused invitations from the Al Jazeera Brigade to gather in Hun. Elsewhere they also had moved in with relatives or were living in makeshift camps, especially in Tripoli.

Many Tawerghans said they were reluctant to go outside in many parts of Libya for fear of capture and abuse by Misrata brigades. Misrata units in Tripoli and elsewhere have been rounding up Tawerghan men, frequently transferring them to Misrata.

On September 22, fighters from a Misrata brigade detained at least five members of the Tawergha Local Council, a body of 10 members that the NTC had recognized as representatives from Tawergha. They were released on October 2 or 3.

On September 30, Human Rights Watch visited Heisha, a cluster of rural settlements about 60 miles south of Misrata. Two groups of displaced Tawerghan families had taken refuge in an unfinished housing development and some abandoned farm houses. The first group of about 700 people said they had fled their homes on August 12, when the Misrata forces arrived. They took no part in the fighting, they said, and in fact had opposed Gaddafi. They said that pro-Gaddafi Tawerghans threatened to assault them when the war was over.

In interviews in Heisha, a group of six men said they moved first to Jufra, about 200 miles south of Sirte, on August 11, and then to Heisha, closer to their hometown, on September 26. Rebels at a nearby checkpoint have refused to let them pass either to Tawergha or beyond to Tripoli, they said.

Mohammed Idriss, a physician, said that on October 2, guards denied a woman soon to give birth passage for four hours until they relented and permitted her to continue to Misrata hospital.

“The rebels call us rats and say we will never go back,” he told Human Rights Watch.

Three medical workers interviewed by Human Rights Watch said that the de facto director of the makeshift hospital between Sirte and Heisha, at a place known as Kilometer 50, told the staff to treat Misrata fighters ahead of everyone else, including ahead of “Tawerghans, people who are black, civilians from Sirte, Gaddafi soldiers, and women. Basically anyone not from Misrata.”

In the nearby town of Heisha, three Tawerghan families of about 32 women and children had taken refuge in an abandoned farmhouse. They too said they had fled Tawergha on August 12 as forces from Misrata approached, but got no further than Heisha, where rebels arrested five of their men. The women did not know the men's whereabouts, and they have not been able to go back to Tawergha. They are being fed by a nearby family from the southern town of Sebha, they said.

Harassment in Misrata

The collective blame that militias are applying to the people of Tawergha includes Tawerghan residents of Misrata. These people say they dislike Gaddafi and supported the anti-Gaddafi revolt. Human Rights Watch interviewed four such Tawerghans. One said he

had been fired from his state job, another that a teller forbade him from withdrawing money at a bank, and another said nurses denied her medical care at the hospital. In all cases the people were told this was because they were Tawerghans. The fourth said a band of armed men from Misrata ransacked his home and stole a camera. All of the men asked that their names not be used. They all said that Misratans had repeatedly told them that Tawerghans would not only be forbidden from returning to Tawergha, but also from staying in Misrata.

One of the Tawerghans, who said he has lived in Misrata for 20 years, said he supported the rebels as a volunteer by giving out food during the siege. On July 11, he arrived on payday at his place of work, which he did not want to identify, and a guard at the facility told him to "forget about it."

"We are going to eradicate Tawergha," he said the guard told him.

"I don't know who these people are and they don't know I was with the revolution," the man told Human Rights Watch. "They don't care. It is enough that I am Tawergha."

The man said he complained to the Misrata Security Committee, which instead of helping told him to surrender his government-provided car. The man said he returned home to find his car stolen.

Another Tawerghan resident of Misrata said she was rejected for treatment at Misrata's government-run hospital, where she went in August for a pregnancy checkup. Nurses told her: "We don't treat Tawarhans here." The woman approached a Libyan doctor friend who conducted an examination in her home. She said that when she has gone to a local market, Misrata people have insulted her and told her to leave town.

One elderly Tawerghan man who said he has lived in Misrata for 10 years, including during the fighting, said a teller denied him service at a bank unless he erased Tawergha from his identity card. He said the teller told him that Tawerghans were "traitors" who should not stay in Misrata.

Another Tawerghan from Misrata, a clothing store owner, said during the anti-Gaddafi revolt, he took part in street protests and helped carry ammunition for the rebels. In mid-July, a group of men in sedans and pickup trucks mounted with recoilless rifles pulled up to his home, he said, knocked on the door and demanded to conduct a search. He said as he opened the door, men leaped over a courtyard wall and entered the house, saying "No more Tawerghans." They overturned shelves and drawers and stole a camera and mobile phone, he said. The man complained to the Misrata Security Committee, but they have not

investigated, he said.

Recommendations

Misrata's civil and military leaders should help promote justice for serious violations during the conflict and support the rule of law by:

Publicly condemning revenge attacks against Tawerghans and punishing those who harass or attack Tawerghans, or detain them without grounds;

Issuing strong and unambiguous orders to all military commanders and detention facility officials that physical or mental abuse at the time of arrest or during detention is strictly forbidden and will be punished appropriately, and that commanders will be held responsible;

Expediting efforts to bring the many military brigades and local militias in Misrata under a unified civilian command;

Clarifying who has the lawful authority to detain people and treating detentions by anyone else as a crime;

Transferring Tawerghan detainees out of Misrata to NTC-run facilities in Tripoli or Benghazi, where they are less vulnerable to abuse; and

Working to reestablish the criminal justice system, so those accused of having committed serious crimes can be lawfully investigated, prosecuted, and given in a fair trial.

Source URL: <http://www.hrw.org/news/2011/10/30/libya-militias-terrorizing-residents-loyalist-town>

Links:

[1] <http://www.hrw.org/news/2011/10/30/libya-militias-terrorizing-residents-loyalist-town>

[2] <http://www.hrw.org/bios/sarah-leah-whitson>

[3] <http://www.hrw.org/news/2011/04/17/libya-indiscriminate-attacks-kill-civilians>

[4] <http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2011/04/15/libya-cluster-munitions-strike-misrata>

[5] <http://www.hrw.org/middle-eastn-africa/libya>

© Copyright 2014, Human Rights Watch