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Source:

Donatella Rovera, Senior Crisis Response Adviser at Amnesty International

Armed militias operating across Libya commit widespread human rights abuses with impunity, fuelling insecurity and hindering the rebuilding of state institutions, warned Amnesty International in a new report released today, a year on from the start of the February 2011 uprising.

The report *Militias threaten hopes for new Libya*, documents widespread and serious abuses, including war crimes, by a multitude of militias against suspected al-Gaddafi loyalists, with cases of people being unlawfully detained and tortured – sometimes to death.

African migrants and refugees have also been targeted, and revenge attacks have been carried out, forcibly displacing entire communities – while the authorities have done nothing to investigate the abuses and hold those responsible to account.

“Militias in Libya are largely out of control and the blanket impunity they enjoy only encourages further abuses and perpetuates instability and insecurity,” said Donatella Rovera, Senior Crisis Response Adviser at Amnesty International.

“A year ago Libyans risked their lives to demand justice. Today their hopes are being jeopardized by lawless armed militias who trample human rights with impunity. The only way to break with the entrenched practices of decades of abuse under Colonel al-Gaddafi’s authoritarian rule is to ensure that nobody is above the law and that investigations are carried out into such abuses”.

In January and early February 2012, Amnesty International delegates visited 11 detention facilities in central and western Libya used by various militias and at 10 of these locations, detainees said they had been tortured or ill-treated en situ, and showed Amnesty International injuries resulting from recent abuse. Several detainees said they had confessed to rape, killings and other crimes they had not committed just to end the torture.

At least 12 detainees held by militias have died after being tortured since September. Their bodies were covered in bruises, wounds and cuts and some had had nails pulled off.

Individuals held in and around Tripoli, Gharyan, Misratah, Sirte and Zawiya told Amnesty International they had been suspended in contorted positions; beaten for hours with whips, cables, plastic hoses, metal chains and bars,

and wooden sticks; and given electric shocks with live wires and taser-like electro-shock weapons.

At a detention centre in Misratah an Amnesty International delegate saw armed militia members beating and threatening some detainees whose release had been ordered. An older detainee from Tawargha was cowering, squatting against the wall, and crying as he was being kicked and threatened by a militia member who told Amnesty International that “those from Tawargha will not be released or we’ll kill them”.

In an interrogation centre in Misratah and Tripoli Amnesty International found detainees who interrogators had tried to conceal and who had been severely tortured – one so badly that he could hardly move or speak.

Not a single effective investigation is known to have been carried out into cases of torture, even in cases where detainees died after having been tortured at militia headquarters or in interrogation centres which are formally or informally recognized or linked to the central authorities.

“Militias with a record of abuse of detainees should simply not be allowed to hold anyone and all detainees should be immediately transferred to authorized detention facilities under the control of the National Transitional Council.”

No investigations have been carried out either into other grave abuses, such as the extrajudicial execution of detainees and other war crimes, including the killing of some 65 people whose bodies were found on 23 October in a hotel in Sirte which served as a base for opposition fighters from Misratah.

Militia members are seen on video footage obtained by Amnesty International hitting and threatening to kill a group of 29 men in their custody. One is heard saying “take them all and kill them”. Their bodies were among those found three days later at the hotel, many with their hands tied behind their back and shot in the head.

The Libyan authorities have so far taken no action against the militias who have forcibly displaced entire communities – a crime under international law. Militias from Misratah drove out the entire population of Tawargha, some 30,000 people, and looted and burned down their homes in revenge for crimes some Tawargha are accused of having committed during the conflict. Thousands of members of the Mashashya tribe were similarly forced out of their village by militias from Zintan, in the Nafusa Mountains. These and other communities remains displaced in makeshift camps around the country while no action has been taken to hold the perpetrators accountable or to allow the displaced communities to return home.

“The blanket impunity afforded to militias is sending the message that such abuses are tolerated and is contributing to making such practices accepted practice. Individuals responsible for abuses must be held to account for their actions and removed from positions that would allow them to repeat such abuses.” said Donatella Rovera.

“It is imperative that the Libyan authorities firmly demonstrate their commitment to turning the page on decades of systematic violations by reining in the militias, investigating all past and present abuses and prosecuting those responsible - on all sides - in accordance with international law.”

<http://www.amnesty.org/en/news/libya-out-control-militias-commit-widespread-abuses-year-uprising-2012-02-15>