

Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

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Freedom in the World - Libya (2008)

Capital:
Tripoli

Population:
6,200,000

Political Rights Score: 7
Civil Liberties Score: 7
Status: Not Free

Overview

Libya continued to improve its relations with the United States and Europe in 2007, in part by making major arms purchases and releasing a group of six foreign health workers who had been sentenced to death on dubious charges. In November, al-Qaeda announced an alliance with a Libyan Islamist militant group, highlighting the Libyan regime's interest in antiterrorism cooperation with the West. However, the oil-rich country's poor human rights performance showed no signs of improvement during the year, and the warmer diplomatic climate appeared to dim prospects for concerted international pressure on the issue.

Libya was part of the Ottoman Empire until the Italian conquest of the country in 1911. It achieved independence in 1951 after a brief period of UN trusteeship in the wake of World War II. Until 1969, the sparsely populated country was ruled by a relatively pro-Western monarch, King Idris. A group of young army officers, led by 27-year-old captain Mu'ammar al-Qadhafi, overthrew the king while he was traveling abroad.

Al-Qadhafi believed that foreign oil companies were profiting from the country's natural-resource wealth at the expense of the Libyan people, and he moved to nationalize oil assets, claiming that oil revenues would be shared among the population. In the early phase of his leadership, al-Qadhafi published a multivolume treatise, the *Green Book*, in which he expounded his political philosophy and ideology, a fusion of Arab nationalism, socialism, and Islam. Although he has been Libya's undisputed leader since 1969, making him one of the world's longest-serving rulers, he officially holds no title and is referred to as the Brotherly Leader and Guide of the Revolution.

Al-Qadhafi adopted decidedly anti-Western policies, and after the regime was implicated in several international terrorist attacks, the United States imposed sanctions on Libya in 1981. Relations between the two countries continued to worsen, and in 1986 the United States bombed several targets in Libya, including al-Qadhafi's home. The attack led to more provocations. In 1988, a Pan Am airliner exploded over Lockerbie, Scotland, killing all 259 people aboard as well as 11 residents of the town. After an exhaustive investigation, Scottish police issued arrest warrants for two Libyan men, including a Libyan intelligence agent. The UN Security Council then imposed trade sanctions on the country. For the next several years, Libya was economically and diplomatically isolated.

In 1999, al-Qadhafi moved to mend his international image and handed over the two Lockerbie bombing suspects for trial. He accepted responsibility for past acts

of terrorism and offered compensation packages to the families of victims. The United Nations suspended its sanctions, and the European Union (EU) began reestablishing diplomatic and trade relations with Tripoli. In 2001, the International Court of Justice in The Hague, the Netherlands, found one of the Lockerbie suspects guilty of masterminding the attack. Libya agreed to pay a \$10 million compensation package to the families of each of the 270 victims in 2003. The following year, al-Qadhafi made his first trip to Europe in more than 15 years, and European leaders in turn traveled to Libya. The EU subsequently lifted its arms embargo and normalized diplomatic relations; Libya purchased hundreds of millions of dollars in European weapons systems in 2007. The regime has also improved its relations with the United States. In 2004, a year after al-Qadhafi's government announced that it had scrapped its nonconventional weapons programs, the United States established a liaison office in Tripoli. The United States eventually removed Libya from its list of state sponsors of terrorism, and established a full embassy in Tripoli in May 2006.

Many observers have speculated that Saif al-Islam al-Qadhafi, the leader's son, is behind some of the policy moves of the past few years. He runs a charitable organization, the Gaddafi International Foundation for Charity Associations, and has facilitated visits by foreign human rights activists. According to press reports, his foundation has made it possible for Libyan citizens to report abuses by the authorities. Saif al-Islam has also publicly criticized current conditions in Libya and advocated changes in the leadership. Nevertheless, the diplomatic and economic shifts to date have not been accompanied by noticeable improvements in political rights or civil liberties.

Political Rights and Civil Liberties

Libya is not an electoral democracy. Power theoretically lies with a system of people's committees and the General People's Congress, but those structures are manipulated in practice to ensure the continued dominance of Mu'ammar al-Qadhafi, who holds no official title. It is illegal for any political group to oppose the principles of the 1969 revolution, which are laid out in al-Qadhafi's *Green Book*, although market-based economic changes in recent years have diverged from the regime's socialist ideals.

Political parties have been illegal for over 35 years. The government strictly monitors political activity, and those who appear to be attempting to establish anything akin to a political party face imprisonment. Many Libyan opposition movements and figures operate outside the country.

Corruption is pervasive in both the private sector and the government in Libya, which ranked 131 out of 180 countries surveyed in Transparency International's 2007 Corruption Perceptions Index.

There is no independent press in Libya. State-owned media largely operate as mouthpieces for the authorities, and journalists work in a climate of fear and self-censorship. Those who displease the regime face harassment or imprisonment on trumped-up charges. According to the New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), three suspects were sentenced to death in 2007 for the 2005 murder of journalist Dayf al-Ghazal al-Shuhaibi. He had worked for state-owned media but also contributed to London-based websites focused on Libya, and had criticized the authorities in the months leading up to his death. According to CPJ, little information was released on the trial of the three suspects, prompting

concerns about the sincerity of the process.

Nearly all Libyans are Muslim. The government closely monitors mosque activity for Islamist activity, and there have been unconfirmed reports of Islamist militant groups allied to al-Qaeda operating against the government. In November 2007, al-Qaeda declared that the so-called Libyan Islamic Fighting Group had joined its international network. The few non-Muslims in Libya are permitted to practice their faiths with relative freedom. Academic freedom is tightly restricted.

The government does not uphold freedom of assembly. Those demonstrations that are allowed to take place are typically meant to support the aims of the regime. In February 2007, the authorities arrested 12 men for planning a peaceful demonstration in Tripoli to commemorate clashes between security forces and demonstrators the previous year. (The clashes had occurred after the demonstrators attacked the Italian embassy in connection with the publication in Denmark of cartoons that were critical of the prophet Muhammad.) The 12 arrested men face serious punishment, including possible death sentences. The law allows for the establishment of nongovernmental organizations, but those that exist are directly or indirectly linked to the government. There are no independent labor unions.

The infamous People's Court, which had been used to punish dissidents, has been closed, but the judiciary as a whole remains subservient to the political leadership. In July 2007, a high-profile case involving five Bulgarian nurses and a Palestinian doctor came to an end when the six defendants were released. They had been arrested in 1999 after being accused of deliberately infecting 400 Libyan children with HIV, and had since faced death sentences as the case moved through the courts. Experts have cited ample evidence that the prosecution was politically motivated, and the defendants claimed to have been tortured in custody. Their release followed intense diplomatic efforts by European nations, and the EU agreed to provide lifelong treatment for the infected children. In addition, Libya was able to improve its commercial ties with Europe in the wake of the deal, and al-Qadhafi and French president Nicolas Sarkozy visited each other in their respective capitals.

A large number of migrants from sub-Saharan Africa work in Libya or pass through in attempts to reach Europe. Human rights organizations have documented and criticized the country's treatment of these migrants. The regime has been more aggressive in its crackdown on illegal laborers in recent years, increasingly the likelihood of abuses.

Women enjoy many of the same legal protections that men do, but certain laws and social norms perpetuate many forms of discrimination, particularly in areas such as marriage, divorce, and inheritance.