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Raucous supporters rally around Libyan leader after day of violence

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20 reported dead Friday in Libya as thousands take to streets

February 18, 2011 | By the CNN Wire Staff

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At least 20 people were killed and 200 more were injured Friday in the northern Mediterranean city of Benghazi, Libya's second-largest, said a medical source in Benghazi who was not identified for security reasons.

The casualties occurred as thousands of Libyans took to the streets to voice their discontent over leader Moammar Gadhafi, witnesses said.

Friday's killings brought to 50 the number of people killed since Tuesday, when the protests began, the medical source said.

Amnesty International said security forces had killed at least 46 during the past three days, with sources at al-Jala Hospital in Benghazi saying that the most common injuries were bullet wounds to the head, chest and neck.

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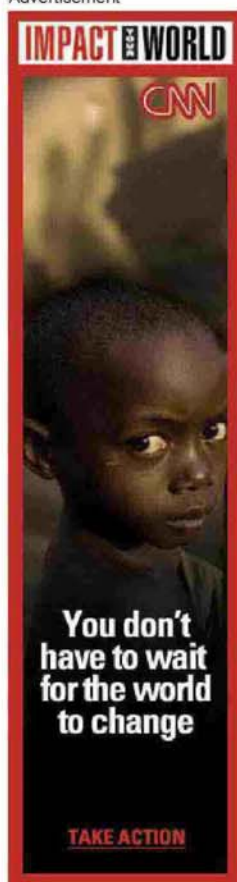
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"The alarming rise in the death toll, and the reported nature of victims' injuries, strongly suggests that security forces are permitted to use lethal force against unarmed protesters calling for political change," said Malcolm Smart, the Amnesty's director for the Middle East and North Africa.

CNN was unable to independently verify the information.

In front of the main courthouse in a square in Benghazi, thousands of demonstrators filled the streets demanding a change of government, a protester said. He said people were chanting for Gadhafi and his children to get out of Libya. He called Gadhafi's authoritarian rule "the biggest dictatorship in history."

Late Friday, a witness said more people were still streaming into the already crowded plaza, with some erecting tents, apparently planning to spend the night.

There was no sign in the square of police or military forces except for the presence of three tanks, which were not moving, he said.

Another source said that he saw three Libyan army tanks in the square and that young demonstrators were engaging the tank crews in conversation. He said government forces were not visible in or around Benghazi.

He added that he visited Al-Jala hospital and that it was "full of dead and wounded."

Electricity was lost in parts of the city but had been restored by late Friday, when the city was quiet, he said.

Farther east, in al-Baida, thousands of people showed up to bury 13 protesters killed in clashes in recent days, said Mohamed Abdallah of the opposition National Front for the Salvation of Libya, who has been receiving information about Libya from sources there.

Plainclothes members of the Revolutionary Committee had reportedly fired at the protesters, Abdallah said.

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Demonstrations unfolded Friday in other cities as well, he said.

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