Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada

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Responses to Information Requests

Responses to Information Requests (RIR) respond to focused Requests for Information that are submitted to the Research Directorate in the course of the refugee protection determination process. The database contains a seven-year archive of English and French RIRs. Earlier RIRs may be found on the UNHCR's Refworld website. Please note that some RIRs have attachments which are not electronically accessible. To obtain a PDF copy of an RIR attachment, please email the Knowledge and Information Management Unit.

LBY104991.E
Libya: Situation of the Tebu ethnic group and their advocates, including treatment by society and authorities; relationship with other ethnic groups (2012 - October 2014)
Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

1. Overview

According to sources, the Tebu [also named Tibu or Tabu, or Toubou in French] are a nomadic Saharan ethnic group (Le Point 3 Feb. 2014; Van Waas May 2013, 5). Sources also report that the Tebu are a non-Arab group that inhabits parts of Libya, Chad, and Niger (ibid. May 2013, 3, 5; St John 2014, 279, 281). In Libya, they are mostly concentrated in the cities of Kufra and Sebha (ibid., 279; Joffé 2014, 297). Sources report that the Tebu are located in the Tibesti mountains along the border with Chad (Van Waas May 2013, 5; MRG Aug. 2011). According to Ronald Bruce St John, a scholar who has published over 100 articles on Libya and served on the International Advisory Board of the Journal of Libyan Studies and the Atlantic Council Working Group on Libya [(Ennaji 2014, xiii-xiv)], "the Tebu are connected ethnically and linguistically to sub-Saharan peoples; hence, they are totally distinct from the remainder of the Libyan population" (St John 2014, 281). Minority Rights Group International (MRG)'s World Directory of Minorities indicates that the Tebu's language is related to "a Nigerian language" and that they have retained most of their traditional religious beliefs and practices (MRG Aug. 2011).

Sources indicate that the Tebu constitute a minority group within Libya (ibid.; Van Waas May 2013, 5). Mohammed A'Sunoussy, a member of the Tebu National Assembly (TNA), a "non-governmental body" created on 9 February 2012 to "represent the Tebu people - their views, interests, and concerns," before Libyan authorities and the international community, stated in a November 2012 interview with Laura Van Waas [1] that there are about 50,000 Tebu in Libya but the exact number is unknown (qtd. in Van Waas May 2013, 9). According to Le Point, a Paris-based newspaper, as of 3 February 2014, there were approximately 300,000 Tebu in Libya (3 Feb. 2014). A 7 February 2013 article published by Al Jazeera estimates the Tebu population to be [translation] "at least" 800,000. The US Central Intelligence Agency's World Factbook estimated that Libya's population in June 2014 was 6,244,174 (US 20 June 2014).

2. Treatment
2.1 Treatment by Authorities

According to A'Sunoussy, after Libya's independence, the Tebu who lived in cities and towns obtained documents that recognized them as Libyan citizens, but those who lived in the desert remained undocumented because Libyan authorities made "little effort to reach out" to them (qtd. in Van Waas May 2013, 10). According to St John, the December 1969 Constitutional Proclamation, which replaced the 1951 Constitution, defined Libya as an "Arab nation" and Arabic was designated as the country's only official language (2014, 281). Sources indicate that with this "Arabisation" of Libya, which included policies that were implemented
throughout the country during the ruling of Gadhafi, non-Arab minorities, including the Tebu, were denied access to citizenship (AllAfrica 22 May 2013; Van Waas May 2013, 3). Sources indicate that the Tebu were subjected to marginalization (Joffé 2014, 293; Van Waas May 2013, 5), "massive discrimination," and forced evictions from their residences, which resulted in their dispersal across Libya and across borders to neighbouring countries (ibid.). Sources report that the Tebu were also refused access to education and health care due to the denial of their citizenship (IPS 26 Nov. 2013; AllAfrica 22 May 2013) and "lack of documentation" (A'Sunoussy qtd. in Van Waas May 2013, 11). St John reports that in November 2008, the Libyan government stopped issuing identity and ration cards to the Tebu which barred them from accessing education, health care, housing, and jobs (St John 2014, 282). According to Van Waas, as of May 2013, some Tebu may remain stateless in Libya today, though the "scale and reach" of this statelessness is not known (May 2013, 3, 8).

According to A'Sunoussy,

the perception and treatment of Tebu still varies from one place to another and in most of the country it largely depends on the individual views of the civil servant how a person is treated. In Murzuk, where Tebu are concentrated, they are usually recognised as Libyan and there are less problems accessing documentation or services. However, this is an exception to the general rule and elsewhere difficulties are still very common. ... Overall, the situation of the Tebu at present is diverse - some with documents, some without, some recognised as citizens, some apparently not. There is simply no uniform practice but I believe that problems of statelessness do persist for some at least. (qtd. in Van Waas May 2013, 12, 13)

Sources report that elections were held in February 2014 for a 60-member constitutional committee to draft Libya's new constitution (The Carter Center 2014, 9; UK 17 Oct. 2014). However, due to security concerns during the elections, 13 of the constituencies experienced no voting at all, resulting in the absence of representatives from the Amazigh [Berber], Tebu and Tuareg ethnic groups in the Constitutional Committee (ibid.; The Carter Center 2014, 3). In a report on the February 2014 elections in Libya, the Carter Center, a non-profit NGO that advances human rights, democracy, and improves mental health care in 80 countries (ibid., 55), indicates that polling stations did not open in Tebu as "days before" the elections, the TNA, in consultation with Tebu candidates, announced that they would boycott the electoral process (ibid., 11). The report states that the Tebu, along with the Amazigh and the Tuareg, "fear being outnumbered and excluded" (ibid.). In correspondence with the Research Directorate, Ronald Bruce St John indicated that the three ethnic minorities were each offered two seats in the Constitutional Committee, but all of them "rejected this offer as too little, too late" (29 Oct. 2014).

2.2 Treatment by Society

According to St John, Arab resentment toward the Tebu and other black ethnic groups grew within Libya during the Gadhafi era in spite of his "pro-African policies" (2014, 282). In an academic paper on nonviolence and reconciliation in Libya, John Braithwaite, the Chief Investigator of Peacebuilding Compared (ANU 14 Jan. 2013a), a research institute that undertakes ethnographic and quantitative research on peace-building and social development (ANU 14 Jan. 2013b) [2], and Tamim Rashed, a Libyan peacebuilder and writer who fought in the Libyan revolution of 2011(ANU 14 Jan. 2013c), indicate that Tebu leaders complain that they have been "constantly harassed and attacked by Arab militias" since the Gadhafi regime collapsed (Braithwaite and Rashed 2014, 194). Sources indicate that black people are often associated with Gadhafi’s mercenaries (DW 22 Jan. 2014; Jeune Afrique 23 Apr. 2014) and, according to an article published by Jeune Afrique, are therefore now "persecuted" (ibid.). According to MRG, "xenophobic rhetoric" about the Tebu "has lingered" in Libya (July 2014, 199-200). Deutsche Welle (DW), a German news broadcaster, similarly indicates that "[r]acism is rampant across Libya, especially towards African migrants and the black Toubou" (DW 12 Oct. 2013). Sources also indicate that most Libyans consider and stigmatize the Tebu as "invaders" (ibid.) or [translation] "foreigners" (Al Jazeera 7 Feb. 2013). According to St John, the Zawiya, which constitutes the majority in Kufra, consider the Tebu as "inferiors and foreigners" (St John 2014, 282). Sources further indicate that the Tebu also face discrimination because of competition for scarce resources (Joffé 2014, 293; International Crisis Group 14 Sept. 2012, 6). There is reportedly also competition over smuggling routes in southern Libya (ibid.; MRG July 2014, 200).

In 2012, sources reported that the Tebu consider themselves victims of "ethnic cleansing" (RNW 17 July 2012; RT 1 July 2012; Al Jazeera 29 Mar. 2012). According to Radio Netherlands Worldwide (RNW), this has been committed by other ethnic groups (RNW 17 July 2012). Sources report that the post-Gadhafi government is responsible for the killing (RT 1 July 2012; Al Jazeera 29 Mar. 2012). DW quotes Adam Rami Kerki, the chief of the TNA, as saying that "the post-war government is 'sticking to the same Arab-Islamist rhetoric as the ousted dictator (Moammar Gadhafi)'" (22 Jan. 2014).

2.3 Clashes with Other Ethnic Groups
DW reports that the Tebu expect "little" from the Libyan government and Libyans themselves, and rely mostly on the military power they obtained during 2011 (12 Oct. 2013). According to an article published by AllAfrica, Gadafi promised the Tebu rights if they joined his forces; the "Tebu took Gadafi's weapons and then turned against him" (AllAfrica 22 May 2013). Sources indicate that clashes in Sebha and Kufra between the Tebu and local Arab ethnic groups have been longstanding, mostly over the lucrative business of cross-border smuggling (ibid.; Al Jazeera 7 Feb. 2013). According to St John, competition over the control of commercial, human migration, and drug trafficking routes has been longstanding in southern Libya (St John 2014, 282, 289). Sources report that competition for pasture access and water have also been causes of conflict (Joffé 2014, 297; International Crisis Group 14 Sept. 2012, 6). Sources report that the ethnic groups in conflict with the Tebu have included the Arab Zway [also named Zawiya] (ibid.; St John 2014, 282) as well as the Awdl Suleiman [Ouled Sliman] (DW 12 Oct. 2013).

Sources report that, in February 2012, violent clashes in Kufra between the Tebu and the Zawiya (International Crisis Group 14 Sept. 2012, 7; St John 2014, 289) left more than 100 people dead (ibid.). The International Crisis Group Reports that a shooting incident which "led to the death of a Zway man at the hands of a Tebu militia," and also killed a young Tebu, started "ferocious, community-wide fighting which, although it began with small arms, quickly escalated to include rocket-propelled grenades and anti-aircraft weapons," and cut off some Tebu areas from the rest of Libya (International Crisis Group 14 Sept. 2012, 6, 7). The same source indicates that long-held, ethnically-based prejudices against the Tebu exacerbated tensions during that conflict (ibid., 7). The International Crisis Group also reports that a ceasefire was later negotiated by local notables with the support of the Libyan army and eastern revolutionary fighters (ibid.).

The International Crisis Group further reports that between March and May 2012, a conflict between the Tebu and the Awdl Bussayf [Abu Saif], an ethnic Arab group, erupted in Sebha after a young Tebu was accused of stealing a car (ibid.). The Awdl Suleiman, another ethnic Arab group that had taken control over the local military council, intervened on behalf of the Awdl Bussayf (ibid.). Sources report that during a reconciliation meeting that was scheduled at the local "People's Hall," a "firefight" occurred and some Sebha residents from various Arab communities indiscriminately shelled Tebu shantytowns (ibid.; Braithwaite and Rashed 2014, 195). Two sources report that the conflict killed over 100 people (International Crisis Group 14 Sept. 2012, 7; St John 2014, 289), while Al Jazeera reports that the number of people killed was [translation] "close to" 200 (7 Feb. 2014).

Braithwaite and Rashed indicate that, on 9 January 2014, a new conflict erupted after the ceasefire of 2012 failed to achieve a "genuine reconciliation" (Braithwaite and Rashed 2014, 196). Sources report that Tebu gunmen attacked a police headquarters in Sebha and killed Mansour al-Aswad, a revolutionary brigade leader who was accused by the Tebu of crimes committed during the 2012 clashes in that city (ibid.; BBC 11 Jan. 2014). DW reports that "dozens" had been killed in the clashes (22 Jan. 2014). The Philippines News Agency (PNA) reports that the clashes left 27 dead and 72 wounded (13 Jan. 2014).

On 14 October 2014, Reporters without Borders reported that, since mid-September 2014, members of the Tebu and Tuareg communities were engaged in armed clashes after some Tuareg from another region joined an Islamic coalition to take over the town of Oban's main gas station, which was until then protected by the Tebu. The Pan African News Agency (Panapress) reports that at least 22 people died in the clashes, many were wounded, and hundreds were displaced (22 Oct. 2014).

3. State Response

According to the International Crisis Group, previous peace agreements among the ethnic groups and reached by local authorities "lacked teeth because the absence of centralized authority and a credible judiciary made them virtually unenforceable" (14 Sept. 2012, 7). Al Jazeera reports that ceasefires are [translation] "fragile" and the calm that follows is "delicate" (7 Feb. 2013). Sources report that the central government has been unable to establish control over multiple armed groups operating in the country (DW 12 Oct. 2013; MRG July 2014, 199), which has left some minorities vulnerable to attacks (ibid.). DW explains that one reason for the government's lack of power is that it attempted to integrate whole rebel groups into the army, and many of those groups "prioritize the interests and commands from their tribes over the national good" (12 Oct. 2013). Corroborating information could not be found by the Research Directorate among the sources consulted within the time constraints of this Response.

According to MRG, in April 2013, the Libyan General National Congress passed an anti-discrimination law to protect the rights of ethnic minorities (MRG July 2014, 199). The same source says that another law was passed which prohibits electoral candidates from engaging in speeches that encourage tribalism, regionalism or ethnic sentiments (ibid.). In July 2013, a law was passed which officially recognizes the Tebu, Tamazight (Berber), and Tuareg languages and enables them to be taught at schools (ibid.). Information on the implementation of these laws and their effectiveness could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.
Information on supporters of the Tebu could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

Notes
[1] Laura Van Waas is a Senior Researcher and Manager of the Statelessness Programme at Tilburg University's Law School (Van Waas n.d.), whose research specializes in statelessness, nationality, human rights and international law (Tilburg University 17 Nov. 2011).

[2] John Braithwaite is also an Australian Research Council Federation fellow and founder of RegNet (the Regulatory Institutions Network) at the Australian National University.

References

AllAfrica. 22 May 2013. Rebecca Murray. "Libya's Vast Borders Still a No-man's Land for Most [Analysis]." (Factiva)


Deutsche Welle (DW). 22 January 2014. "'Al Qaeda Virus is Spreading like Wildfire'." (Factiva)


Pan African News Agency (Panapress). 22 October 2014. "Le Parlement libyen appelle à l’arrêt des affrontements intertribaux dans le Sud." (Factiva)


St John, Ronald Bruce. 29 October 2014. Correspondence with the Research Directorate.


**Additional Sources Consulted**

**Oral sources:** Attempts to contact a lecturer at the Department of History at the University of Hull were unsuccessful within the time constraints of this Response.

**Internet sites, including:** African News Agency; Al Arabiya News; Amnesty International; ecoi.net; European Union – Institute for Security Studies; Factiva; *Le Figaro*; Freedom House; Human Rights Watch; International Federation for Human Rights; Libya – High National Elections Commission, House of Representatives; *Libya Herald; Le Monde; The National; Paris Match; Small Arms Survey; Tamazgha; The Telegraph; United Nations – Integrated Regional Information Networks, Refworld, ReliefWeb; United States – Department of State.