

Libya: Opposition Forces Should Protect Civilians and Hospitals Human Rights Watch
13 July 2011

(...) Rebel forces in Libya should protect civilians and civilian property in areas they control, Human Rights Watch said today. The rebel forces should hold accountable anyone from their ranks responsible for looting, arson, and abuse of civilians in recently captured towns in western Libya, Human Rights Watch said.

In four towns captured by rebels in the Nafusa Mountains over the past month, rebel fighters and supporters have damaged property, burned some homes, looted from hospitals, homes, and shops, and beaten some individuals alleged to have supported government forces, Human Rights Watch said. (...)

(...)
Rebel forces seized control of al-Awaniya, Rayayinah, and Zawiyat al-Bagul in mid-June 2011, ousting government forces that had used the towns as a base for attacks against rebel-held territory - some of them [indiscriminate attacks](#) on civilian-inhabited areas. Rebel forces captured al-Qawalish on July 6.

In all four towns, some residents had left when government forces first arrived to fight the rebels in April and May. In all the towns but Rayayinah, most of the remaining residents fled when government forces withdrew, apparently fearing reprisals from rebel forces.

Al-Awaniya and Zawiyat al-Bagul are home to members of the Mesheshiya tribe, known for its loyalty to the Libyan government and Muammar Gaddafi.

The rebel military commander in the Nafusa Mountains, Col. El-Moktar Firnana, admitted that some abuses had taken place after rebels captured the towns, but said such attacks violated orders issued to the rebel forces not to attack civilians or damage civilian property. He claimed that some people had been punished, but did not say how many people or for what offenses. (...)

(...) Opposition fighters in the Nafusa Mountains have detained roughly 200 government fighters over the past month. Human Rights Watch had unrestricted access to detention facilities in Zintan, Yafran, and Kikla. Some detainees complained of physical abuse at the time of capture, but said that conditions since then had been adequate.

Human Rights Watch has

[documented](#)

repeated indiscriminate attacks by government forces on civilian areas in the Nafusa Mountains over the past two months, as well as the use of

[landmines](#)

. In the town of Yafran, government forces

[unlawfully occupied](#)

a hospital for six weeks.

"Opposition forces say they are committed to human rights, but the looting, arson, and abuse of civilians in captured towns are worrying," Stork said. "This raises concerns about how civilians will be treated if rebels capture other towns where the government has support." (...)

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