

Urgent Call: Libyan Arab Armed Forces Must Be Held Accountable for Torture Crimes Committed in Garnada

Tunis, 20 January 2025 - The World Organization Against Torture (OMCT) and the Libyan Anti-Torture Network (LAN) consistently condemn the systematic and widespread perpetration of torture, cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment within detention facilities across Libya. For years, Libyan authorities, both in the east and west of the country, were urged to ensure the full accountability of military and security forces implicated in grave human rights violations.

The recent emergence of social media videos depicting horrific forms of torture within Garnada Prison in eastern Libya urgently demands an investigation into these long-standing allegations. The physical and psychological torture contained in these videos clearly constitute grave breaches of international humanitarian law, human rights law, and Libyan law. Despite the documented widespread nature of these crimes, accountability mechanisms within Libya remain absent, creating an environment conducive to the normalization of perpetration torture.

Video Evidence Exposes Torture at Garnada Prison

The clips - allegedly filmed in 2020 in Garnada Prison, located 20 km South of Shahat city - show a group of detainees brutally beaten with iron rods. Their bodies bear clear signs of serious injuries, indicating that they have been subjected to severe physical torture and cruel disciplinary methods. Others are being humiliated and forced into prolonged and agonizing postures, while begging for mercy. These practices are perpetrated by individuals, some wearing military uniforms affiliated with the Libyan Arab Armed Forces (LAAF), while others, in civilian clothing, are believed to be detainees forced to inflict torture upon their fellow captives.

Interviews with former detainees held at Garnada Prison conducted by the LAN and OMCT corroborate the identification of the torture site. The ex-detainees recognized the iron doors and a piece of the curtain, and they were certain of the identities of the officers and torturers depicted in the videos carrying out the torture.¹ Witnesses alleged that some of the torturers were foreign nationals who, acting under the orders of LAAF officers, sexually assaulted many detainees in Garnada. Survivors reported that these perpetrators disappeared after 2020, with rumours circulating that they either fled the country or were arrested in other regions of Libya without being brought to trial.

The Worst is yet to Be Revealed

**“I witnessed the death of more than 15 inmates in 5 years, and perhaps more, I don’t know!
The prison building is large and consists of two floors, and we were usually tortured on the**

¹ The World Organization Against Torture (OMCT) and The Libyan Anti-Torture Network (LAN) draw attention to the posted video of a [meeting of senior military and security officials](#), including the Secretary-General of the General Command (Khairy Al-Tamimi), the Chiefs of Staff (Khaled and Saddam Haftar), and the Military Prosecutor General (Faraj Al-Sousaa). This meeting serves as an implicit recognition of the grave violations alleged to have occurred within Garnada Prison.

ground floor.” a witness stated.² In addition to severe beatings, electric shocks, humiliation, threats, and insults against their families, detainees were subjected to food and water deprivation. Crammed into overcrowded cells, detainees were forced to sleep pressed against each other. Many were subjected to prolonged solitary confinement in narrow cells and forced to perform gruelling forms of labour. During interrogations, detainees were suspended from doors by their wrists, their hands shackled in iron cuffs, for prolonged periods. As a result, many suffered fractures in their shoulders and hands, as documented in medical reports from survivors.

Additionally, detainees are forced to undress and then hung upside down by their feet with ropes, then subjected to beatings across their entire bodies. Systematic torture also involves the flogging of detainees’ legs (Falka). Survivors described injuries to their knees, a common consequence of trying to shield their heads from the strikes. Ex-detainees reported being forced to place their fingers into the gaps of iron doors. The doors were then shut, slowly crushing the fingers and causing bone fractures. To inflict further pain, their fingernails were often ripped off with pliers. A former detainee stated, **"The reception of new inmates in Garnada was referred to as “the welcome”. They would beat the new arrivals for about an hour and a half, then flog them with thick copper electric wires, BBR water pipes, and horse whips. The beatings were administered all over the body after the detainees were stripped almost naked."**

Another detainee added **"We were subjected to a cruel punishment where we were forced to squat in the prison corridor for extended periods, sometimes up to six hours, facing the walls. All the inmates in the cell block were stripped down to their underwear and made to hold this position. Any movement would result in severe beatings."**

Some Guards were assigned to carry out specific torture methods. One guard was well known for using only sharp weapons like axes and knives. Detainees who were beaten with these weapons often suffered severe bleeding and deep wounds to their heads and limbs. Furthermore, detainees were subjected to humiliating acts such as being forced to lick the floor or mimic animal noises. Several testimonies alleged sexual assault and rape by guards or with objects. Several witnesses claimed to have eye-witnessed the execution of three detainees who were shot dead within Garnada including a Jordanian and an Egyptian, and a fourth Palestinian detainee was killed after being struck on the head with a piece of furniture. Also, detainees heard accounts from families of female prisoners, including reports of systematic torture that allegedly led to one woman's suicide.

Forms of Humiliating and Cruel Treatment or Systematic Torture?

Detainees are subjected to cruel and humiliating treatment, being denied access to legal counsel, family visits, or the necessary medical care for injuries sustained from torture or illness. One detainee declared **“a guard entered our cell and there were too many ill detainees who desperately needed medication. He said, ‘Whoever wants medicine must give me his**

² Survivors provided a detailed description of Garnada prison. According to the detainees, the prison consists of a ground floor, which appeared in the leaked footage, containing a clinic and two blocks, each with five cells. There is also a solitary confinement cell known as 'Dar al-Shilaat.' The upper floor houses the prison warden's office, a kitchen, a property office, and other administrative offices.

mother's or sister's phone number, otherwise, no medicine will be given.' All the ill detainees refused to give the numbers out of fear for their families. However, one person who was very sick agreed to give his mother's number, but he was crying." Another former detainee testified, **"I witnessed the death of four detainees suffering from kidney failure due to medical neglect."**

Testimonies reveal that detainees are subjected to inhumane conditions, including the denial of basic hygiene. Many have developed skin diseases due to a lack of showers and are forced to drink contaminated water. Inmates are subjected to harsh conditions, including being forced to stand naked in the cold for hours and being denied the necessity of hot water for showers in freezing temperatures. Guards spit on detainees and deliberately rub spices and salt into their wounds to inflict more suffering and pain. Some witnesses described forms of psychological torture, including threats of rape, and insults against the detainees' wives and families. Survivors have estimated that the number of Garnada detainees between 2015 and 2021 ranged from 1,500 to 2,000, as they were forced to prepare inmates bread pieces. Testimonies also confirmed that rotten meat provided to detainees caused food poisoning while daily rations were often limited to small portions of pasta. On several occasions, guards were overheard discussing the transportation of dead bodies in trucks in 2020.

Nothing can Justify Torture under Any Circumstances

Local and international human rights NGOs and multiple reports of international mechanisms have repeatedly warned about the consequences of the ongoing torture of prisoners, specifically in Granada and other State military and security detention facilities. Documentation has proven that victims in these facilities have died either due to physical torture or deliberate medical neglect.³ Systematic torture, often used to coerce confessions for crimes that the detainees did not commit or as a form of punishment. A survivor recounted **"torture is often carried out in the style of collective punishment against everyone, and they call this style of torture 'disciplinary methods of punishment'. These punishments are frequently arbitrary, or they might be imposed when they hear detainees talking in cells, or when they believe someone is breaking the rules, or simply to pass the time. Each guard has their own motive for torture."**

The majority of detainees in Garnada between 2015 and 2021 were arrested in military operations in eastern Libya at the course of hostilities. Others were detained during the 2019-armed conflict. Therefore, the acts of torture in Garnada may constitute war crimes. Under international humanitarian law and international human rights law, torture crimes are not subject to a statute of limitations. In accordance with the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment state parties *"shall take effective legislative, administrative, judicial or other measures to prevent acts of torture in any territory under their jurisdiction."* Furthermore, they shall ensure that all *"public officials have the duty to prevent and punish acts of torture and that any allegation of torture is investigated promptly and impartially. No exceptional circumstances whatsoever, whether a state of war or a threat of war, internal political*

³ OMCT and LAN's report published in 2022 and titled "That Was the Last Time I Saw My Brother – Extrajudicial and Unlawful Killings in Libya" which references Garnada as one of the detention facilities where unlawful killings were documented, p.37.

instability or any other public emergency, may be invoked as a justification of torture."⁴ Libyan Law No. 10 of 2013 also criminalizes the torture of individuals in places of detention in Libya.⁵ In accordance with Libya's international obligations and domestic law, these crimes constitute grave violations that must be investigated promptly and thoroughly.⁶

Recommendations

The World Organization Against Torture and the Libyan Anti-Torture Network call upon all Libyan judicial authorities, the military prosecutor's office, and the Attorney General to take immediate and swift action to investigate the crimes of torture committed in Garnada Prison. The organizations point to the direct responsibility of the Libyan Armed Forces and their high-ranking commanders for these crimes, given their de facto control and direct responsibility for the management of Garnada.

Recent efforts by Libyan political factions to advance transitional justice under the newly enacted Libyan Transitional Justice Law necessitate the prosecution and accountability of individuals responsible for torture, cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment. These efforts must prioritize the urgent implementation of comprehensive rehabilitation, reparation, and compensation programs for survivors.

Therefore, the World Organisation Against Torture and the Libyan Anti-Torture Network call upon all Libyan judicial authorities, including the military prosecutor's office and the Attorney General, to immediately and swiftly investigate the alleged crimes of torture committed within Garnada Prison. Currently detained in Garnada who have served their sentence or have been approved innocence must be released immediately. Given the LAAFs' de facto control and management of Garnada, both organisations emphasize the direct responsibility of high-ranking commanders for these alleged crimes. Additionally, both OMCT and LAN call upon the International Criminal Court (ICC) to investigate these allegations and hold accountable any high-ranking commanders implicated in these grave IHL and human rights violations, particularly due to the Libyan judiciary's incompetence and lack of independence, the fact that commanders accused of these crimes are high-ranking political officials in the eastern Libyan government, and the absence of effective protection mechanisms for those pursuing justice against the accused, the ICC is strongly urged to open such investigations.

⁴ Article 2, Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.

⁵ This is in line with Libya's international obligations, as outlined in Article 2 of Law No. 10 of 2013 concerning the criminalization of torture, enforced disappearance, and discrimination.

⁶ Libya is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, the Arab Charter on Human Rights, the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, and the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance. Libya has also ratified the four Geneva Conventions of 1949 and their Additional Protocols of 1977. All these instruments criminalize torture and oblige States to prevent, a principle enshrined in customary international law too. This means that States are bound to take the necessary measures to protect the right to be free from torture in all circumstances for all persons within their territory and subject to their jurisdiction, regardless of whether they have ratified the relevant international treaties.