

Libya: All Sides obligated to Protect Civilians 22 August 2011 Human Rights Watch As fighting reaches the Libyan capital, Tripoli, all sides to the conflict – forces loyal to Muammar Gaddafi, forces of the National Transitional Council, and the NATO allies – need to ensure that they take all feasible steps to avoid harming civilians, Human Rights Watch said today. The National Transitional Council (NTC) should instruct its forces not to engage in acts of revenge, Human Rights Watch said. (...)

Internally displaced persons in areas now controlled by NTC forces need immediate protection, Human Rights Watch said. Dark-skinned Libyans face particular risks, Human Rights Watch said, because they have frequently been accused of fighting as pro-Gaddafi mercenaries from other African countries.

Human Rights Watch also called on NTC forces to protect state institutions such as police stations, security offices, courts, prisons, and other facilities that could come under attack from NTC fighters or angry Tripoli residents. Arms depots and military facilities that may be vulnerable to looting should also be secured.

All those detained by rebel forces, including pro-Gaddafi fighters and Gaddafi supporters as well as members of the Gaddafi family, should be treated humanely in accordance with international human rights and humanitarian law standards, Human Rights Watch said. (...)

Since anti-government protests erupted in mid-February 2011, followed by armed clashes, government forces have committed numerous violations of the laws of war, including indiscriminate attacks in places with civilians such as Misrata and towns in the Western Mountains.

Rebel forces have carried out some acts of revenge in areas they captured that supported the government, including looting, arson, and some beatings of civilians. Opposition leaders have condemned such attacks and in speeches and television broadcasts over the past 24 hours have urged their fighters not to engage in retaliatory violence.

“The NTC has made welcome statements against revenge, but the danger of these attacks still exists,” Stork said. “Opposition leaders and the governments supporting them should keep pressing to avoid atrocities motivated by revenge.”

NATO forces should also take all feasible measures to avoid civilian casualties in their airstrikes, as required by international humanitarian law, Human Rights Watch. Some airstrikes in western Libya recently inspected by Human Rights Watch apparently caused civilian deaths.

“Libya is facing the possibility of a new state that respects fundamental rights,” said Stork. “But what happens in the next few days will set the tone for all that lies ahead. See [full article](#)