

Libya: Protect Civilians in Sirte Fighting Human Rights Watch 12 October 2011 Forces on both sides fighting in the Libyan city of Sirte should minimize harm to civilians and treat all prisoners humanely, Human Rights Watch said today. Fighters aligned with the National Transitional Council (NTC) have reached the center of the city, after attacking Sirte for more than three weeks.

NTC-aligned forces that capture pro-Gaddafi fighters and civilians suspected of actively supporting Gaddafi forces should promptly transfer their detainees to NTC facilities in Tripoli or Benghazi to minimize the danger of abuse from forces that were engaged in combat, Human Rights Watch said.

“Commanders on the ground in Sirte need to make sure that their forces protect civilians and allow them to flee the combat zone,” said Fred Abrahams, special advisor at Human Rights Watch. “All prisoners should be treated humanely and transferred to the NTC authorities who can better ensure their safety.”

The NTC political leadership has repeatedly called on fighters not to loot or commit revenge attacks, but forces on the ground do not always heed those calls, Human Rights Watch said. (...)

The laws of war require warring forces to attack only military targets. Attacks that do not discriminate between combatants and civilians, or that can be expected to cause harm to civilians disproportionate to the expected military gain, are unlawful. Forces must take all feasible steps to protect civilians under their control from attacks and avoid deploying in densely populated areas. (...)

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