



Libya: Bolster Security at Tawergha Camps ^[1]

Survivors Describe Fatal Attack

March 5, 2012

(Tripoli, March 5, 2012) – The Libyan government should urgently increase security for the roughly 12,000 displaced people from Tawergha in western Libya, Human Rights Watch said today. Nearly a month after militias raided a Tawergha camp in Janzur, shooting dead one man, three women, and three children, that camp and others still lack adequate protection, Human Rights Watch said.

In Tripoli and other western areas, Tawerghans have been subjected to attacks, arrests and harassment ^[2] since August 2011, mostly by militias from Misrata, Human Rights Watch said. Human Rights Watch has found no evidence that the government is investigating these crimes or the shooting deaths in Janzur.

“The displaced people of Tawergha are exposed to the violent whims of militias in western Libya,” said Sarah Leah Whitson ^[3], Middle East and North Africa director at Human Rights Watch. “The government needs to get serious about providing more official forces to protect these camps and to investigating the killings there.”

Human Rights Watch interviewed nine witnesses to the violence at and around the Janzur camp on February 6, 2012, among them family members of people who were killed and three people who were wounded, as well as camp leaders and a Defense Ministry official. Human Rights Watch also reviewed death reports and medical records of the wounded.

According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, approximately 35,000 people from Tawergha are displaced around Libya. Tawergha leaders say 16,000 of their people are in eastern Libya and 12,000 are in the west, mostly in Tripoli. Tawerghans in eastern Libya, further from Misrata, appear less vulnerable to attack.

The town of Tawergha near Misrata has been abandoned since mid-August 2011. Militias from Misrata are blocking residents from returning because they accuse Tawerghans of rape and other atrocities in Misrata during the war, together with forces loyal to Muammar Gaddafi.

A Commission of Inquiry on Libya appointed by the UN Human Rights Council recently concluded that Misrata militias had committed crimes against humanity of torture and killings of Tawerghans. “The Misrata *thuwar* [anti-Gaddafi forces] have killed, arbitrarily arrested and tortured Tawerghans across Libya,” said the [report](#) ^[4], issued on March 2, 2012. “The destruction of Tawergha has been done to render it uninhabitable.”

The Libyan government and international actors who support it should ensure that sufficient security forces protect the Tawergha camps and that legal authorities promptly investigate crimes against displaced persons, Human Rights Watch said. The government should also take urgent steps to help Tawerghans safely return home.

Security at Tawergha camps in western Libya should come from the central government, such as the national army, which has lawful authority to carry out security measures, rather than quasi-official local military councils, frequently consisting of unaccountable militias, Human Rights Watch said.

Another camp for displaced Tawerghans, on Airport Road in Tripoli, with about 300 people, was also raided twice in February by unknown militias. Three men were detained, one of whom was later released, camp residents said. Camp leaders said that four guards assigned to the camp by local militias lack the power to resist such raids and abductions by other armed groups.

The violence at the Tawergha camp in Janzur on February 6 began after heavily armed fighters from various militias, some of them apparently from Misrata, entered the Janzur Marine Academy, where about 2,000 Tawerghans were taking shelter. Camp residents said that militia fighters told them they had come to search for weapons.

The camp was guarded at that time by about six Marine Academy cadets who operate under the authority of the Libyan Army. When Human Rights Watch visited the camp in late February, the number of guards had not increased, although a new 14.5mm gun stood at the gate.

Witnesses said that men with pistols and AK-47s entered the camp around 9:30 a.m. with up to 10 vehicles mounted with 14.5mm guns and 23mm artillery pieces. Four witnesses said that some of the vehicles had the markings of militias from Misrata. One person who was wounded claimed that the people attacking him were yelling “*Misrata hurra! Misrata hurra!*” (“Free Misrata! Free Misrata!”).

Some of the vehicles remained at the gate, but others went into the camp near a cluster of buildings where Tawergha families live. There the armed men invading the camp abducted three male camp residents, camp leaders said, all of whom were released within two weeks.

The militia vehicles that entered the compound returned to the gate, which is when the shooting took place, witnesses said. Najma Abdulgadar Faraj, 60, a homemaker and mother of eight, and Juma al-Gaddafi, 55, were shot dead near the gate in unclear circumstances.

After camp residents learned of the two deaths, some of them started throwing stones at the militia fighters, one witness said.

In the late morning, camp residents began marching outside the camp to protest the killings. Militias in the area near the camp fired into the air to force the protesters back, witnesses said. When the protesters continued to march, members of another militia opened fire on the crowd for about two minutes, killing three people, including a 12-year-old girl, two witnesses said. One of the witnesses described the scene:

We were marching. We saw some people from Misrata and they told us to go back ... The *shabab* [youth activists] refused to turn back and sat down in the middle of the road. When we reached the guys from Misrata, near a clinic, there was a place near a wall. But we got shot at before we reached the wall. We decided to turn back. A guy was injured in his side but said to us, "Leave me and just go." After that, another girl got injured. I grabbed Fatima (not her real name) by her arm and said we have to leave. Fatima told Haneen to leave with us. But Haneen was shot in the neck from the front, and the bullet exited her shoulder. I didn't see who shot her. There were four or five guys shooting, one of them was carrying a handgun and the rest had Kalashnikovs.

Haneen Salah Agily, the 12 year-old girl, died instantly. Two others, Nureddin Beleid al-Agmaty, 21, and Nasseradin Muhammad al-Agmaty, 25, were also killed at the scene, according to the two witnesses. Death records viewed by Human Rights Watch confirmed the names, dates, and cause of the deaths.

Witnesses said the militias then forcibly held some protesters for at least two hours in a nearby medical clinic. More than 10 others managed to escape the area, walking several kilometers to the coast. A journalist who visited the clinic while the Tawerghans were there said he heard

some of the militia members say, “There are a bunch of guys on the beach – let’s go.” Members of the militia then left for the beach, he said.

Two of the people who made it to the beach told Human Rights Watch that militia fighters arrived there in the early afternoon and opened fire on the escaped protesters, killing two boys, Muhammad Atiya Erhuma, 13, and Farayj Abdulmullah Farayj Muhammad, 15.

One of the protesters who made it to the beach recalled the shooting:

We walked until we reached the seaside outside the Tourist Village. It was around 1 p.m. But then a *katiba* [militia] came to us again, and they started shooting. They were around 50 meters away. We had nothing to defend ourselves. We just tried to hide. Two kids, Muhammad and Farayj, were injured with bullets. We tried to help them, but [the militia] started shooting at us again. The group split up, and my friend and I hid in a place until 7 p.m. – we covered ourselves with blankets and stones.

The families said they found the two boys’ bodies in the hospital later that day. A relative of Muhammad said he had one bullet wound in his torso – the entry wound was in his back and the exit wound in the chest – and another in his leg. A relative of Farayj said he had three entry wounds in his back and one in his upper right arm. The death records of both boys reviewed by Human Rights Watch confirmed the dates and causes of death.

Following the deaths in and near the camp, the United Nations mission in Libya called ^[5] on the government to increase protection for the displaced people of Tawergha and to investigate the February 6 attack.

Human Rights Watch urged the government to ensure that its formal criminal justice authorities conduct a prompt and thorough investigation into the killings in and around the camp, leading to the prosecution of those responsible.

“A key way to protect displaced Tawerghans is to arrest and prosecute those who use violence against them,” Whitson said.

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

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

[4] <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/RegularSessions/Session19/Pages/ListReports.aspx>

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