

### Introduction

Increasing and widespread use of explosive weapons in Libya's urban areas is having a devastating impact. In addition to a growing number of civilian casualties, shelling and aerial bombardment by both Libyan and rebel forces are damaging infrastructure, civilian housing, mosques, and causing large-scale displacement. As the situation worsens, aid agencies are suspending and relocating operations, and vulnerable civilians continue to face attacks. The UN Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights has condemned the attacks on civilian populations as displaying "massive, indiscriminate force."<sup>1</sup> Libyan forces have today begun bombing Benghazi, Libya's second-largest city, despite the UN Secretary-General's warning that bombing urban centres "would massively place civilian lives at risk."<sup>2</sup>

### Heavy weapons use in urban areas

Libyan government forces continue to bombard populated areas from the air, ground, and sea, in the face of widespread international condemnation. Meanwhile, rebel forces have gained control of explosive weapons including mortars, surface-to-air missiles, artillery and RPGs, and have been using these in pitched battles against government forces. Over the last few days, civilians in Misrata have been bombarded by artillery from three different directions,<sup>3</sup> and in Ajdabiya, air strikes, rocket attacks and naval shelling have reportedly displaced most of the resident population.<sup>4</sup> The use of heavy weapons in Zawiya city, 30 miles west of Tripoli, has reportedly caused widespread devastation, and there are grave concerns for civilians in Benghazi following the recent bombardments.

### Humanitarian harm

Reports from doctors and medical foundations describe severe explosive weapons injuries, indicating that survivors are likely to suffer long-term impairments. In Benghazi, an international medical foundation reports that field staff in Benghazi have received reports of the need for orthopaedic and reconstructive surgeons.<sup>5</sup> A surgeon at a hospital in Ajdabiya has stated: "The injuries are different now...I'm seeing a lot of amputees, shrapnel wounds."<sup>6</sup> A medical official dealing with the aftermath of the stockpile explosion outside Benghazi described the difficulty of counting the casualties, as the bodies were so degraded.

*"We've got pieces, arms and legs, so we don't know how many people were killed."*<sup>7</sup>

On Wednesday 16 March, two children were reportedly hit by a mortar round in Ajdabiya,<sup>8</sup> and NGO Save the Children has highlighted the severe risks to children in Libya:

*"Heavy weapons, including shells and airpower, are being used on towns in Libya right now...The experience of Save the Children from working in conflicts around the world is that using explosive weapons in populated areas has a devastating and indiscriminate impact on children and their families. This has to stop."* (Gareth Owen, Emergency Director, Save the Children)

### Displacement

The shelling of Ajdabiya city has reportedly displaced most of the population, which number 170,000 people. In addition, at least 140,000 foreign nationals have left Libya, including Egyptians, Bangladeshis, Chinese and Europeans.<sup>9</sup> The long-term impacts of this displacement will affect not only the health, security and livelihoods of the displaced, but will further affect Libyan civilians through long-term harm to the economy.

### ERW and landmines

Libyan civilians now face the long-term threat of explosive remnants of war, including unexploded ordnance from continued use in cities, as well as the risks posed by abandoned and poorly managed ordnance in Libya's stockpiles, several of which are now controlled by rebel forces with little or no military training. Displaced populations may also be at risk from landmines along the borders with Egypt, Chad and Tunisia.

### Damage to infrastructure

Explosive weapons use and the associated insecurity has already had a devastating impact on Libya's infrastructure, as well as the property and services which shelter and support the civilian population. Following attacks on Zawiya, shelling reportedly damaged government buildings and private homes, and a New York Times correspondent described:

*"...walls collapsed, shell holes everywhere, the mosque destroyed, the top of the mosque gone...a crumpled up bunch of old burned-out cars...I mean, it was devastation."*<sup>10</sup>

The bombing of an oil refinery in Ras Lanuf has reportedly destroyed a water pipeline, affecting water supplies to the city and leaving its hospital in urgent need of water.<sup>11</sup> According to the *International Energy Agency*, damage to refinery facilities, as well as international sanctions, may halt Libyan crude oil exports for many months.<sup>12</sup> As a net food importer, the bombing of airports and the increasing insecurity are likely to cause further to civilians by blocking access to food supplies, a further factor increasing civilian vulnerability.<sup>13</sup>

## Aid agencies pulling out

Following shelling in Misrata, a doctor reported that while 11 had been killed and 20 were wounded, *“the wounded are being brought to hospital in private cars, as ambulance drivers are afraid of being hit by shells.”*<sup>14</sup> In Zawiya on 6 March, a resident said that shelling was hampering medical aid, saying *“We can’t rescue anyone because the shelling is so heavy.”*<sup>15</sup> In response to the deteriorating situation, Médecins Sans Frontières and the ICRC have both withdrawn from Benghazi.<sup>16</sup> The ICRC mission in Libya has stated grave concerns for civilians: *“We are extremely concerned about what will happen to civilians, the sick and wounded, detainees and others who are entitled to protection in times of conflict.”*<sup>17</sup>

## Summary

The impacts of explosive weapons use in Libya’s populated areas are causing severe human suffering and will cause long-term and far reaching problems for the populations as they rebuild their lives after the fighting has ceased. Immediate action is needed to address ongoing humanitarian harm and prevent further civilian suffering.

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## Recommendations

1. All actors should immediately respect UN calls for a ceasefire and refrain from using explosive weapons in populated areas.
2. States, international organisations and NGOs should demand an end to this use.
3. When security allows, urgent action should be taken to address immediate threat of explosive remnants of war and ensure the security of explosive ordnance stockpiles to prevent wider proliferation

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<sup>1</sup> “Gaddafi forces pound rebel-held city,” 16 March 2011, [www.english.aljazeera.net/news/africa/2011/03/201131692353456943.html](http://www.english.aljazeera.net/news/africa/2011/03/201131692353456943.html) (accessed 17 March 2011).

<sup>2</sup> Maggie Mitchell, “Rebels battle to hold city under Gadhafi sief,” *Associated Press*, posted by *AJC*, 17 March 2011, [www.ajc.com/news/nation-world/rebels-battle-to-hold-874036.html](http://www.ajc.com/news/nation-world/rebels-battle-to-hold-874036.html) (accessed 17 March 2011).

<sup>3</sup> Mohammed Abbas, “Gaddafi shells city, threatens rebel stronghold,” 17 March 2011, [www.africa.ibtimes.com/articles/123494/20110316/gaddafi-shells-city-threatens-rebel-stronghold.htm](http://www.africa.ibtimes.com/articles/123494/20110316/gaddafi-shells-city-threatens-rebel-stronghold.htm) (accessed 17 March 2011).

<sup>4</sup> Maggie Mitchell, “Rebels battle to hold city under Gadhafi sief,” *Associated Press*, posted by *AJC*, 17 March 2011, [www.ajc.com/news/nation-world/rebels-battle-to-hold-874036.html](http://www.ajc.com/news/nation-world/rebels-battle-to-hold-874036.html) (accessed 17 March 2011).

<sup>5</sup> International Medical Corps, “International Medical Corps Prepares to Deploy Team to Assist Those Fleeing Deadly Clashes in Libya” 1 March 2011, [www.internationalmedicalcorps.org.uk/wherewework.asp?pageid=317](http://www.internationalmedicalcorps.org.uk/wherewework.asp?pageid=317) (accessed 17 March 2011).

<sup>6</sup> International Medical Corps, “International Medical Corps Prepares to Deploy Team to Assist Those Fleeing Deadly Clashes in Libya” 1 March 2011, [www.internationalmedicalcorps.org.uk/wherewework.asp?pageid=317](http://www.internationalmedicalcorps.org.uk/wherewework.asp?pageid=317) (accessed 17 March 2011).

<sup>7</sup> Nancy A Youssef, “Massive blast rips arms depot key to Libya rebels,” *Macclatchy Newspapers*, posted by *World Wires*, 4 March 2011, [www.miamiherald.com/2011/03/04/v-fullstory/2098596/massive-blast-rips-arms-depot.html#ixzz1GsZcSgII](http://www.miamiherald.com/2011/03/04/v-fullstory/2098596/massive-blast-rips-arms-depot.html#ixzz1GsZcSgII) (accessed 17 March 2011).

<sup>8</sup> David Kirkpatrick and Kareem Fahim, “Rebels Claim Small Gains Against Qaddafi Forces,” *NY Times*, [http://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/17/world/africa/17libya.html?\\_r=1&src=twrhp](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/17/world/africa/17libya.html?_r=1&src=twrhp) (Accessed 17 March 2011)

<sup>9</sup> “Libya: stranded foreign workers need urgent evacuation,” *Eurasia review*, 2 March 2011, [www.eurasiareview.com/world-news/africa/libya-stranded-foreign-workers-need-urgent-evacuation-02032011/](http://www.eurasiareview.com/world-news/africa/libya-stranded-foreign-workers-need-urgent-evacuation-02032011/) (accessed 17 March 2011).

<sup>10</sup> David Kirkpatrick, New York Times correspondent, interviewed by Melissa Block, in: “Libyan government forces take Zawiya,” National Public Radio, 11 March 2011, [www.npr.org/2011/03/11/134467281/Libyan-Government-Forces-Take-Zawiya](http://www.npr.org/2011/03/11/134467281/Libyan-Government-Forces-Take-Zawiya) (accessed 17 March 2011).

<sup>11</sup> Maria Golovkina and Alexander Dziadosz, “Gaddafi’s forces steps up action: U.S. mulls action,” 8 March 2011, Reuters, [www.us.mobile.reuters.com/article/topNews/idUSTRE7270JP20110308?i=2](http://www.us.mobile.reuters.com/article/topNews/idUSTRE7270JP20110308?i=2)

<sup>12</sup> Ola Galal and Massoud A. Derhally, “Qadaffi bombs Benghazi as son says ‘too late’ for no fly zone over Libya,” 16 March 2011, [www.bloomberg.com/news/2011-03-15/qaddafi-forces-near-benghazi-as-rebel-says-world-failed-us-.html](http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2011-03-15/qaddafi-forces-near-benghazi-as-rebel-says-world-failed-us-.html) (accessed 17 March 2011).

<sup>13</sup> “WFP: Libya’s food chain at risk of collapse,” 25 February 2011, Middle East Online, [www.middle-east-online.com/english/?id=44601](http://www.middle-east-online.com/english/?id=44601) (accessed 17 March 2011).

<sup>14</sup> “Update 5-rebel forces attack rebel-held Misrata,” *Reuters*, 16 March 2011, [www.af.reuters.com/article/commoditiesNews/idAFLDE72F25Y20110316?pageNumber=2&virtualBrandChannel=0&sp=true](http://www.af.reuters.com/article/commoditiesNews/idAFLDE72F25Y20110316?pageNumber=2&virtualBrandChannel=0&sp=true) (accessed 17 March 2011).

<sup>15</sup> Brian Ferguson, “Battle for Zawiya rages as tanks bombard rebels,” *The Scotsman*, 6 March 2011, [www.news.scotsman.com/world/Battle-for-Zawiya-rages-as.6729191.jp](http://www.news.scotsman.com/world/Battle-for-Zawiya-rages-as.6729191.jp) (accessed 17 March 2011).

<sup>16</sup> Mohammed Abbas, “Gaddafi shells city, threatens rebel stronghold,” 17 March 2011, [www.africa.ibtimes.com/articles/123494/20110316/gaddafi-shells-city-threatens-rebel-stronghold.htm](http://www.africa.ibtimes.com/articles/123494/20110316/gaddafi-shells-city-threatens-rebel-stronghold.htm) (accessed 17 March 2011).

<sup>17</sup> ICRC, “Libya: fighting still raging one month on,” 16 March 2011, [www.icrc.org/eng/resources/documents/news-release/2011/libya-news-2011-03-16.htm](http://www.icrc.org/eng/resources/documents/news-release/2011/libya-news-2011-03-16.htm) (accessed 17 March 2011).