Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada

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.

LBY104237.FE

Libya: The situation of Amazighs (Berbers) and their treatment by society and the government since the fall of Muamar Qaddafi (September 2011-October 2012)

Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

1. General Information

Amazighs, who are also called Imazighen or Berbers, are one of the principle minority groups in Libya (US 24 May 2012, 28; MRG Aug. 2011). They are located mainly in the west (ibid.; Le Monde 29 Sept. 2011; L'aménagement linguistique dans le monde 19 Oct. 2012) and northwest of the country (Chaker and Ferkal Mar. 2012). Sources indicate that there are no “reliable” statistics on Amazighs in Libya (MRG Aug. 2011; CNN 3 Sept. 2012). According to some sources, Amazighs account for approximately four (L'aménagement linguistique dans le monde 19 Oct. 2012; MRG Aug. 2011) to ten percent of the 6,420,000 inhabitants in the country (ibid.). Other sources also indicate that Amazighs represent 10 percent of the Libyan population (CNN 3 Sept. 2012; Le Monde 29 Sept. 2011; The Guardian 4 July 2012).

2. Overview of the Situation of Amazighs under Muamar Qaddafi’s Regime

Several sources indicate that, under Qaddafi’s regime, Amazighs faced “discrimination” (Human Rights Watch 2011; US 24 May 2012, 25; BBC 23 Dec. 2011) or were “persecuted” (ibid.; The Guardian 4 July 2012). An article published by the Parisian newspaper Le Monde states that, in 2010, President Muamar Qaddafi told Moroccan journalists that Amazighs [translation] “had disappeared and no longer existed” (29 Sept. 2011). Under Qaddafi’s regime, Tamazight, the language spoken by Amazighs, was officially banned (La Tribune 29 Sept. 2011; CNN 3 Sept. 2012; BBC 23 Dec. 2012). Moreover, that language could not be taught in schools (ibid.; CNN 3 Sept. 2012; L'aménagement linguistique dans le monde 19 Oct. 2012). Giving children Amazigh names was also prohibited (ibid.; UN 28 May 2012; CNN 3 Sept. 2012). The BBC notes that “[t]hose attempting to promote Amazigh culture, heritage and rights were persecuted, imprisoned and even killed” (23 Dec. 2011). Also, the London-based newspaper The Guardian notes that Amazigh leaders were arrested and “protesters [were] beaten” (4 July 2012).

Sources indicate that Amazighs played an “important” role in the rebellion against Qaddafi’s regime (RFI 10 Nov. 2011; BBC 23 Dec. 2011; Le Monde 29 Sept. 2011). Le Monde reports that, in August 2011, a large portion of the troops that attacked Tripoli were from Nefousa, a predominantly Amazigh region (ibid.). RFI also notes that Amazigh militia had [translation] “made possible the final attack on the capital of Tripoli” in August 2011 (10 Nov. 2011).

3. Situation of Amazighs since the Fall of Muamar Qaddafi 3.1 Political Situation of Amazighs
After Muammar Qaddafi was overthrown, the National Transitional Council (NTC) assumed power in Libya (BBC 9 Aug. 2012; International Crisis Group 14 Sept. 2012, note 2). International Crisis Group explains that, when it was established in Benghazi in February 2011, the NTC was considered the political face of the rebellion, but that it later became a legislative body charged with forming the transitional government (ibid.). Sources indicate that five Amazighs were members of the NTC (US 24 May 2012, 25; Reuters 25 Nov. 2011). In November 2011, a new transitional government was formed in Libya (Le Monde with AFP and Reuters 23 Nov. 2011; Jeune Afrique with AFP 23 Nov. 2011; Chaker and Ferkal Mar. 2012). None of the ministers of that government were of Amazigh origin (BBC 23 Dec. 2011; US 24 May 2012, 25; Reuters 25 Nov. 2011). In protest against the absence of ministers of Amazigh origin, the five Amazigh members of the NTC boycotted the swearing-in ceremony for the new government (ibid.; US 24 May 2012, 25). Furthermore, in its first press release, the Libyan Amazigh National Congress (Congrès national amazigh libyen, CNAL) declared that the composition of the government was “discriminatory” and emphasized its “complete and definitive rejection of any and all governmental or ministerial formations … that exclude the right of the Imaazighen to fully participate in politics” (CNAL 26 Sept. 2011). Moreover, sources indicate that, in November 2011, to express their discontent, Amazighs demonstrated by the thousands in the streets of Tripoli, as well as in Berber cities and villages (Chaker and Ferkal Mar. 2012), and by the hundreds in front of the office of the Prime Minister (Reuter 27 Nov. 2011). Information about the response of the Libyan authorities to the Amazigh protests could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

The NTC was replaced by the General National Congress, a new parliament elected in July 2012 (Le Temps 22 Aug. 2012; Reuters 9 Aug. 2012; IPU 24 Sept. 2012). Information indicating whether members of Amazigh origin were part of that new parliament could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

### 3.2 Conflicts Involving Amazighs

Sources indicate that, in March and April 2012, fighting erupted between Amazighs from the city of Zuwarana and the cities of Riqdalin (AP 3 Apr. 2012) and Al-Jamil (AFP 5 Apr. 2012; The Guardian 4 July 2012). According to The Guardian, the riots caused the deaths of 17 people in March (4 July 2012), while Radio France internationale reported at least 21 deaths in early April (4 Apr. 2012). The Associated Press (AP) puts the number of deaths at 22 in April; AP indicates 17 deaths on the Riqdalin side, and 5 deaths and some 40 wounded on the Zuwarana side (AP 3 Apr. 2012). Tensions were fuelled by the fact that the two groups were on different sides in the uprising against Colonel Qaddafi (ibid.; The Guardian 4 July 2012). International Crisis Group explains that, during the 2011 conflict, Qaddafi’s troops were stationed in Al-Jamil and Riqdalin, and they used those towns as bases to launch attacks on Zuwarana (International Crisis Group 14 Sept. 2012, 6). International Crisis Group noted that Al-Jamil and Riqdalin joined the rebellion after Tripoli was taken and Zuwarana armed groups started attacking them out of revenge, believing that Al-Jamil and Riqdalin were helping Gaddafi partisans flee the country (ibid.).

AP reported that Amazighs had accused fighters from Al-Jamil and Riqdalin of raping their women, looting their property, and blocking them from reaching their farms (3 Apr. 2012). The Guardian indicates that “smouldering disputes over land and smuggling routes” had also triggered the uprising (4 July 2012). According to International Crisis Group, Zuwarana claimed that Al-Jamil and Riqdalin residents were “comparatively recent migrants who had settled on and taken over Zuwarana lands” (14 Sept. 2012, 6). Information about the outcome of the clashes or whether Amazighs were involved in other conflicts since September 2011 could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

### 3.3 Cultural Situation of Amazighs

Amazighs are demanding that their language, Tamazight, share official language status along with Arabic (CNN 3 Sept. 2012; La Tribune 29 Sept. 2011; Le Monde 29 Sept. 2011). However, that status was not included in the draft constitution drawn up by the NTC (ibid.; RFI 10 Nov. 2011; Chaker and Ferkal Mar. 2012). Article 1 of the NTC’s interim Constitutional Declaration states the following:

[translation]

The State shall guarantee for non-Muslims the freedom of practising religious rights. Arabic is its official language while preserving the linguistic and cultural rights of Amazighs, Toubous, Tuaregs and all other components of Libyan society. (Libya 2011)

In its press release, the CNAL rejected Article 1 of the constitution, considering it [translation] “discriminatory,” and demanded that, like Arabic, the Amazighs’ language be recognized as an official language (26 Sept. 2011).

To voice their claims, Amazighs reportedly organized rallies to raise awareness in Tripoli (Le Monde 29 Sept. 2011). They also organized demonstrations (RFI 10 Nov. 2011; Chaker and Ferkal Mar. 2012) and public...
and media activities (ibid.). In September 2011, *Le Monde* reported that, according to an Amazigh activist from Yefren, Libyan authorities did not follow up on several protest letters from the Amazighs (29 Sept. 2011). Cited by *Le Monde*, an Amazigh activist, who was also an advisor to the NTC, explained the following:

[translation]

As a result of the very nature of Gaddafi’s regime, there is no civil society. It is extremely difficult to get across arguments in favour of the Amazighs’ language. The idea that Libyans can be different and united at the same time is very difficult to convey in a country that is emerging from decades of unanimist politics (*Le Monde* 29 Sept. 2011).

The United States Department of State’s *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2011* indicated that the new government has not restricted any cultural events and that Amazigh communities “were able for the first time in 42 years to use their language in public communications” (US 24 May 2012, 20). An article published by *Jeune Afrique* noted that [translation] “without Gaddafi, the Berber culture has been revived,” thanks to the appearance of radio broadcasts, newspapers, associations, museums, songs and Amazigh language courses (*Jeune Afrique avec AFP* 20 July 2011). CNN also reported the “rebirth” of the Amazigh language and culture in Libya after Qaddafi (3 Sept. 2012). According to some sources, schools have begun to teach in Tamazight (MRG 2012, 206; *Le Figaro* 20 July 2011).

4. Situation of the Libyan Tuaregs

Sources presented the Tuaregs as a distinct minority group in Libya (Libya 2011, Art. 1; MRG Aug. 2011). However, several other sources presented them as part of the Berber minority (RNW 7 Sept. 2011; Al Jazeera 10 Aug. 2012; UN 28 May 2012; *Le Monde* 12 Mar. 2012). The Tuaregs live mainly in south (UN 19 July 2012; RNW 7 Sept. 2011) and southwest Libya (Carnegie Endowment 26 Sept. 2012). According to Minority Rights Group International (MRG), there are 17,000 Libyan Tuaregs (Aug. 2011). However, other sources estimate that there are approximately 560,000 Tuaregs in Libya (*Jeune Afrique* with AFP 8 Sept. 2011; Reuters 25 Aug. 2011).

In a report published in August 2011, MRG indicates the following:

...Berbers who live in the south of Libya have not been granted Libyan citizenship and also face serious discrimination: they have no rights to decent housing, access to higher education, open a bank account, or get a passport.

Also, an article published by the UN Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN) states that the poverty level in Tuaregs communities is higher than that in other areas in Libya, that many Tuaregs cannot enrol their children in school, that they have no access to “the same services and opportunities as other Libyans” and that those who continue to study at the university level “are often denied access to good jobs” (UN 28 May 2012). According to IRIN, Tuareg families who have lived in Libya for 100 years have managed to obtain official identity documents, but those who settled in the country 40 or 50 years ago are stateless (ibid.). A former analyst for the International Crisis Group in Tripoli stated that, during a meeting organized by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, a think tank working to advance cooperation between nations and to promote active international engagement by the United States (Carnegie Endowment n.d.), Qaddafi’s regime had left many Tuaregs “without clear citizenship links to Tripoli” (ibid. 26 Sept. 2012). Tuaregs supported Qaddafi during the revolution (*Le Figaro* 6 Apr. 2012; Reuters 16 May 2012; RNW 7 Sept. 2011).

According to a government representative, clashes involving Tuaregs in Ghadames in May 2012 resulted in seven deaths and some twenty wounded (Al Jazeera 10 Aug. 2012; Reuters 16 May 2012). An official of the Ghadames local council stated that 13 people had been killed in the fighting, 12 of whom were Tuaregs (ibid.). A report on the UN Support Mission in Libya put the death toll at 10 and estimates that 1,600 Tuaregs had been displaced (UN 30 Aug. 2012, para. 14). The report also states that a Tuareg from Ghadames, who was a member of the NTC, had resigned in protest at the inaction of authorities to stop the fighting and address the grievances of the displaced Tuaregs (ibid.). According to Reuters, the fighting erupted over control of one of the main entrance gates to the city that is on a route often used for smuggling (Reuters 16 May 2012). Reuters also stated that “Libya’s interim rulers have struggled to impose their will on the vast country’s often fractious tribal groups since last year’s uprising against Muammar Gaddafi” (ibid.).

In April 2012, *Le Figaro* noted that 12 people were killed in clashes between Tuaregs combatants and members of the Zintan tribe near Ghat (*Le Figaro* 6 Apr. 2012). The conflict began when Zintans took a Tuareg hostage in order to reproach the Tuaregs for being [translation] “collaborators” because their fought alongside Qaddafi (ibid.). According to *Le Figaro*, the NTC government is [translation] “incapable of establishing its authority” (ibid.). Additional information on this conflict could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.
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.

References


Additional Sources Consulted

**Internet sites, including:** Actualites.fr; AfricaTime; Afrik.com; Afrol News; Amnesty International; Centre des études méditérranéennes et internationales; Concordia University – Montreal Institute for Genocide and Human Rights Studies; Congrès mondial amazigh; Courrier international; La-Croix.com; El Moudjahid; El Watan; Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network; Europe Online Magazine; European Strategic Intelligence and Security Center; European Union; Factiva; France24; Freedom House; GlobalSecurity.org; Inter Press Service; Institut de recherche sur le Maghreb contemporain; International Federation for Human Rights; International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies; The Jerusalem Post; Lawyers for Justice in Libya; Liberté; Los Angeles Times; Maghreb Émergent; Maghrès; Le Matin; Middle East Forum; Le Monde diplomatique; The National; The National Interest; The New York Review of Books; OpenDemocracy; Organisation de la presse africaine; Slate Afrique; Le Soir Échos; The Tripoli Post; Tunisia Live; United Nations – High Commissioner for Refugees, UN Development Programme, United Nations Support Mission in Libya; Voice of America; World Affairs.

Tips on how to use the search engine.