

The State of the World's Human Rights; Libya 2024

Security forces, militias and armed groups across Libya carried out arbitrary arrests targeting hundreds of activists, protesters, journalists, women social media users and others. Thousands remained arbitrarily detained solely for their political or tribal affiliation, following grossly unfair trials or without legal basis. Torture and other ill-treatment remained widespread and systematic. “Confessions” extracted under torture were published online. Civil society was stifled amid efforts by rival authorities to control the registration, funding and activities of NGOs. Sporadic clashes between militias and armed groups using explosive wide-area impact weapons led to civilian casualties and destruction of civilian objects. Women, girls and members of religious minorities faced entrenched discrimination. LGBTI individuals were subjected to arbitrary arrests, prosecutions and death threats. Militias and armed groups carried out forced evictions and house demolitions. EU-backed Libyan coastguards in western Libya, and armed groups in eastern Libya, intercepted thousands of refugees and migrants at sea and forcibly returned them to detention in Libya. Detained refugees and migrants were subjected to torture, sexual violence and forced labour. Thousands were forcibly expelled to neighbouring countries without due process or the possibility to claim asylum. Courts handed down death sentences following unfair trials; no executions took place.

Background

Libya’s political deadlock deepened as rival factions failed to agree a new unity government and a unified budget or set dates for long-delayed presidential and parliamentary elections.

On 30 September, rival governments agreed on a new governor for the Central Bank of Libya (CBL), ending the banking crisis that had affected trading, oil revenues and access to foreign currency since the ousting of CBL governor Sadik al-Kebir on 20 August.

The Libyan Arab Armed Forces (LAAF), the de facto authorities in eastern and parts of southern Libya, paused oil production in relation to the crisis over CBL’s leadership and the reported arrest warrant issued by Spain in August against Saddam Haftar, the de facto leader of the Tarik Ben Zeyad (TBZ) armed group and son of LAAF General Commander Khalifa Haftar.

Violations of the UN arms embargo on Libya persisted with Russian shipments delivered openly in eastern Libyan ports.

Arbitrary detention and unfair trials

Security forces, militias and armed groups arbitrarily arrested hundreds of activists, tribal leaders, journalists, government officials and others for their actual or suspected affiliations or opinions or for financial gain. Thousands continued to be detained solely for their tribal or political affiliations, following grossly unfair trials or without legal basis.

In February, around 20 armed men from the Support Service of Security Directorates in the Eastern Region arrested Sufi Sheikh Muftah Al-Amin Al-Biju from his home in Benghazi. He remained arbitrarily detained without charge or trial at the end of year and was denied access to his family and lawyers.

In July, unidentified armed men in plain clothes abducted political activists Al-Moatassim Al-Areebi and Mohamed Shtewi from a street in Misrata. They arbitrarily detained the two men for

two days in connection to leaked recordings implicating officials in corruption.

Torture and other ill-treatment

Torture and other ill-treatment remained systematic in prisons and detention facilities nationwide. Reported methods included beatings, electric shocks, sexual violence and stress positions. “Confessions” extracted under torture continued to be published online by militias and armed groups.

Authorities failed to promptly and effectively investigate the causes and circumstances of suspicious deaths in custody. In July, Ahmed Abdel Moneim Al-Zawi died while detained by the Internal Security Agency (ISA), in Ajdabiya. The ISA claimed that he had hanged himself, but witnesses reported seeing a bruise on the back of his head which appeared to come from a heavy blow. A prosecutor in Benghazi closed the case without any investigation.

Freedom of association

Armed actors aligned to rival authorities continued to crack down on civil society, including by targeting activists through abductions, arbitrary detention, summons for coercive interrogations, threats and demands for information.

In October the ISA armed group in Sabha raided a civil society event on mental health, briefly arresting and interrogating several attendees.

The Commission of Civil Society, an official body, introduced a bill on NGOs that would grant the government undue powers over NGOs’ registration, funding and activities. The draft bill, as well as counter-proposals submitted by Libyan civil society, remained pending before parliament.

Freedom of expression and assembly

Armed groups and militias arbitrarily arrested and detained hundreds of activists, protesters, journalists and online content creators simply for exercising their rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly.

In January the ISA armed group in Sabha arbitrarily arrested blogger Maryam Mansour al-Warfalli over social media posts critical of LAAF. The ISA detained her without charge or trial until October.

On 11 July the ISA militia in the capital, Tripoli, arrested journalist Ahmed Al-Sanousi after he published a story about allegations of corruption in the Tripoli-based Government of National Unity (GNU). He was released three days later following a public outcry, and subsequently fled Libya after receiving threats.

A peaceful protest by residents of the western city of Yefren was violently dispersed on 24 October by soldiers affiliated with the Western Mountain Military Region of the armed forces of the GNU. The residents were protesting against deteriorating living conditions and the presence of Tripoli militias. Witnesses reported that two protesters sustained injuries. In the aftermath of the protest, the Central Mountain Security Directorate arrested at least 14 individuals suspected of organizing or participating in the protests. One remained in detention at the end of the year.

Unlawful attacks

While a nationwide ceasefire reached in 2020 largely held, sporadic small-scale armed clashes took place in Tripoli, as well as in al-Zawiya and al-Jameel in western Libya and Sabha in southern Libya, between militias and armed groups vying for control of resources or political influence. Indiscriminate attacks and the reckless use of firearms and explosive weapons with wide-area effects in residential areas led to casualties among civilians and damage to or destruction of civilian objects. In May a 10-year-old girl was killed in Tripoli during clashes between local militias.

In August, clashes between two militias in Tajoura, an eastern suburb of Tripoli, in which explosive wide-area impact weapons were used, led to at least nine deaths and further injuries, according to the Ambulance and Emergency Service, as well as the temporary displacement of dozens of families.

Impunity

Officials and commanders of powerful militias and armed groups enjoyed near total impunity for crimes under international law committed in 2024 and previous years.

In May the GNU prime minister established a new agency to combat financial crimes and terrorism, without any human rights vetting of its commander and members.

In July the UN Human Rights Council adopted a resolution renewing its technical assistance and capacity building in Libya, which fell far short of the investigative and monitoring mechanism advocated by NGOs and risked further entrenching impunity.

In July, 12 low- and middle-level officials were sentenced to prison terms for their responsibility in the deadly collapse of dams near Derna in September 2023. However, authorities failed to promptly, thoroughly, independently, impartially and effectively investigate whether powerful military and political figures had failed to protect people's human rights, particularly the rights to life and health.¹

In September, Abdelrahman Milad, known as "Bija", who was under UN sanctions for his alleged involvement in the trafficking and abuse of migrants, was shot dead in Tripoli without facing justice.

In October the International Criminal Court (ICC) announced warrants for the arrests of six leaders, senior members and affiliates of the al-Kaniat armed group for the war crimes of murder, torture, enforced disappearances and other inhumane acts in the north-eastern town of Tarhouna, which the group controlled until June 2020. Five of the suspects remained at large, while Libyan authorities failed to hand over to the ICC Abdelbari Al Shaqaqi, who was reportedly detained by the Deterrence Apparatus to Combat Terrorism and Organized Crime (DACTO).²

Despite its record of committing torture and other crimes, DACTO continued to be involved in the interrogation and detention of individuals accused of crimes under international law, including a commander of the Islamic State armed group accused of responsibility in the beheading of 21 Egyptian Christians in Libya in 2015.

Discrimination

Women and girls

Women faced discrimination in law and practice, including in matters related to marriage, child custody, access to political office and employment.

Militias and armed groups targeted women social media influencers and content creators for forms of expression and dress that did not conform with dominant societal norms grounded in discrimination against women and girls. In March, DACTO released a woman who had been detained on “morality” grounds since November 2022 and whose release the state prosecution had ordered in April 2023.

In September the ISA armed group arrested two women social media influencers at Benghazi airport on accusations that their behaviour had violated societal norms. No information had been provided about their fate and whereabouts by the end of the year.

In June the Presidential Council created the Public Morality Protection Authority under its mandate. In October the GNU established a new Morality Protection Department within the Ministry of the Interior. In November the GNU’s minister of the interior announced plans to introduce compulsory veiling for women and enforce it through the deployment of “morality police”. He also threatened to introduce stricter measures to prevent women from travelling abroad without a male guardian’s permission.

LGBTI people

Consensual same-sex sexual relations between adults remained criminalized. The ISA in Tripoli and other militias and armed groups arrested tens of individuals on the basis of their actual or perceived gender identity and/or sexual orientation.

LGBTI individuals and activists faced death threats for their social media posts, prompting several to flee Libya.

In March the Tripoli-based Office of the Public Prosecutor referred 19 individuals on charges of “homosexuality” and “atheism” to the Indictment Chamber of the South Tripoli First Instance Court. All were released on bail pending trial and were required to report weekly to the Public Prosecutor’s office.

In July, Tripoli’s Emergency Police arrested a vendor for selling rainbow-coloured kites in Martyrs’ Square.

Ethnic minorities and Indigenous Peoples

In January, parliament adopted a new law criminalizing “witchcraft” and “sorcery”. The law jeopardized the rights to freedom of conscience and religion of religious and ethnic minorities, including Sufis and Amazigh adherents of the Ibadi faith.

Members of the Tabu and Tuareg communities, who lacked national identity cards owing to discriminatory laws and regulations governing Libyan citizenship, faced barriers in accessing education and health services.

Forced evictions

Militias and armed groups in Tripoli and Benghazi carried out forced evictions and house demolitions, arresting and intimidating those who protested.

In March, some 350 families were forcibly evicted from their homes in the Abu Salim neighbourhood of Tripoli without being provided with alternative housing, according to the UN.

In October the ISA armed group in Benghazi arrested journalist Mohamed Al-Sarit Qarqar after he criticized online the seizure of private property by the Libya Reconstruction Fund. LAAF-affiliated

armed groups had forcibly evicted and demolished his uncles' homes in Benghazi's Jaliana area without adequate compensation or consultation with the community. Mohamed Al-Sarit Qarqar was released after 19 days on medical grounds.

Refugees' and migrants' rights

Security forces, militias, armed groups and other non-state actors across Libya continued to commit widespread and systematic human rights violations and abuses against refugees and migrants with impunity.

According to the International Organization for Migration, between January and September, 1,749 people died or went missing at sea in the central Mediterranean. At least two mass graves were uncovered in Libya in March and July, containing 65 and 12 bodies of suspected refugees and migrants, respectively. During the year, 21,762 refugees and migrants were intercepted at sea and forcibly returned to Libya by EU-backed coastguards in western Libya, and by the LAAF-affiliated Libyan Special Naval Forces and the TBZ in eastern Libya.

Widespread arrests based solely on migration status intensified in southern Libya and continued across the country following interceptions at sea as well as raids by militias and armed groups on makeshift migrant encampments or dens of traffickers or smugglers. As of December, more than 5,470 foreign nationals remained arbitrarily detained in centres run by the Department for Combating Illegal Migration (DCIM), while thousands more were held by other militias and armed groups. They were detained in cruel and inhuman conditions and subjected to torture and other ill-treatment, including sexual violence, extortion, forced labour and denial of adequate medical care.

Throughout the year, Tunisian authorities forcibly expelled thousands of refugees and migrants to Libya. Those returned were detained in cruel and inhuman conditions and subjected to torture and other ill-treatment in detention centres run by the Libyan Border Guards, the DCIM or armed groups (see Tunisia entry.)

Armed groups affiliated to LAAF forcibly expelled thousands of refugees and migrants to Chad, Egypt, Niger and Sudan without giving them the opportunity to challenge their deportation or seek international protection. Some, including those rescued from prolonged captivity after being held by traffickers, were expelled for "carrying diseases".

Death penalty

Libya retained the death penalty for a wide range of offences, including those not meeting the threshold of the most serious crime of "intentional killing" under international law. Civilian and military courts continued to hand down death sentences for murder following grossly unfair trials. No executions took place.

Right to a healthy environment

Limited early warning systems and inadequate crisis responses worsened Libya's increasing vulnerability to extreme weather events. In August, heavy rains, floods and thunderstorms affected the cities of Kufra and Ghat as well as other areas in southern Libya, leading to extensive damage and loss of life. Libya had yet to ratify the Paris Agreement or submit any formal plans for climate mitigation and adaptation.

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1. *Libya: "In Seconds Everything Changed": Justice and Redress Elusive for Derna Flood Survivors*, 11 March ↩

2. *Libya: “Every Day We Die a Thousand Times”: Impunity for Crimes against Humanity in Tarhouna*, 26 November ↩