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NO PLACE OF SAFETY

CIVILIANS IN LIBYA
UNDER ATTACK

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MAP OF THE CITY OF MISRATAH, LIBYA



As anti-government protests developed into armed conflict between forces loyal to Colonel al-Gaddafi and opposition fighters from late February 2011, civilians living in some areas, particularly the besieged city of Misratah, increasingly found that nowhere was safe. Many were killed by indiscriminate weapons fired by al-Gaddafi forces or by snipers, or died in cross-fire. Amnesty International spoke to some of their relatives.

Libyans responded en masse to calls for 17 February 2011 to be their “Day of Rage” against Colonel Mu’ammar al-Gaddafi’s 42-year rule. Protests rapidly turned into armed confrontations between forces loyal to Colonel al-Gaddafi and opposition fighters. After most of eastern Libya and parts of the west, including Libya’s third largest city Misratah, fell to the opposition, al-Gaddafi forces unleashed a brutal military campaign in an attempt to regain control. They fired indiscriminate rockets, mortars and artillery shells, as well as cluster bombs, into residential neighbourhoods in opposition-held areas.

Such attacks were particularly widespread in Misratah, but also took place in and around Ajdabiya and the Nafusa Mountain. As projectiles rained down, civilians had nowhere safe to go. Victims included children and the elderly, Libyans and migrant workers. Many died in their homes or while trying to flee.

MISRATAH

In Misratah, home to some 300,000 people, residents were trapped from late February as al-Gaddafi forces laid siege to the city from all sides but the sea. They were exposed to relentless and indiscriminate rocket attacks from March to mid-May. Sporadic attacks again took place during the summer months.

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ZAROUG

‘There was nothing left of my boys, except pieces of flesh.’

Mother of teenagers Mohamad and Mounir, who were killed on 28 April 2011.

Brothers **Mohamed** and **Mounir Taher Fakroun Abou Sha’la**, aged 16 and 15 respectively, were watching television at home in Zaroug neighbourhood in northern Misratah in the evening of 28 April. Suddenly, they heard explosions and screaming nearby. They ran to help their elderly neighbour, but were blown to pieces by another rocket. Their 13-year-old brother Mostafa, who was standing at the doorway when the rocket struck, not only witnessed the horror but suffered injuries to his face. Their distraught mother told Amnesty International:

“Zaroug was considered a safe area, in fact many families came here after fleeing their own homes in other Misratah neighbourhoods [closer to the frontline]... When I heard the explosions and ran outside to check on my boys, there was nothing left of them, except pieces of flesh. Since the boys’ death I am unable to go back home and face their rooms and the spot where they were killed.”



The place in Zaroug where brothers Mohamed and Mounir Taher Fakroun Abou Sha’la were killed during a rocket attack after running to help an elderly neighbour.

Cover image: Misratah residents assess the damage to Tripoli Street, scene of heavy fighting, following the withdrawal of the al-Gaddafi forces in late April

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Top: Six of Mohamed Abdel Hamid Sbikhi's children, who are now without their father.

Below: The family home after the attack.

'I am now alone with all the pain and seven young ones.'

Wife of Mohamed Abdel Hamid Sbikhi, who was killed at home on 30 April 2011.

RAS TOUTA

At least seven people died in Ras Touta neighbourhood when a barrage of projectiles landed there between 10pm and 11.30pm on 30 April.

The youngest victim was 15-year-old **Ali Weldbaba Ahmed Ma' al-'Inin** from Mauritania who was the sole breadwinner for his mother, grandmother and two sisters. Barely holding back tears while clutching his picture, his mother, a widow, told Amnesty International:

"He was killed while running to the shelter. We were already there, waiting for him. What has he done to deserve this? He was just a young boy."

Farid Mohamed Abdallah al-'Ghouj, 39, was killed while helping other Ras Touta residents into the shelter. His wife told Amnesty International:

"We left our house on Benghazi Street [near the frontline in central Misratah] in March because of the fierce fighting; we were constantly under fire there. We thought Ras Touta would be safe. Then, one night [30 April], it all started... You could feel the walls move, and the windows shatter, from the strength of the explosions. The men, including my husband, started getting their families into the basement. He was killed instantly from shrapnel directly into his heart."

Mohamed Abdel Hamid Sbikhi, a 46-year-old father of seven, was killed in his home. His wife Mu'ad Mohamed Ali al-Dawali described the scene:

"My husband, myself and our seven little ones were all in the bedroom when the explosions started... Our house was hit on the fourth strike, and the entire bedroom wall facing the street was completely destroyed; now it's just an empty space. My husband was by the wall and died instantly in front of all our children... I am now left alone with all the pain and seven young ones."

The four others known to have died that evening were **Ahmed Khairi Ahmed al-Triki**, a 17-year-old school student; brothers **Mohsen and Shaaban Abdallah Mohamed Jabril**, aged 33 and 22 respectively; and **Hossam Hamida Ali Talha**, 31, who happened to be visiting friends in the area.

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GARARA

At least six people died on 28 April when projectiles landed in Garara, just east of central Misratah. When Amnesty International visited the neighbourhood in May, it found remnants of mortars and Grad rockets in several homes and scattered in public spaces.

Amna Youssef lost three children that terrible day. She showed Amnesty International her damaged home and recalled:

“My daughter **Zeinab [Mohamed Ibrahim ‘Awana]**, who was 35 years old, brought her five kids here seeking shelter because her home in Ramla had no electricity and the area was shelled. She was the first one to die. She was standing by the doorway when the first explosion hit the house. The rest of us started running towards the backdoor when another Grad struck the hallway. My other daughter Hawa and my son **Abdallah** were instantly killed. My daughter-in-law Hanan Mohamed sustained shrapnel injuries to her arm and legs; she has been evacuated to Benghazi for medical treatment... Our life is in pieces. How can I rebuild it at my age?”

Just across the street **Sanaa Faraj Ali Aghliou**, 28, was at home with her four children when shrapnel from an explosion tore through the house and killed her. Her brother-in-law found her lying in a pool of blood surrounded by her distraught children, who luckily were unharmed.

Further down the street, the wife of 53-year-old **Mohamed Ismail Al-Ghoul** and his eight children were grieving his death. He had left home at about 3.30pm to go to the local mosque and was hit by shrapnel.

Mohamed Saleh Kashwir, who came to visit relatives in Garara, was killed at the same time.

‘Our life is in pieces.
How can I rebuild it at
my age?’

Amna Youssef, who lost three of her children during attacks on 28 April 2011.



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Top: Hanan Mohamed was injured in her arms and legs on 28 April 2011, when projectiles landed in Garara.

Below: The damaged home of the ‘Awana family in Garara.

'We tried to save him, but his injuries were too severe.'

Mother of Mohamed al-Amin Ali al-Na'iri, who was killed during a rocket attack on 4 April 2011.

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Top: A damaged corner of Zawiyat al-Mahjoub, western outskirts of Misratah, 31 May 2011.

Left: Iftima Ali Kirzab, mother of 11 children, was killed by a shrapnel on 16 March 2011.

Right: Mohamed al-Amin Ali al-Na'iri

ZAWIYAT AL-MAHJOUR

Al-Gaddafi forces relentlessly shelled Zawiyat al-Mahjoub in the western outskirts of Misratah, killing many of the trapped residents.

Eleven-year-old **Mohamed al-Amin Ali al-Na'iri** (pictured below right) was playing outside his uncle's home near Abu Hadi mosque on 4 April at around 7.30pm when a barrage of Grad rockets hit the area. His grieving mother, Na'ma Mohamed Zliten, told Amnesty International:

"I am a widow and he was my only son. Now I am left alone with my two small daughters Mounira, 7, and Aisha, 10. We tried to save him, but his injuries were just too severe, shrapnel tore through his little body and head. He was just a child; he had his whole life ahead of him. Those who did this to him must be punished."

Ahmed Mohamed Abou 'Azoum, 24, was killed in the courtyard of his home. His mother, who showed Amnesty International the damage caused by the shrapnel, said:

"These weapons destroy metal; imagine what they do to a human being of flesh and blood. Ahmed was outside with his father in the evening [18 April] slaughtering a chicken, when a Grad rocket landed just outside the gate; shrapnel hit the door bouncing off into Ahmed's back. He took a few steps towards us, and then just collapsed on the ground. We ran towards him, and saw that he was bleeding from the back. He didn't make it."

Iftima Ali Kirzab (pictured left), 69, mother of 11 children, was visiting her son's home next to her house in Zawiyat al-Mahjoub on about 5.45pm on 16 March when the area was heavily shelled by al-Gaddafi forces. She was fleeing when she was hit by shrapnel and died instantly.

As al-Gaddafi forces strengthened their positions around the area, travel became increasingly difficult and residents faced the dangers of sniper fire and indiscriminate rocket attacks. A relative told Amnesty International that 41-year-old **Taher Omar Shibshib**, worried about his mother's safety, was on his way to visit her in Zawiyat al-Mahjoub when he was killed by shrapnel on 16 March. He left behind a pregnant wife and three small children.

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JEZIRA AND BIRA

When Jezira, north-west of the city centre, was shelled by al-Gaddafi tanks on 25 March, Ramadan 'Ajaj (pictured right) lost his wife **Khadija al-Burki**, aged 37, and their three daughters –twins **Rihan** and **Riyan**, aged four and a half; and one-year-old **Taqu'a**. They were killed as they were trying to flee the building. Ramadan said:

“We were asleep, it was about 8am or so, when we heard shelling right by the building; I ran out and as I got to the courtyard there was another explosion and I was hit by shrapnel all over my body. I was taken to hospital and minutes later my wife and our three daughters were killed by another shell as they were fleeing the building. I've lost everything, my little girls, my whole family.”

On 11 April, newly-wed **Ahmed Mostafa al-Bira**, 31, moved his family from Bira neighbourhood near the frontline in central Misratah to Jezira, and was driving back home to park his car in the garage. His younger brother Magdi recounted what happened next:

“I was opening the garage door for Ahmed to park inside. As we were heading out, at about 4.30pm, a really loud explosion hit the place. We were both injured. I couldn't see well in the smoke and confusion, but I could hear Ahmed screaming for help. A few minutes later, another explosion took place and Ahmed went silent. He died. I later found out that his body was blown to pieces... We found his shoes lying in the garage.”

Their older brother **Abdallah**, who was in the street, was fatally wounded; he died in a hospital in Tunisia on 21 April.

Mohamed Fathi Imtair (pictured right), 25, decided to risk staying in Bira. In early April, he sustained serious injuries to his back, head and stomach when a rocket exploded in the street as he was on his way to a neighbour's house. He died in Ras Touba Hospital on 16 April without regaining consciousness.

‘my wife and three daughters were killed as they were fleeing the building. I've lost everything.’

Ramadan 'Ajaj, whose family were killed on 25 March 2011.



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Top: Ramadan 'Ajaj holding pictures of his family.

Below: A street damaged by rockets in Bira.

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RAS AMAR

Ninety-year-old **Ali Abdallah Sliman Shkay** was killed by shrapnel when his home in Ras Amar, not far from central Misratah, was shelled on 23 April by al-Gaddafi forces. Ali's nephew **Mohamed Omar Abdallah Shkay** was also killed that night. His widow said:

“On 23 April, Mohamed came home just before sunset. After finishing his evening prayer, he went to visit his mother and came back at around 11.30pm. I was so relieved he returned home safely because I was afraid. I could hear explosions in the distance... He looked out of the window and saw smoke. Shortly after we realized that the explosions were getting closer, and becoming much louder. He ran to his uncle's house to help the elderly man out; he was 90 and walked with great difficulty. The two were about to step outside with Ali supporting the older

The house in which **Ali Abdallah Sliman Shkay** and his nephew **Mohamed Omar Abdallah Shkay** were killed.

man when another rocket struck and they both died instantly. Our six children have now been left without a father; the youngest was born just four months ago.”

‘He ran to his uncle’s house to help the elderly man... when another rocket struck they both died instantly.’

Wife of Mohamed Omar Abdallah Shkay who was killed on 23 April 2011.

CIVILIANS KILLED BY GUNFIRE

Some of Misratah's many civilian victims died because of reckless and indiscriminate gunfire by al-Gaddafi forces. Others died as a result of deliberate targeting by al-Gaddafi forces, implementing a policy of "shoot to kill" anything that moves. Some were caught in cross-fire.

'**Afiya Mohamed Ja'rani** (pictured right), who lived in Jzir was trying to reach the local hospital on 18 March when the car in which she was travelling came under fire. From her hospital bed in Benghazi she told Amnesty International:

"For days there had been a lot of shooting and explosions... Despite this, I had to leave the house because I have diabetes and needed urgent treatment. My son Salah was driving. I was in the backseat with my daughter **Hanan**, my son Ahmed, and another relative. As soon as we drove out, the car came under fire as if they were waiting for us. We were in a street near Tripoli Street, where al-Gaddafi forces were positioned. The shots came from behind, and Hanan died in my arms, all covered in blood..."

At about 5.30pm on 26 March, **Abdel-Karim Salem Imbrika**, 20, left his home in Jezira to go to the local mosque, when he was shot in the neck. According to Jezira residents, there were no armed confrontations in the area at the time, and the bullet that killed Abdel-Karim came from where al-Gaddafi troops were positioned. One of Abdel-Karim's relatives told Amnesty International that "bullets were coming down like rain targeting any movement in the area". Local residents rushed Abdel-Karim to Hikma Hospital by car, but it was too late.

Al-Touhami Ramadan Irhouma died as a result of a gunshot wound sustained on 16 March when al-Gaddafi forces were approaching the outskirts of the city. His son said:

'Bullets were coming down like rain.'

Relative of Abdel-Karim Salem Imbrika, who was shot in the neck and killed by al-Gaddafi forces on 16 March 2011.

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'**Afiya Mohamed Ja'rani** in hospital in Benghazi after the car in which she was travelling came under fire.

"In the early hours of 16 March, I drove my female relatives and the children out. It wasn't safe; we live in a very rural area, west of Zawiyat al-Mahjoub, the entry point for the kata'ib [al-Gaddafi forces] coming from the west. On my way back, as I was approaching our farms, I heard gunshots. When I got there, I was told by other relatives that my father had been killed. He was shot from behind by the kata'ib. He died immediately, but we could not bury him for two days because the area was surrounded by the kata'ib. Eventually, we got him out to Zarig cemetery through back roads. When I took my other relatives to safety, I urged my father to join them. He refused, saying that he would rather die at home. And he did."

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FOREIGN NATIONALS TRAPPED IN MISRATAH

At the height of the fighting in April, some 8,000 migrants were living in Misratah's port desperately awaiting evacuation to safety. As al-Gaddafi forces targeted the port to cut the city from its only lifeline to the outside world, many migrant workers were killed by rockets and artillery shells.

Among the dead were four members of a Nigerian family waiting to be evacuated from Misratah – babies **Success** and **Destiny**, aged eight and 18 months respectively; their aunt Miriam, 38; and uncle Amarachi, aged 32. The children's mother, 29-year-old **Viva Emecka** (pictured below), who was expecting her third child, lost her right leg and right hand and sustained multiple other injuries. The children's father told Amnesty International:



Top: Egyptian and Tunisian migrant workers awaiting evacuation at Misratah port.

Below: Viva Emecka's two babies were killed in April 2011, when al-Gaddafi forces attacked the port. She lost her right leg and right arm in the attack.

"Rockets exploded by our home so we fled and went to a Red Crescent tent camp near the port and were waiting for the IOM [International Organization for Migration] ship to evacuate us from Misratah. We were going to return to Nigeria, away from this war. It was 4 May and we had been waiting for the IOM ship for days when the rocket exploded near us. I have lost my children and my brother and sister and their children are now orphans. My wife is maimed for life and traumatized. She does not want to live any more and I don't know how to help her. Our family has been destroyed and I can't cope."

Other foreign nationals who decided to stay in Misratah were also killed or injured. **Olga Kozina**, a 54-year-old nurse from Ukraine, spoke to Amnesty International from her hospital bed in Benghazi. She described the attack that left her with serious injuries and killed her colleague **Dr Anatoly Nagayko**, aged 59, who worked in Zawiyat al-Mahjoub clinic:

"That day I was going to get the key to an apartment nearer to my work in a safer area... I was locking the metal door outside the building and Dr Anatoly was standing a few metres away while we waited for the car. Next thing I woke up on the ground and saw Dr Anatoly also on the ground in a pool of blood."

AJDABIYA

In their attempt to regain control of the east, al-Gaddafi forces launched Grad-type rockets and artillery shells at Ajdabiya, including into residential neighbourhoods. There were fewer casualties than in Misratah simply because most civilians had already fled. However, several people who remained or tried to flee after the shelling began were killed or injured.

On 21 March, three **Sanoussi brothers** were killed or fatally wounded and two others were seriously injured by a rocket attack. Just before the call to sunset prayer, 26-year-old Ali and his brothers 'Azab, 30, Seif, 27, Lafi, 22, and Baset, 20, were sitting outside their home in the Souk area of Ajdabiya with friends and neighbours when a Grad rocket landed. From his hospital bed in Benghazi six weeks later, Ali (pictured right), whose left leg was amputated, told Amnesty International:

“That was the fourth day of the al-Gaddafi offensive; there were no longer any women or children in our house. We stayed behind just to protect our property from theft and looting. None of us had any weapons. Then, a rocket exploded just in the spot where we were sitting. **Seif** died immediately, he was shredded to pieces. **'Azab** died in the hospital in Ajdabiya shortly after, and **Baset** died a week later in Benghazi – he had a head injury... Lafi's hand was amputated. The attack also killed our neighbour and injured three others.”

Siblings **Khadija** and **'Attiya 'Issa Ahmad Salah al-Qbaili**, aged six and 10 respectively, were shot dead on 15 March as the family was fleeing from Ajdabiya. The attack also injured their father in the back and arm. The children's mother, Na'ima, described the family's ordeal:

“We reached near the eastern gate of the city... al-Gaddafi's forces were there. Suddenly our car came under fire. My husband turned around to go back to Ajdabiya but they continued to shoot at our car. My husband was hit and he stopped the car. I ran out of the car screaming that my husband had been injured and rushed to open the back door to get the children to safety. I found that 'Attiya and Khadija had been hit and were not moving... Khadija was hit in the head and chest and 'Attiya in the neck. Why did they shoot at us? Why did they kill my children?”

'Why did they kill my children?'

Mother of Khadija and 'Attiya 'Issa Ahmad Salah al-Qbaili, who were shot dead on 15 March 2011.

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Top: Ali Sanoussi in hospital in Benghazi. Three of his brothers died after a rocket attack on 21 March 2011.

Below: Relatives of Khadija and 'Attiya 'Issa Ahmad Salah al-Qbaili.

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JUSTICE NEEDED

As these harrowing cases illustrate, al-Gaddafi forces committed serious violations of international humanitarian law, in some cases amounting to war crimes, in their attempt to regain opposition-held territory.

Relatives of those killed and survivors deserve a full remedy. They deserve to see those responsible for ordering, carrying out or assisting in the commission of indiscriminate attacks and other crimes brought to justice. They should receive adequate reparation, including financial compensation proportional to the gravity of the violation and the harm suffered.

Nothing will bring their loved ones back, but relatives repeatedly told Amnesty International that they will not rest until the perpetrators are punished. The new leadership of Libya must ensure that these demands are realized, regardless of the outcome of the conflict.

A young woman holds a candle at a Libya solidarity action, organized by Amnesty Switzerland in Bern, Switzerland, 24 February 2011.

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