



**WILPF STATEMENT**  
**WILPF International**  
**Geneva, Switzerland**  
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**Written Statement submitted to the 34th session of the UN Human Rights Council  
(27 February to 24 March) under Item 10: Technical assistance and capacity-building,  
Interactive dialogue on the situation of human rights in Libya**

## **Multidimensional Insecurity and its Impacts on Libyan Women**

After the 2011 NATO military operation to remove Qadhafi from power, there was a brief moment of hope for a new, inclusive and democratic country. Libya has, however, not only been rendered internally chaotic and dysfunctional, it has become: a target of extended aerial bombardment by the United States,<sup>1</sup> Egypt,<sup>2</sup> and possibly France<sup>3</sup>; a site of Islamic extremism and home to an apparent offshoot of Daesh (ISIS); a corridor for people traffickers, and a destination for desperate refugees and migrants attempting to flee to Europe;<sup>4</sup> and a source of weapons flows that have destabilised fragile internal truces, Libya's neighbours and the region.<sup>5</sup> The use of explosive weapons in populated areas, especially in aerial bombardment, continues to take a huge toll—70% of the deaths and injuries from explosive violence since 2011 have been civilian.<sup>6</sup> OHCHR has reported to the Human Rights Council that “[h]eavy weaponry, such as Grad rockets, which are not appropriate for use in highly populated residential areas given that they cannot target with sufficient precision, have been employed.”<sup>7</sup>

Women report a swift erosion of their rights<sup>8</sup> and are crushed by a strongly reinstated, extremist Islamic-inflected patriarchy, combined with an impossible burden of care as their access to functioning institutions and infrastructure disappears.<sup>9</sup>

As Libya fragments, ethnic differences are being mobilised for local and international political ends, diverse armed groups continue to operate on and over borders that are now closed, and national reform processes, including of the military, have stalled. Internal displacement, including that of ethnic minorities, is escalating as conditions deteriorate.<sup>10</sup> Women leaders face threats and even lethal public violence.<sup>11</sup> Other human rights abuses continue to escalate. The World Bank warns that the economy is close to collapse.<sup>12</sup> Oil and gas production, virtually the only source of income, was erratic until early 2017. The judicial, health and education systems are in tatters, and infrastructure is in rapid decline. Youth male unemployment reached a record high of 48.9% in 2014 and is likely to have risen since.<sup>13</sup> Many young men are heavily armed.



While the UN-backed Government of National Accord (GNA) tries to exert control in Tripoli, numerous religious and tribal militias, criminal networks, and local armed men loosely align themselves behind ideologically-opposite authorities, including a coalition under the anti-Islamist General Khalifa Haftar in the East (Torbruk). Each authority claims an army, a Prime Minister, and *de facto* control over resources and infrastructure. They exert little control beyond the coastal areas. In the southern desert, where the oil fields lie, local militias battle for control over territory, resources, and borders. This internal political chaos appears to be fuelling partisanship within the international community, made more complex by the change in US administration, a shift in whose strategy would risk further undermining the capacity of the GNA.<sup>14</sup>

The European Union has recently agreed a plan to grant more financial, training and other assistance to the GNA's coast guard and other relevant agencies as a measure to reduce migratory flows along the Central Mediterranean route. UN Special Procedures, policy analysts, aid groups and human rights organisations have raised serious concerns about the proposed approach.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, as rival factions are not party to the EU deal, it is difficult to assess the extent to which it can succeed.

In the context of the 'war on ISIS', frequent calls are made, including from Security Council permanent members, to reverse the arms sanctions and flood new weapon systems into the country to 'improve security', including the measure of supporting one or another of Libya's emergent regional warlords.<sup>16</sup> Women activists strongly oppose such calls, pointing out that it will do little to create security and instead risks escalating the existing crises in the country. In the meantime, emerging online markets are already facilitating the proliferation of illicit small arms and light weapons to various non-state armed groups.<sup>17</sup>

Women on the ground and international observers report that limited efforts have been made to include women in community peacebuilding efforts. This is despite strong evidence from WILPF and other conclusive research recognising their potential contributions to, among other things, combating extremism<sup>18</sup> and the call in UNSCR 2178 (2014) to include women in developing strategies to combat extremism. WILPF's partners report that the Special Representative of the Secretary General, like his predecessor, does little to ensure women's participation in peacebuilding activities. Women deserve more than lip service to their inclusion.

## **Recommendations**

WILPF urges Human Rights Council members and observer states to:

### Protect civilians and migrants

- Call for an immediate end to the use of explosive weapons in populated areas, including aerial bombardment of Daesh in Sirte and its surroundings. Previous military interventions created a vacuum filled by Daesh, as in Syria and Iraq. Ongoing military interventions will strengthen Daesh and are deepening the misery of civilians, who are



the overwhelming majority of casualties from aerial bombardment and suffer most from the destruction of civilian infrastructure;

- Stop directing financial aid, vitally needed for humanitarian actions, to military and operations intended to 'end terror' or 'control ISIS' and that only leads to an increased militarised environment;
- Address the human rights crisis faced by migrants, who continue to be subjected to arbitrary detention, torture and other ill-treatment, unlawful killings and sexual exploitation.

#### Arms control

Recalling the Arms Trade Treaty, Security Council resolutions on women, peace and security, and the EU common position on arms transfers:

- Continue the UN embargo on all weapons sales to Libya, including by investigating online markets;
- Consider sanctions against countries violating the arms embargo;
- Prevent further undermining the GNA or overlooking embargo-breaking weapons sales to Libyan warlords, including offers of overt military 'technical support' or 'security equipment' to Khalifa Haftar, who remains an obstacle to unified governance and the honouring of human rights in Libya. History has shown weapons are too easily diverted to emerging militia, especially in a governance vacuum.

#### Women's participation in mediation and peacebuilding

- Support Tunisian and Algerian efforts to maintain regional stability by providing neutral meeting space to Libyan actors; in this, broker meetings and capacity-building activities between the strong Tunisian women's movement and Libyan counterparts;
- By encouraging engagement in a coherent mediation and political process, ensure that parties agree on a consensual solution for the political deadlock undermining the GNA's authority; draw on the particular contributions women can make;
- Ensure implementation of the calls in SCR 2323 (2016) for a "full, equal and effective participation of women in all activities relating to the democratic transition, conflict resolution and peacebuilding", and "on the Libyan authorities to prevent and respond to sexual violence in conflict";
- Honour commitments to include women in all decision-making: a cadre of committed and capable Libyan women stands ready to offer alternative solutions to endless war, but they are not included in decision-making on the country's future; with their exclusion, the international community in practice endorses extremist interpretations of Islam that forcefully exclude women from public life;
- Call on the UN to reverse the policies that have led to the effective exclusion of women from UN peace efforts;
- Ensure high-level representation of Senior Gender Advisors as part of the proposed strategic assessment review of the UN presence in Libya.



- <sup>1</sup> Operation Odyssey Lightning was authorised by former President Obama from August to late December 2016.
- <sup>2</sup> See Investigation by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on Libya (A/HRC/31/47), paragraph 10.
- <sup>3</sup> See: Libya: Benghazi residents accuse France of air strikes  
<http://video.aljazeera.com/channels/eng/videos/libya%3A-benghazi-residents-accuse-france-of-air-strikes/5050279388001>.
- <sup>4</sup> See, for example, Human Rights Watch, World Report 2017. "Libya. Events of 2016." Available at: <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2017/country-chapters/libya#1de7c4>.
- <sup>5</sup> SCR1970 (February 2011) imposed an open-ended embargo on arms and military equipment supplies into and out of Libya as a reaction to gross and systematic human rights violations. By September of that year, SCR2009 allowed some arms transfers for narrowly-specified use. SCR2095 (2013) authorises transfers of non-lethal military equipment to protect humanitarian personnel; SCR2174 (2014) requires the Sanctions Committee's approval of any arms transfers; SCR2213 (2015) extends the sanctions panel, calling for uncontrolled arms to be secured and their proliferation prevented; SCR2292 (2016) aims to ensure implementation of the Libya arms embargo, specifically by maritime traffic.
- <sup>6</sup> See Action on Armed Violence for 2016 statistics on explosive violence in Libya, at: <https://aoav.org.uk/2016/libya>.
- <sup>7</sup> Investigation by OHCHR on Libya (A/HRC/31/47), paragraph 19.
- <sup>8</sup> Investigation by OHCHR on Libya (A/HRC/31/47), paragraph 36.
- <sup>9</sup> See Mustafa Fetouri, "Women face setbacks in new Libya." Al-Monitor, online <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2015/03/libya-women-murder-situation-gaddafi-regime-militias.html>.
- <sup>10</sup> ACAPS reports that 1.3 million people need humanitarian assistance; access is difficult as humanitarian agencies pulled out in 2014. See <https://www.acaps.org/country/libya>.
- <sup>11</sup> For examples, see "Salwa Bugaighis, Libyan human rights activist, shot dead in Benghazi", <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jun/26/salwa-bugaighis-libyan-shot-dead-benghazi> (2014); Umberto Bacchi, "Libya: Female activist Intissar al-Hasaari shot dead in Tripoli" <http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/libya-female-activist-intissar-al-hasaari-shot-dead-tripoli-1489296> (2015); OHCHR "Libyan human rights defenders under attack" <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=15752&LangID=E>.
- <sup>12</sup> See <http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/libya/overview>.
- <sup>13</sup> <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.UEM.1524.ZS?locations=LY>.
- <sup>14</sup> See discussions at <http://www.voanews.com/a/eu-malta-summit-libya/3706189.html> and [www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2017/01/us-strike-libya-obama-trump-plans.html](http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2017/01/us-strike-libya-obama-trump-plans.html).
- <sup>15</sup> See, for example, Malta Summit: "Is Libya the right disembarking point for migrants?" – UN rights experts, at <http://www.ohchr.org/FR/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=21140&LangID=E>; MSF's extended challenge to EU policy on migration, at: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/refugee-crisis-medical-charity-msf-rejects-funding-from-uk-and-other-eu-nations-over-shameful-a7087051.html>; Myopic in Malta: Europe's short-sighted migration policy with Libya, at <https://www.irinnews.org/opinion/2017/02/07/myopic-malta-europe-s-short-sighted-migration-policy-libya>.
- <sup>16</sup> See "Arms embargo exemption for Libya considered", at <http://www.rte.ie/news/2016/0517/788896-libya-sanctions/>.
- <sup>17</sup> "The Online Trade of Light Weapons in Libya," Dispatch No. 6, Small Arms Survey, April 2016, <http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/fileadmin/docs/R-SANA/SANA-Dispatch6-Online-trade.pdf>.
- <sup>18</sup> <http://www.un.org/en/sc/ctc/docs/2015/Open%20Briefing%20%20WILPF%20and%20GJC%20Civil%20Society%20Intervention.pdf>