



Written by [Alex Newman](#) on February 16, 2012

Libyan Militias Face Accusations of Ongoing War Crimes

As Libyans prepare to mark the one-year anniversary of the Western-backed uprising that ultimately toppled the regime of despot Muammar Gadhafi, human-rights monitors say hundreds of “out of control” militia groups are still engaged in mass savagery — raping and torturing people to death in makeshift prison camps, ethnically cleansing parts of the country, and more.



The most recent charges came on Wednesday. Researchers with the organization Amnesty International released a fresh [report](#), citing interviews with detainees and observations on the ground, accusing the lawless Libyan militias of committing widespread human rights abuses including what amounts to war crimes.

The atrocities documented in the report include rape, torture, extrajudicial executions, looting, and even the displacement of whole neighborhoods and towns. Some detainees held by the militias reported being suspended in contorted positions and subjected to electro-shock abuse.

"Armed militias operating across Libya commit widespread human rights abuses with impunity, fueling insecurity and hindering the rebuilding of state institutions," the group said in a statement about its latest report. "African migrants and refugees have also been targeted, and revenge attacks have been carried out, forcibly displacing entire communities."

At 10 of the 11 prison camps visited by Amnesty delegates in Libya, despite militia efforts to conceal the crimes, detainees reported savage torture and showed investigators evidence of the abuse. At some of the facilities, investigators discovered rapes by prison guards, beatings with whips or metal chains, and even torture by electrocution.

Several detainees also reported falsely confessing to crimes just to make the abuse stop, Amnesty International said.

In recent months, at least a dozen detainees are known to have been tortured to death while in custody, according to the group. "Their bodies were covered in bruises, wounds and cuts and some had had nails pulled off," investigators noted in the report.

A former Libyan diplomat recently made headlines after being brutalized and tortured to death in militia custody. And more instances of death-by-torture are being uncovered on a regular basis.

The abuse has become so rampant that in late January, the non-profit group Doctors Without Borders — an international organization that sends medical teams to disaster-stricken regions and war zones — [halted its involvement](#) with militia-run prison camps in the city of Misrata. The group determined that, in many cases, detainees were being offered medical care only to ensure they would be in good enough condition to endure more torture and interrogations.



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Even the United Nations, which originally signed off on the resolution used by NATO to wage war against Libya, has highlighted the problem. "There's torture, extrajudicial executions, rape of both men and women," [said](#) UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay in late January.

In November, the self-styled "International Criminal Court" [announced](#) that it was investigating [war crimes and crimes against humanity perpetrated in Libya by revolutionaries and NATO forces](#). The list of allegations cited by the "prosecutor" included unlawful detention of civilians and extrajudicial executions.

The Libyan "National Transitional Council" (NTC) regime, meanwhile, is doing little to nothing to rein in the militias now ruling over much of Libya, according to the human-rights investigators. Instead, the new NATO-backed rulers — an odd coalition of [former Gadhafi officials, Islamic extremists, and known terror leaders](#) — are letting the armed groups run wild.

"Militias in Libya are largely out of control and the blanket impunity they enjoy only encourages further abuses," said Donatella Rovera, a Senior Crisis Response Adviser with 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."

According to Amnesty, the central regime in Tripoli — which has yet to solidify any widespread semblance of allegiance among Libyans despite broad Western support — must investigate and prosecute individuals responsible for the ongoing atrocities. The NTC should also bring all of the detainees under a centralized system, and militias known to have perpetrated war crimes should be stripped of their prison camps.

"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," Rovera said. "Individuals responsible for abuses must be held to account for their actions and removed from positions that would allow them to repeat such abuses."

Of course, civilians and detainees are not the only ones bearing the brunt of Libya's militia forces. Various armed groups from different parts of the country have been fighting each other, too. [Sporadic clashes](#) have become a regular occurrence — even in the capital, Tripoli — as competing factions turn on each other and struggle for power.

The violence and human-rights abuses, however, are nothing new in Libya. Under the Gadhafi regime, political dissidents were [regularly tortured and publicly executed](#). And as *The New American* reported last year, many of the NATO-backed rebels were [engaged in barbarism](#) from the first days of the uprising as well.

Videos posted online showed revolutionaries publicly [beheading](#) officials and suspected supporters of the Gadhafi regime as onlookers cheered and shouted "Allah Akbar." And it went downhill from there.

The entire town of Tawarga — largely populated by blacks — has essentially been [wiped off the map](#) following the revolution. Tens of thousands of Libyans have already been killed — particularly endangered are black sub-Saharan Africans. And the growing violence is [expected to continue ravishing the nation](#) for the foreseeable future.

Gadhafi's son Saadi, who fled to Niger as Tripoli was being overrun, told an Arab TV station last week he was in contact with sources in Libya and that an [armed uprising against the new regime was imminent](#). Whether his claims are true or not, outside analysts have been [suggesting that a new civil](#)



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[war was brewing](#) since before the slain despot's execution in October.

With the chaos and bloodshed in Libya spiraling further out of control, Western leaders have largely toned down their [public celebrations over the "success"](#) of NATO's regime-change mission against Gadhafi — who served as the West's former ally in the terror war just a few years ago. The situation is likely to deteriorate further.

But even as the body count continues to rise in Libya, an eerily similar situation is unfolding in Syria right now. Al Qaeda and Western intelligence agencies have [united with a goal of overthrowing](#) the dictatorship of Bashar al-Assad. And the the blood is already pouring out into the streets.

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Photo: Libyan militias from towns throughout the country's west parade through Tripoli, Libya, Feb. 14, 2012: AP Images



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