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Libya: Serious Human Rights Violations amid Secrecy and Isolation.

When a head of state publicly calls for the physical elimination of his country's political dissidents and vows to punish families and tribes if they do not inform on relatives, then human rights in that country must be in a dire situation, Amnesty International said today as it launched a new report on Libya.

"In Libya gross human rights violations are taking place not only with total impunity but also are sanctioned at the highest level, in flagrant violation of the country's solemn obligations under international human rights treaties," Amnesty International said in the report.

The new 36-page report-- *Libya: Gross human rights violations amid secrecy and isolation*-- documents a wide range of serious violations, including arbitrary arrests, torture, extrajudicial executions and "disappearances", which are being perpetrated in a climate of fear.

Colonel Mu'ammar al-Gaddafi has demonstrated his absolute disregard for human rights in a series of speeches in recent years:

- "I want a law to be introduced... so that the hands of the thief, both male and female, be cut off regardless of the amount they have stolen..."
- "Anyone who said 'no' would be seen as collaborating with the enemy. He [the coordinator of popular committees] has the right to shoot him [collaborator] dead, often without trial or with a summary trial lasting no more than a few minutes..."
- "When traitors are discovered within a tribe, the Libyan people automatically consider the whole tribe as traitors, they disdain it and humiliate it..."

Only three months ago the Libyan General People's Congress approved a law known as "charter of honour" authorizing collective punishment for those found guilty of 'collective crime'. Collective punishment will be carried out on a community even when the identity of the person(s) concerned has not been established. In practice, families of suspected government opponents have long been subjected to various forms of punishment, including being held as hostages. House destruction is another form of collective punishment and several prominent Libyan figures in exile have had their properties, including houses, destroyed.

In recent years, hundreds of suspected government opponents have been arbitrarily arrested, often without any arrest warrant, and held incommunicado during the first months of their detention during which they were reportedly tortured. Most have been held without charge or trial, some for at least 15 years, and others continue to be held even though they have been acquitted by the courts.

Rashid 'Abd al-Hamid al-'Urfia, arrested in February 1982 with 20 others on suspicion of having "founded an Islamist opposition group which aimed to overthrow the system of government", is still held in Abu Salim Prison in Tripoli without charge or trial. 'Omran 'Omar al-Turbi, a 46-year-old dentist married with two children, has been held without charge or trial since 28 May 1984.

In detention centres and prisons throughout Libya, such as in the underground rooms of Abu Salim Prison in Tripoli, detainees are routinely tortured during interrogation. Over the last few years, several political detainees have died in custody reportedly as a result of torture. Methods of torture include electric shocks, exposure to aggressive dogs which result in bite wounds, or threats of abuse

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against prisoners' female relatives are widely used. The method commonly known as the "car torture" is consistently reported by former detainees: The detainee is left in an extremely small room which resembles a box and is forced to sit on an uncomfortable chair for weeks, with hands tied behind the back.

Extrajudicial execution continues to be used against government opponents. A number of people have been reportedly killed both inside the country and abroad in circumstances suggesting they may have been extrajudicially executed.

Several Libyans have "disappeared" inside but also outside the country in recent years. Among them, Mansur Kikhiya, a prominent Libyan diplomat and human rights activist who went missing in December 1993 from a hotel in Cairo and who remains "disappeared".

"While a number of countries worldwide have moved towards abolishing or reducing the use of the death penalty, Libya has over the last few years increased its scope," Amnesty International said.

In July 1996, the General People's Committee for Justice and Public Security stated that the death penalty will be applied to those "who speculate in food, clothes or housing during a state of war or blockade and may be applied for crimes related to drugs, alcohol and speculation in foreign currency."

Amnesty International has written to the Libyan Government on numerous occasions urging it to act decisively to end human rights violations. Its appeals remain without response.
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