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## LIBYAN ARAB JAMAHIRIYA

# Increasing reports of internal displacement

The continuing internal conflict in Libya started on 15 February when rioters in Benghazi demanded the end of the 41-year rule of Muammar Qadhafi. As of 14 April, repeated advances and retreats of both pro-Qadhafi and opposition forces had left cities and villages deserted, with civilians increasingly bearing the brunt of the combat.

As of 14 April, aid organisations reported that about 106,000 people had been internally displaced many of them several times. The Libyan Committee for Humanitarian Aid and Relief had reported that 35,000 people had been displaced from Ajdabiya to Benghazi; UNHCR reported that about 6,000 IDPs were seeking shelter in Tubruq. As of 25 March, International Medical Corps' East Libya Team reported that 25,000 IDPs had gathered in Al Butwen. Meanwhile, according to the Libyan Red Crescent, some 5,000 people were displaced in Derna.

The Telegraph reported that in Nouflia, 32 kilometres east of Ben Jawad, an undetermined number of people had set up improvised camps to escape the violence. OCHA also reported on 12 April that it had received information that about 24,000 people had fled from the periphery of Misrata to the city centre.

While the opposition movement has facilitated assistance in the eastern region of Cyrenaica, access has remained restricted by the fighting and the air bombardments. Several organisations have called for the establishment of humanitarian corridors. Some estimate that about four million people, including a million children, could be in need but remain inaccessible.

## Background

The continuing internal conflict in Libya started on 15 February when rioters in Benghazi demanded the end of the 41-year rule of Muammar Qadhafi. Four days later the protests engulfed a number of cities in the country, including Al-Baida, Ajdabiya and Misrata. On 20 February, protesters took control of Libya's second city Benghazi, and four days later of Misrata. On 27 February opposition groups formed the National Transitional Council, in which they were joined by several high-ranking members of the government's armed forces. These included General Abdul Fatah Younis, who took the leadership of the Libyan's People Army which, with civilian volunteers, has been opposing Qadhafi's forces since (UN News Centre, 25 March 2011; UNHCR, 25 March 2011).

On 6 March, the opposition forces were stopped at the battle of Bin Jawad near Sirte in Tripolitania. Four days later, Qadhafi's forces went on the offensive, bombing Brega and taking Zawiyah before moving eastward towards Ajdabiya, near Benghazi. On 17 March, at the request of the Arab League, the UN Security Council passed Resolution 1973 which authorised a no-fly zone over Libya and "all the necessary measures to protect civilians". On 24 March, NATO took over the responsibility of implementing the no-fly zone while hostilities continued in Misrata, Ajdabiya and Zintan (The Telegraph, 29 March 2011).

As of 14 April, fighting was ongoing in several areas. Meanwhile, the UN Secretary-General warned that he had seen no evidence of steps by the government to fulfil its obligations to protect civilians. Ban Ki-moon expressed "serious concerns about the protection of civilians and respect for human rights and international humanitarian law" at an informal closed meeting of the General Assembly (Monsters and Critics, 21 March 2011).

The continued movement of the front line from east to west and back, and the periodic or sus-

tained isolation of cities such as Misrata, where combat has taken place within the town, has dramatically affected civilians. Their situation has been made worse by the indiscriminate nature of the fighting, while throughout the conflict Qadhafi and his family have promised a very violent response against protesters and opposition.

## Patterns of displacement

As Libya's armed conflict drags on and civilians increasingly bear the brunt of the combat, more information has become available on the number, location and situation of internally displaced people (IDPs) in the country.

OCHA reported on 14 April that over 500,000 people had fled Libya since the beginning of the crisis, predominantly foreign nationals who overwhelmingly fled within the first two weeks. From early March, Libyans also began to flee in large numbers, an indication of the deteriorating situation inside the country. Although information from within Libya was scant and has remained difficult to verify due to limited access and the rapid evolution of the conflict, reports of people being internally displaced by the conflict have increased (Monsters and Critics, 21 March 2011; OCHA, 12 April 2011 and 14 April 2011).

The repeated advances and retreats of both pro-Qadhafi and opposition forces, from near Tripoli in the west to around Benghazi in the east, have left cities and villages deserted and houses locked and shuttered, while their residents have either fled or gone into hiding. The few remaining in their homes have sought to protect themselves through barricades. There have been consistent reports of displacement due to the destruction of homes or the severe damage they have sustained. This has been most reported in towns and cities that have faced prolonged shelling, such as Ajdabiya, and those which have been the scene of street-to-street urban fighting, such as Misrata.

## Reported internal displacement figures

Aid organisations have reported that most of the 120,000 residents of Ajdabiya have fled the city; many of them had reportedly already been displaced at least once since March. The Libyan Committee for Humanitarian Aid and Relief had reported that 35,000 people had been internally displaced from Ajdabiya to Benghazi; UNHCR reported that about 6,000 of them were seeking shelter in Tubruq with host families or in temporary shelters. As of 25 March, International Medical Corps' (IMC's) East Libya Team reported that 25,000 IDPs had gathered in Al Butwen, some 30 kilometres east of Ajdabiya (IMC, 24 March 2011; The Telegraph, 29 March 2011).

Meanwhile, according to the Libyan Red Crescent, some 5,000 people were displaced in the coastal town of Derna. The Telegraph also reported that in Nouflia, 32 kilometres east of Ben Jawad, an undetermined number of people had set up improvised camps to escape the violence. OCHA also stated on 12 April that between 3,500 and 4,000 families (about 24,000 people) had reportedly fled from the periphery of Misrata to the city centre to escape the fighting. In this besieged city, in addition to the Libyan civilian population, between 6,000 and 10,000 foreign nationals remained stranded and in need of urgent evacuation and re-settlement (UN News Centre, 25 March 2011; New York Times, 30 March 2011; IRIN, 30 March 2011).

IDPs in Libya have reportedly sought refuge with relatives or in neighbouring villages and towns, with some host families housing up to seven families which average six individuals each. This generosity has put a heavy strain on both the IDPs and the host community. Some, including foreign nationals, have sought shelter within public buildings such as schools or abandoned houses, where they have remained at high risk of being displaced again.

Some IDPs are reported to be staying in improvised camps in the middle of the desert, particularly in the inaccessible west of the country, in a very precarious situation out of the reach of support.

## Humanitarian response

From the onset of the crisis there was a rapid international response, including from regional organisations such as the Arab Medical Union and Islamic Relief. Humanitarian organisations carried out increasing activities on the Libyan borders of Egypt and Tunisia grew as tens of thousands of people left the country, but activity within Libya initially remained limited until the conflict escalated and the needs became apparent.

On 28 March, IMC reported that 600,000 civilians in the country were in need of humanitarian assistance. IMC had up to that point distributed food, water and supplies in settlements outside Ajdabiya to which many people had fled, including Al Butwen, Albethnan and Genane. As of 27 March, the World Food Programme (WFP) was pre-positioning food stocks in Libya and the surrounding countries, and was about to start distributing food through the Libyan Red Crescent to 7,000 IDPs in Eastern Libya. WFP expressed concern over the future of the public food distribution system in Libya, with food supplies reportedly not being replenished. Food prices reportedly increased in different areas, with some reports suggesting that stocks in Tripoli were dwindling (OCHA, 14 April 2011).

In Benghazi, the Libyan Committee for Humanitarian Aid and Relief (LCHAR) of the Libyan National Council has worked with local religious authorities and the Scouts to obtain and analyse data on local families and IDPs who need assistance. According to their registry, the number of IDPs has changed daily. LCHAR and the Libyan Association for Humanitarian Relief have distributed food to both residents and IDPs in Benghazi

and its environs. Over 48,000 resident families have received food to date. Meanwhile, United Nations agencies and humanitarian partners have provided jerry cans, hygiene kits and other non-food items to IDPs.

In Ajdabiya City, IMC reported that the hospital had a critical shortage of staff and surgical supplies. There was no access to running water, the hospital had one small generator to supply electricity, and non-food items were also needed. The hospital did not have the capacity to receive an influx of population, if the majority of residents of the city, who fled, come back again. On the morning of 14 April, heavy shelling was reported around the port area with an unconfirmed number of casualties. That evening, an IOM-chartered ship reached Misrata to deliver 400 tons of humanitarian supplies and evacuate around 600 foreign nationals to safety.

On 6 April 2011 the Humanitarian Coordinator for Libya recommended that the UN activate its cluster coordination system (IRIN, 11 April 2011; UNHCR, 22 March 2011).

As of 11 March, the \$310-million Flash Appeal for the Libyan Crisis was 41-per-cent funded, with \$128 million committed and \$1.4 million pledged. Further funds were urgently needed for all sectors of the humanitarian response (IRIN, 11 April 2011).

While the opposition movement has facilitated assistance in the eastern region of Cyrenaica, the access of humanitarians has remained restricted by the fighting and the air bombardments. Their reach has been critically limited in the north-western Tripolitania and the south-western Fezzan. Several organisations including Save the Children, Merlin, Islamic Relief, Action Contre la Faim and Christian Aid have called for the establishment of humanitarian corridors. Some estimate that about four million people, including a million children, could be in need but remain inaccessible (UNHCR, 22 March 2011).

## About the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre

The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, established in 1998 by the Norwegian Refugee Council, is the leading international body monitoring conflict-induced internal displacement worldwide.

Through its work, the Centre contributes to improving national and international capacities to protect and assist the millions of people around the globe who have been displaced within their own country as a result of conflicts or human rights violations.

At the request of the United Nations, the Geneva-based Centre runs an online database providing comprehensive information and analysis on internal displacement in some 50 countries.

Based on its monitoring and data collection activities, the Centre advocates for durable solutions to the plight of the internally displaced in line with international standards.

The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre also carries out training activities to enhance the capacity of local actors to respond to the needs of internally displaced people.

In its work, the Centre cooperates with and provides support to local and national civil society initiatives.

For more information, visit the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre website and the database at [www.internal-displacement.org](http://www.internal-displacement.org).

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