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## Libya: Commanders Should Face Justice for Killings

Reports of "Random" Fire in Tripoli, At Least 62 Dead

FEBRUARY 22, 2011

(New York) - Witnesses in Tripoli have described Libyan forces firing "randomly" at protesters in the capital on February 22 and 21, 2011, Human Rights Watch said today. While Human Rights Watch is unable to verify these reports, sources from two hospitals in Tripoli said at least 62 bodies, victims of clashes, had been brought into their morgues since February 20. On February 22, one man told Human Rights Watch by Skype that he could see men driving around shooting at passers-by in the Ben Ashour neighbourhood of Tripoli.

Statements from doctors working in two Tripoli hospitals obtained by Human Rights Watch by email confirmed that at least 62 people have been killed since February 20 but these are figures from only two hospitals. Other witnesses told Human Rights Watch there were at least 50 bodies in the morgue at Abu Salim Hospital, all casualties of clashes over the weekend. A doctor said that Tripoli's Central Hospital had received 12 dead, brought in by emergency services from the area around Green Square, the site of anti-government protests on February 21.

"Anyone, including Muammar Gaddafi, ordering or carrying out atrocities should know they will be held individually accountable for their actions, including unlawful killings of protesters," said Sarah Leah Whitson, Middle East and North Africa director at Human Rights Watch. "We fear the death toll will rise much higher unless Gaddafi ends his bloody attempts to suppress dissent. He should call his forces including mercenaries off immediately."

On February 21, high-ranking Libyan diplomats around the world publicly resigned from their roles representing the government in Tripoli and demanded strong international action to end the violence. Libya's deputy ambassador to the United Nations in New York called on the International Criminal Court (ICC) to investigate and hold accountable those responsible for serious crimes in Libya.

The ICC has a mandate to investigate and prosecute war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide when the appropriate national judiciary is either unwilling or unable to do so. Libya is not a party to the ICC but the court's statute allows a non-state party to declare at any time that it accepts the court's jurisdiction for such crimes within its borders.



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*Anyone, including Muammar Gaddafi, ordering or carrying out atrocities should know they will be held individually accountable for their actions, including unlawful killings of protesters. We fear the death toll will rise much higher unless Gaddafi ends his bloody attempts to suppress dissent. He should call his forces including mercenaries off immediately.*

Sarah Leah Whitson, Middle East and North Africa director at Human Rights Watch

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Witnesses in the Fashloum area of Tripoli, one of the first neighborhoods to see protests on February 17, described "random" shooting by government forces of the night of February 21. One woman said she heard gunfire throughout the night of February 21, in Fashloum. She told Human Rights Watch: "They [pro-government forces] have people with guns roaming the streets, they were shooting randomly when they passed near our house." A second protester in Tripoli told Human Rights Watch that she had heard gunfire all through the night of February 21 in Tajoura.

Another protester from the capital said: "If anyone went to pick a body up, they would also get shot. People living near Green Square reported that they saw bodies lying on the square and people unable to pick them up."

Human Rights Watch interviewed one protester by Skype on the evening of February 21 who described what he saw:

The hospitals in Tripoli ran out of the blood yesterday evening. At the beginning of the protest a Land Cruiser drove past firing at people in front of it randomly. I can hear the sound of gunfire and large explosions. We saw loads of Land Cruisers full of masked men in military uniforms and heavy machine guns heading to where the huge protests are downtown. Men wearing civilian clothing in the square were shooting at us. We heard later that Abu Salim hospital was broken into. I saw guys taking off their shirts and exposing their chests to the snipers. I've never seen anything like it, I was very ashamed to hide under a tree but I am human.

On February 20, security forces violently dispersed a protest by a group of lawyers, judges, doctors, and other professionals in front of the Tripoli courthouse, arresting some of the participants, one protester whose father was arrested told Human Rights Watch.

Concerned governments should back their condemnatory statements with concrete action to stop the bloodshed, including an embargo on all arms and security equipment to Libya, targeted sanctions against the Libyan leadership as long as the atrocities continue, ensuring a comprehensive, independent, and speedy investigation into any crimes committed, and an emergency special session by the United Nations Security Council, Human Rights Watch said.

"It's important to denounce the violence but we need concrete measures that will convince the Libyan leadership to end the bloodshed," Whitson said.

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