

## Maat for Peace' Report to the Universal Periodic Review mechanism (UPR) on Libya

April 2025

Maat for Peace, Development, and Human Rights submits this report as part of Libya's fourth cycle of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR). Libya has previously undergone this review three times: the first in November 2010, the second in May 2015, and the third in November 2020. During the third cycle of the UPR, Libya received 285 recommendations from UN Member States aimed at promoting and protecting human rights in the country.

On March 16, 2021, the Human Rights Council, at its forty-sixth regular session, adopted the outcome report of Libya's UPR, which included recommendations accepted by the Libyan state. Of these recommendations, Libya accepted 181, while noting 104 others<sup>1</sup>.

This report focuses on assessing Libya's commitment to implementing the recommendations it accepted during its third review under the Universal Periodic Review (UPR), with a particular focus on Libya's accession to international human rights conventions. The report also addresses the status of civil and political rights, along with economic and social rights, with particular emphasis on the rights of women, migrants, and refugees.

### 1. Accession to International Human Rights Conventions

Libya received two recommendations during its third Universal Periodic Review (UPR) review regarding accession to international human rights instruments to which it is not yet a party<sup>2</sup>, as well as utilizing international mechanisms for the promotion and protection of human rights. Although Libya accepted both recommendations, it has not yet acceded to the International Convention for the

<sup>1</sup> Report of the Human Rights Council on its forty-sixth session, <https://docs.un.org/ar/A/HRC/46/2>

<sup>2</sup> Libya, UPR INFO, <https://upr-info.org/en/review/libya>



Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture, or the Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, aiming at the abolition of the death penalty<sup>3</sup>.

Maat believes that Libya's accession to these conventions will strengthen its commitment to protecting human rights and contribute to progress in promoting the rule of law and fundamental freedoms in the country.

## 2. The Right to Life

During its third UPR review, Libya received one recommendation directly related to the right to life, which it supported, along with several other relevant recommendations to which it fully agreed. However, Maat notes Libya's delay in implementing these recommendations and the persistence of certain practices that contravene the right to life. Despite the declaration of a ceasefire in 2020, Libya continues to experience violence resulting in casualties due to ongoing armed clashes between various factions. These clashes often occur in residential areas, resulting in the death and injury of civilians, including women and children. In May 2024, an 11-year-old girl was killed while driving amid an exchange of fire between forces affiliated with the General Staff and the General Security Service of the Ministry of Interior in southern Tripoli, both of which fall under the jurisdiction of the Libyan Unity Government. In August of the same year, a 55-year-old man was killed after being shot while near an armed clash in the Tajoura area between two brigades affiliated with the General Staff of the Libyan Unity Government<sup>4</sup>.

On the other hand, between January and November 2024, 16 people were killed by mine explosions in Libya, compared to only two in 2023. Reliable estimates, reviewed by Maat, indicate that 444 million square meters of Libyan territory are

<sup>3</sup> Ratification, Reporting & Documentation for Libya, OHCHR, <https://2h.ae/wfUt>

<sup>4</sup> Ibid



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contaminated by mines and unexploded ordnance, posing a continuing threat to the right to life. According to experts, it could take at least 15 years to fully clear these areas unless urgent action is taken to accelerate mine clearance and secure the affected areas<sup>5</sup>.

### 3. Freedom of Opinion and Expression

During Libya's third review in November 2020, Libya received four recommendations related to freedom of opinion and expression, two of which it supported, while noting two others. However, restrictions on the exercise of freedom of opinion and expression persist as a result of the political division and armed conflict that has been ongoing in Libya since 2011. Journalists and media professionals are among the groups most targeted by these violations. Reports reviewed by Maat documented more than 550 violations against journalists between 2014 and 2024, committed by various parties to the conflict. These violations contributed to the deterioration of the independent press, leading to the widespread disinformation<sup>6</sup>.

In this context, Maat received reports indicating the arrest of poet (N.S.) by Internal Security Forces on May 1, 2024, and his detention in a prison in Benghazi after reciting a poem supporting the former Libyan president at an event. Although he was released on May 3, he was not brought before any judicial authority during his detention<sup>7</sup>.

Furthermore, reports have raised concerns about the Cybercrime Law issued in September 2022, which is considered a repressive tool for dissenting voices under the pretext of protecting "public order" and "public morals." The law has been criticized for its vague and undefined legal terms, granting security and judicial authorities broad discretionary power to silence dissidents, posing a serious

<sup>5</sup> Removing them will require 15 years.. Mines are spread across half a billion square meters of Libya, Alhurra, <https://n9.cl/9l2mvl>

<sup>6</sup> What Is Life Like As a Journalist in Libya?, Libya review, <https://n9.cl/yankf>

<sup>7</sup> Report: Human Rights Violations in Libya during May 2024, LCW, <https://n9.cl/myhuv>

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threat to freedom of opinion and expression in Libya<sup>8</sup>.

#### 4. Prisons and Detention Facilities

During its third UPR review, Libya received 28 recommendations related to reforming detention facilities and investigating allegations of abuses within them, primarily torture and arbitrary detention. Libya accepted 24 recommendations and noted four others. In this context, Maat commends the Libyan Ministry of Interior's issuance of Decree No. 1 of 2024, issued in May, which sets out a set of controls to ensure respect for human rights during arrests. This decree requires police officers to take into account legal and humanitarian considerations when arresting suspects, whether nationals or foreigners, in accordance with Libyan law, international human rights law, and the principles of Islamic law. This includes carrying out arrests only in cases where there is sufficient evidence, such as serious crimes and flagrante delicto cases that carry prison sentences of more than three months. The decree also limits the period of temporary police custody to a maximum of 48 hours, extendable to seven days in certain cases, such as drug-related cases<sup>9</sup>.

Despite Libya's pledge to implement the accepted recommendations, Maat notes the continued serious violations against detainees in Libyan prisons and detention centers. These facilities suffer from severe overcrowding, a lack of basic health and humanitarian standards, and the systematic practice of torture and ill-treatment by their officials, particularly in western Libya, where the so-called Government of National Unity controls the country. In this context, many individuals are detained without a fair trial or clear charges, amid a weak judicial system and the lack of effective oversight of these centers, which exacerbates the violations.

<sup>8</sup> Libya: A law on cybercrime, Africa news, <https://n9.cl/439m5>

<sup>9</sup> Decree No. 1 of 2024 Regarding Respect for Human Rights During the Arrest of Suspects, Law Society, <https://n9.cl/veqst>



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In this context, Maat has reviewed reports revealing the involvement of the administration of the Bir al-Ghanam camp, located southwest of Tripoli and used to detain migrants and asylum seekers, in serious violations against detainees. Testimonies from former detainees indicate that camp authorities demand exorbitant ransoms from detainees' families in exchange for their release. In addition, detainees suffer from inhumane conditions. Cells are constructed of sheet metal, making the high temperatures unbearable, especially since the camp is located in a desert area, making breathing difficult inside the cells. Detainees are often prevented from leaving their cells due to the intransigence of prison staff. Furthermore, detainees complain of food scarcity, with meals sometimes limited to just two spoonfuls of rice or pasta, which Maat considers a systematic starvation policy. They also suffer from severe overcrowding inside the cells, with four people sharing a small mattress on the floor, and sleeping areas adjacent to toilet bowls. Multiple testimonies confirmed that camp guards resort to collective punishment using beatings with sticks and heavy hoses against detainees who go on hunger strike or demand medical care<sup>10</sup>.

## 5. The Right to Education

During the third review of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR), Libya received 13 recommendations related to the right to education, 12 of which it supported. However, Maat notes that this right still faces significant challenges as a result of the ongoing crisis since 2011. Libyan schools suffer from poor funding, deteriorating infrastructure, a shortage of teaching staff, and security challenges that hinder students' safe access to educational institutions. In this context, estimates reviewed by Maat indicate that approximately 220,000 children in Libya are deprived of their right to education due to the collapse of the education system and the unstable security situation during the years of the crisis<sup>11</sup>.

<sup>10</sup> How Libya's "migrant" detention centers turned into hotbeds of "torture and extortion," Asharq Al-Awsat, <https://n9.cl/3u7ha>

<sup>11</sup> Private schools performance in Libya, My school, <https://n9.cl/au2zxl>



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This crisis has been exacerbated by the high costs of private schools, which are beyond the financial capacity of most Libyan families, along with a severe shortage of teachers and administrative staff in the schools that remain operational in Libya. On the other hand, Maat commends the recent efforts to enhance the efficiency of public education. The Ministry of Education of the Government of National Unity issued a decision on November 13, 2024, banning all private tutoring, with an emphasis on punishing teachers found to be involved in giving lessons outside of school hours, in accordance with relevant legal provisions. Maat considers this step an important beginning toward revitalizing public education in Libya, which could contribute to improving the educational situation and ensuring equal educational opportunities for all children<sup>12</sup>.

## 6. The Right to Health

During its November 2020 Universal Periodic Review (UPR) review, Libya received seven recommendations related to the right to health, supporting six and noting one. Maat notes the steps taken by the Libyan authorities in recent years to reform the health sector. However, it continues to suffer from severe deterioration due to political instability and the ongoing power struggle.

This deterioration is clearly evident in the severe shortage of essential medicines and medical equipment within health facilities, endangering the lives of patients and forcing many Libyans to seek treatment abroad at exorbitant costs<sup>13</sup>. In addition, healthcare facilities suffer from frequent power outages, negatively impacting the delivery of medical services. These outages can disrupt medical equipment and damage serums and vaccines, posing a serious threat to patients' lives and putting them at greater risk.

In an effort to mitigate these challenges, the Libyan Ministry of Health partnered with UNICEF to equip 30 health centers with solar panels. This aims to ensure

<sup>12</sup> "Education" bans private lessons, Al-Wasat, <https://n9.cl/I5jyvn>

<sup>13</sup> The health sector in Libya: between deterioration and corruption, My Country, <https://n9.cl/rhxz4>



continuous power supply and sustainable provision of health services. This is a positive step toward addressing health infrastructure challenges and improving access to basic healthcare<sup>14</sup>.

## 7. The Right to Work

During its third UPR review, Libya received 16 recommendations related to labor rights, most of which focused on the conditions of migrant workers. However, Libya supported only eight of these recommendations. According to the latest available statistics, Libya's labor force is 2.6 million, of whom 2.3 million are employed in the public sector and approximately 300,000 in the private sector. Libya's unemployment rate declined in 2024 to 18.5% of the total labor force, compared to 19.7% in 2023. However, despite Libya's significant economic resources, political instability and weak public policies make ensuring the right to decent work a persistent challenge.

In addition, conditions in the informal labor market are exacerbated, particularly for migrant workers. An estimated 82% of workers in Libya do not have written employment contracts, exposing them to multiple abuses and depriving them of their basic rights. Statistics indicate that 66% of these workers have experienced wage theft, 49% suffer from job insecurity, 42% have experienced physical violence, and 60% have experienced verbal violence. Seventy-six% of these workers rely on irregular work as their primary source of income, resulting in only 20% of these workers being able to meet their basic needs within Libya<sup>15</sup>.

## 8. Women's Rights

During the third Universal Periodic Review (UPR), Libya received 48 recommendations related to women's rights, of which it accepted 34 and noted 14. Maat appreciates the positive developments made by the Libyan government

<sup>14</sup> Solar panels support 30 health clinics in Libya, UNICEF, <https://n9.cl/ws13h>

<sup>15</sup> Navigating hardships: Migrant economic realities in Libya, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, <https://n9.cl/a4ziv>

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recently to promote gender equality. The Libyan Women's Support and Empowerment Unit of the Presidential Council has continued to implement activities aimed at raising women's awareness of their rights under international conventions.

In this context, the percentage of women employed in the public sector has reached 50%, with particularly high representation in the education and health sectors<sup>16</sup>. However, Maat remains concerned about women's political representation, which has fallen short of expectations, with women accounting for approximately 16.5% of the total seats in the House of Representatives<sup>17</sup>.

Furthermore, women's representation at the local government level remains limited, as the law requires only one woman to be elected<sup>18</sup> out of nine members of municipal councils in governorates<sup>19</sup>. Nevertheless, efforts to raise awareness of the importance of women's political participation in local government continued. On September 3, 2023, the Ministry of Local Government held the second edition of the Women Municipal Council Members Forum, which aimed to enhance women's participation in local government and activate their contribution to decision-making at the local level.

## 9. Rights of Migrants and Refugees

During its third UPR review, Libya received 39 recommendations related to migrants, of which it accepted 27, in addition to 24 recommendations related to refugees, of which it accepted 14. Maat commends the Libyan Public Prosecution's announcement in September 2024 of the dismantling of a human trafficking network in southwestern Libya and the arrest of its members. One of

<sup>16</sup> Available at the following link, [https://upr-info.org/sites/default/files/documents/2020-10/national\\_report\\_libya-english.pdf](https://upr-info.org/sites/default/files/documents/2020-10/national_report_libya-english.pdf)

<sup>17</sup> Inter-Parliamentary Union, Libya, <https://www.ipu.org/parliament/LY>

<sup>18</sup> Executive regulations of Law No. (59) of 2012. Concerning the local administration system attached to Cabinet Resolution No. (130) of 2013, <https://tinyurl.com/nhd4jfdz>

<sup>19</sup> Increasing the visibility of Libyan women in politics, <https://peacefulchange.org/news/visibility-of-libyan-women-in-politics/>



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the network's leaders and 10 of its members were arrested and charged with murder, unlawful detention, torture, and rape of migrants. Investigations documented violations against 1,300 migrants, including forced detention, torture, and extortion to secure their release<sup>20</sup>.

However, Maat continues to point out that the conditions of refugees and migrants in Libya remain among the worst in the world, as they are subjected to serious violations of their fundamental rights amid political instability and security divisions. Thousands of them live in inhumane detention conditions characterized by overcrowding, lack of food and clean water, and ill-treatment, in addition to being exposed to violence and exploitation by human smuggling networks. They also suffer from discrimination and a lack of legal protection, leaving them vulnerable to extortion and abuse with no accountability. In this context, the International Organization for Migration announced in March 2024 the discovery of approximately 65 bodies of migrants, likely killed while crossing the Libyan desert on their way to Europe<sup>21</sup>.

Furthermore, migrant detention centers in Libya face inhumane conditions, suffering from overcrowding beyond their capacity, poor ventilation, poor lighting, and a lack of adequate sanitation facilities, as well as a severe food shortage. These conditions have led to the spread of skin and respiratory diseases among detainees. Reports also indicate that children are separated from their families and detained in adult wards, while women are guarded by men, exacerbating their suffering. Women are estimated to be subjected to physical and psychological humiliation, including being stripped naked during searches. Their families are extorted for ransom in exchange for their release, and they are often sexually assaulted or forced into prostitution. Black women face double discrimination in detention centers, where they are subjected to severe

<sup>20</sup> Libya authorities dismantle human trafficking network accused of torture, rape of migrants, THE NEW ARAB, <https://2h.ae/PWtX>

<sup>21</sup> Migrant Organization: At Least 65 Bodies Found in Mass Grave in Libya, VOA, <https://n9.cl/he9vm>



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restrictions preventing them from moving outside detention facilities or using phones, while some white women are allowed such privileges<sup>22</sup>.

Maat condemns the Libyan government's failure, in most cases, to protect migrants and refugees or even identify them. It is estimated that the Department for Combating Illegal Migration has not cooperated adequately with international organizations and civil society to monitor and protect its detention centers, and these organizations have been denied access to detention centers controlled by armed militias and non-governmental actors in Libya<sup>23</sup>.

## 10. Recommendations

- Libya must expedite its accession to the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture, and the Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, aiming at the abolition of the death penalty.
- Take decisive action to protect the right to life, including by reducing armed clashes in residential areas and punishing perpetrators of such violations.
- Strengthen efforts to remove mines and remnants of war in cooperation with international bodies with expertise in this issue.
- Take effective measures to ensure that prisons and detention centers are not used for torture and ill-treatment, and conduct independent investigations into deaths in custody.
- Improve prison and detention center conditions by reducing overcrowding, improving health and food services, and strengthening independent oversight.
- Respect the right to peaceful assembly, cease the arrest of peaceful protesters, and hold accountable those responsible for the use of violence against

<sup>22</sup> Migrant Women in Libya: A Journey of Pain and Suffering: Migration Issues Through a Human Rights Lens, Defender Center for Human Rights, <https://n9.cl/yon6bk>

<sup>23</sup> Ibid



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protesters.

- Allocate a sufficient budget to support the reconstruction of educational infrastructure and ensure a safe learning environment for children.
- Improve teachers' salaries and provide them with the necessary training, and ensure the stability of the educational process, free from political and security unrest.
- Enhance investment in the health sector to ensure the availability of medicines and medical equipment, and improve the conditions of health facilities, especially in remote areas.
- Strengthen the rights of migrant workers by ensuring they have formal employment contracts and combating wage theft and exploitation in the informal labor market.
- Improve the conditions of women in detention, ensuring they are not subjected to exploitation or sexual assault, and preventing their detention under the supervision of male guards.
- Strengthen the role of independent oversight and judicial bodies to ensure accountability for human rights violations, including crimes committed in prisons and detention centers.
- Consider establishing a national mechanism to monitor the implementation of recommendations accepted by Libya during its Universal Periodic Review and ensure the implementation of these recommendations.