



Country Report: Libya

April 2021

Instability has plagued Libya since the Arab Spring, allied invasion, and subsequent ousting of Muammar Qaddafi in 2011. Libya is host to over [570,000 migrants](#) and refugees, mostly from Africa, located in urban centers along the Mediterranean, and an additional [278,000 displaced persons](#). 1.3 million Libyans are in need of [humanitarian assistance](#). Between April-June 2020, the U.N. reported at least 102 civilian deaths and 254 civilians injured, which constitutes a 172% increase compared with January-March 2020. General Khalifa Haftar's forces are culpable for the vast majority of these civilian casualties.

In 2014, [ISIS](#) seized strategic cities such as Sirte and Derna, located less than 200 miles from Greece. ISIS was driven out by 2016. Libya is split in half. East and Central Libya are controlled by General Khalifa Haftar's Libyan Arab Armed Forces (LAAF), formerly the Libyan National Army (LNA), based in Tobruk. It is supported by Russia, Egypt and the UAE. Eric Prince of Blackwater infamy also sent mercenaries to support Haftar. Western Libya is controlled by the Government of National Accord based in Tripoli, supported by Turkey. In 2020, the U.N. reported 20,000 [foreign mercenaries](#) from Russia, Syria, Turkey, the U.S., and other countries. Use of mercenaries violates a U.N. Security Council imposed arms embargo.

The [United Nations Support Mission in Libya](#) (UNSMIL), a political not a military mission, negotiated the [Libyan Political Agreement](#) in December 2015, which has finally resulted in a ceasefire in October 2020. U.N.-backed national elections are planned for December 2021, but the Libyan civil war is far from over.

According to the International Criminal Court (ICC)'s prosecutor Fatou Bensouda, the LAAF and GNA have committed [war crimes](#). She cited attacks on civilians. There has been an increase in hate speech in print, radio and social media which she says, "foments conditions in which mass atrocity crimes can occur." More than 2,300 refugees and migrants are currently held in detention centers run by the GNA's Interior Ministry where they face extortion, torture, rape, beatings, forced labor, no sanitation, lack of food, and human trafficking.

After GNA troops recaptured territory previously occupied by the LAAF (LNA), 300 bodies, including those of women and children, were found in [mass graves](#) around Tarhunah and Tripoli. The U.N. has established a fact-finding mission to investigate these killings. Human Rights Watch has accused GNA-affiliated groups of committing extra-judicial killings and other grave human rights violations around Tarhunah.

Libya is a tragic case of a failed state. It was abandoned by Western powers that invoked the "Responsibility to Protect," but that had neither the political will nor the comprehension of the complexity of Libyan politics to carry out the rebuilding of Libyan society that the R2P doctrine requires.

Genocide Watch considers Libya to be at **Stage 7: Preparation**. Increased use of hate speech and the discovery of mass graves near Tarhunah demonstrate the deadly risks civilians face as a result of the ongoing civil war. Impunity for war crimes is total. Without a concerted national and international effort to hold perpetrators accountable, the cycle of impunity will continue. Further mass atrocities are inevitable.

Genocide Watch recommends:

- The EU should end its support of the Libyan Coast Guard, which forcibly turns back refugees and migrants attempting to escape to Europe. It imprisons them in squalid detention centers, where they are vulnerable to militias and human traffickers. Instead of pushing back refugees and migrants, the EU should revive its search-and-rescue operations and resettle refugees in Europe.
- The U.N. Security Council should enforce the U.N. arms embargo on Libya and demand the withdrawal of all foreign mercenaries. Nations supporting him should pressure Haftar to cooperate with the U.N. fact-finding mission investigating the mass graves found around Tarhunah. The Security Council should demand compliance with the outstanding warrants for fugitives from the ICC.