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## AI – Amnesty International

### Libya: Retaliatory attacks against civilians must be halted and investigated

New evidence obtained by Amnesty International indicates that war crimes and other violations may have been committed between 13 April and 1 June by warring parties in Libya during the latest surge in fighting near Tripoli, including, looting, indiscriminate attacks, and the planting of anti-personnel landmines in civilian buildings.

Amnesty International has examined scores of incidents through witness testimonies, analysis of open source photos and videos, and satellite imagery. The organization calls on all warring parties and associated forces in Libya to immediately halt attacks against civilians and other violations of international humanitarian law, including those being carried out to punish civilians for their perceived affiliations with rival groups.

“Civilians in Libya are once again paying the price as all parties escalate retaliatory attacks and other grave violations showing utter disregard for the laws of war and lives of civilians,” said Diana Eltahawy, MENA Deputy Regional Director at Amnesty International.

“We are calling on all parties to the conflict and affiliated militias and armed groups to immediately halt indiscriminate attacks and other serious violations carried out against civilians associated with rival groups. Commanders must publicly condemn these acts. Countries such as Turkey, Russia and the UAE must cease violating the UN arms embargo.”

For years, the Libyan judicial authorities have been unable or unwilling to act leaving years of impunity to fuel these grave violations. Amnesty International is also calling on members of the UN Human Rights Council to urgently establish a Commission of Inquiry or similar mechanism to investigate violations of international humanitarian law and other human rights violations, determine responsibility and preserve evidence of crimes in order to secure justice for the victims.

#### Acts of Retaliation

The recent escalation in fighting in Tripoli’s suburbs and western Libya, with several western towns changing hands between armed groups affiliated with the internationally recognized Government of National Accord (GNA) and the self-styled Libyan National Army (LNA) which is now in de facto control of much of eastern and southern Libya, has sparked an escalation of unlawful retaliatory attacks.

On 13 April, GNA affiliated forces, using Turkish arms and equipment transferred in violation of the UN arms embargo, captured the cities of Surman and Sabratha and several towns west of Tripoli. Witnesses told Amnesty International that members of GNA affiliated armed groups looted several civilian houses and public buildings, including the Sabratha main hospital, and set homes on fire. Amnesty International also verified a photo published on social media by a GNA fighter, showing GNA fighters celebrating next to the corpses of several LNA fighters.

Video footage analysed by Amnesty International shows further incidents of retaliation against civilians for their perceived affiliation to one side or another.

One video Amnesty International verified shows armed men looting civilian property in the town of Al-Asabah, 120 kms south of Tripoli, after GNA forces took control on 21 May. A local resident told Amnesty International that he witnessed an incident where armed men looted the house of an LNA fighter.

In another disturbing video posted on social media on 30 April, verified by Amnesty International, a GNA-affiliated fighter is seen threatening “Kaniat forces” (affiliated with the LNA) that they would [“not to leave a single woman alive”](#) when they capture Tarhuna.

Amnesty International examined another [video](#) with a GNA affiliated fighter threatening another [Tawergha](#) in and Sirte, in reference to the forced eviction of the city's entire population in retaliation for the use of city as a launching ground for attacks against Misratah. With the GNA taking control of Tarhuna, such statements raise fears over further revenge attacks against civilians.

Kaniat forces affiliated with the LNA have committed serious violations against civilians in Tripoli and Tarhuna. The United Nations Support Mission in Libya [reported](#) numerous unlawful killings by Kaniat forces.

Another [video](#) examined by Amnesty International on the personal page of an LNA fighter shows him threatening to kill anyone in Benghazi, along with “those in his house even if babies,” if they mourn those who died fighting along the GNA. Amnesty International verified a video showing LNA first infantry brigade parading fighters’ corpses in a pickup truck, while calling a captured GNA fighter “A Syrian Dog” on 18 April.

### **Anti-personnel Landmines**

LNA forces have also committed serious violations, including acts of retaliation such as the use of anti-personnel landmines in flagrant violation of the international ban.

Residents told Amnesty International that around 22 May forces aligned with the LNA placed anti-personnel landmines as they withdrew from the neighborhoods of Ain Zara and Salah el-Din south of Tripoli. At least one civilian was killed when he returned to his family house on 22 May by a landmine that was planted in his family house according to his family.

LNA affiliated forces laid extensive tripline-activated anti-personnel landmines and other booby-traps in homes and other civilian objects. Photos and videos verified by Amnesty International, show Russian and Soviet-era anti-personnel landmines, including MON-50s, MON-90s, OZM-72s, and MS3s, prohibited by international law due to their indiscriminate nature. Some homes in Ain Zara that were booby-trapped were labeled “onacho,” which translates as “dangerous” in Russian. Foreign personnel employed by the Russian military company Wagner were observed leaving these areas immediately before the landmines were discovered.

### **Indiscriminate attacks**

In the course of April and May, LNA forces have shelled civilian neighborhoods in Tripoli, resulting in civilian casualties and damage to civilian property in the neighborhoods of Ain Zara, Tariq el-Sour, Souq al-Talata, and Souq El-Joma, according to witnesses, residents and a medical source in the GNA-affiliated Ministry of Health. Amnesty International verified images of the aftermath of these attacks, showing civilians killed and wounded. Witnesses and a medical source confirmed to Amnesty International an attack launched by LNA forces on Souq Al-Talat on 31 May, which left at least three civilians dead and 11 wounded, including a child whose leg was amputated.

Forces aligned to the GNA have also carried out indiscriminate attacks across the months of April and May in Tripoli's suburbs of Qasr Bin Ghashir, Beni Walid, Tarhuna and close to Ash Shwayrif village, leading to civilian casualties according to family members and a medical source and photos examined and verified by Amnesty International. At least one girl was killed by shelling in Qasr Bin Ghashir on 1 June according to witnesses, while several buildings were damaged according to photos verified by Amnesty International.

Amnesty International's August 2019 field [investigation](#) into the fighting that broke out in April that year, found that both GNA and LNA affiliated forces were responsible for indiscriminate and disproportionate attacks as well as the use of a range of inaccurate explosive weapons in populated urban areas.

Amnesty International has also documented the use of civilian objects by the GNA for military purposes, endangering civilians. Civilian airports in Tripoli and Misratah receive military shipments from Turkey, while the Special Deterrence Force GNA aligned militia has maintained its base and prison near the airport. LNA forces have repeatedly shelled the airport, which has put it out of action several times and caused damage to civilian aircraft.

### **Background**

Since April 2020, GNA forces have been advancing against LNA positions in western Libya, capturing several coastal areas and the Al-Watiya airbase, pushed back LNA forces from Tripoli's suburbs and took control of Tarhuna and towns around Gharyan.

On 13 April, the GNA's Surman command has issued a statement warning its troops against [retaliatory](#) acts, committing to investigate such “individual incidents”. To date, no commanders or fighters implicated in such crimes have been held to account or removed from active duty.

Despite a comprehensive UN arms embargo in place since 2011, the UAE and Russia and Turkey have been supporting the LNA and GNA, respectively, through illicit arms transfers and direct military support.

Amnesty International is carrying-out investigations into the continued influx of military equipment and foreign fighters -- in violation of the UN arms embargo -- to both sides to the conflict.

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#### ecoi.net summary:

Tripoli: Evidence indicates war crimes committed against civilians between 13 April and 1 June 2020



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