



# 11 stories from 11 September

One year after the Derna tragedy,  
survivors tell their stories



**LCW**

LIBYA CRIMES WATCH  
رصد الجرائم في ليبيا

محامون من أجل العدالة في ليبيا

**LFJL**  
LAWYERS FOR JUSTICE IN LIBYA

## **Acknowledgements**

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This report is dedicated to the victims, survivors, families and communities affected by the eastern Libya floods. Their lives were irrevocably changed by this devastating disaster. We honour those who lost their lives during and after the disaster, and those who continue to fight for justice.

The full identity of interviewees has been withheld to protect the personal safety of those concerned about being targeted and attacked by state and non-state actors across the country.

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# Introduction

On the morning of 12 September 2023, some 24 hours after Storm Daniel triggered the collapse of the Bou Mansour and Belad dams in Wadi Derna, governing authorities in the east and the Government of National Unity (GNU) in the west announced conflicting numbers of deaths and missing persons. In reality, thousands of Derna residents were buried under the rubble or swept away into the Mediterranean sea.

Outside of Derna, many drowned in their homes when floods hit the coastal areas of Al-Bayadha, Batta, Talmitha, Al-Wardiya, Al-Haniya and Qasr Libya. The towns of Al-Marj, Al-Bayadha, Taknis, Al-Qubba, Sousa, Shahhat and Al-Bayda all suffered extensive material damage, as did the desert area of Al-Mukhayli, to the south of Derna and Benghazi.

In the immediate aftermath, the extensive damage and climbing death toll signaled to a catastrophic failure of the governing authorities in both eastern and western Libya to take the necessary measures to protect the population in the affected areas. One year on since the disaster, they are also yet to address the repercussions of their mistakes in managing humanitarian response operations, such as providing adequate shelter for the displaced in an orderly way, and respecting minimum standards of human rights. These shortcomings have negatively impacted the lives of many people and exacerbated the suffering of vulnerable groups, including the displaced, families of the missing and the dead, and those detained for expressing their opinions surrounding the disaster. Moreover, the authorities have deliberately neglected and discriminated against certain groups in the aftermath, notably Libyan women with non-Libyan husbands, journalists, Palestinian residents of Libya, humanitarian workers and civil society activists.

This report presents the testimonies of survivors who bore the brunt of the catastrophe in both Derna and the surrounding regions due to the collapse of the dams and the damage to the Jebel Akhdar coast. Their testimonies demonstrate that the governing authorities failed to respond to the disaster and provide adequate and appropriate protection and relief in a timely manner. Their experiences also show that the authorities have since repeatedly failed to identify the basic needs of those impacted, and have impeded the delivery of aid in ways that have exacerbated the suffering of survivors.

Those affected also describe how beneficiaries have not been involved in the planning and management of the recovery and reconstruction programme, and how authorities have failed to communicate on the matter effectively, leading to a lack of trust in the government and the judiciary, and a clear absence of justice and accountability.

The report also concludes that the authorities in the east and GNU in the west subsequently spent the financial resources allocated for reparations and compensation in an unfair and nontransparent manner, without oversight or follow-up, leading to

alleged widespread corruption and the channelling of financial aid to people who were not affected by the disaster.

The 11 testimonies in this report relate the ordeals survivors continue to suffer to this day.

From the outset, victims of this disaster have been struggling to obtain their rights: the right to know the fate of their missing relatives, the right to decent and adequate housing, the right to education, the right to physical and mental health, the right to remedy, reparation and compensation, the right to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and freedom of the press, the right of access to justice, and the right to equality and non-discrimination between disaster victims. The denial of these rights are human rights violations that contravene Article 14 of the Libyan Constitutional Declaration and Articles 9 and 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The testimonies also show that the authorities have failed to provide social and economic support to the families of the missing, violating their rights under the Libyan Social Security Law No. 13 of 1980. The population's right to equality and non-discrimination was also violated, particularly in the distribution of aid and the treatment of vulnerable groups, contravening Article 2 of the Universal Declaration and Article 26 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. These violations reflect the eastern authorities' and GNU's failure to fulfil their legal and constitutional obligations to protect human rights and ensure justice and equality.

The report calls on the both governing authorities to respect their constitutional and international obligations, which require that they treat those affected through a humanitarian and human rights framework that considers their exceptional position as vulnerable groups. The report also emphasises the importance of international monitoring of victims of such disasters and their humanitarian situation, especially regarding mechanisms of accountability and redress for measures taken by the authorities prior to and during the disaster. Finally, the stories also highlight the consequences of arbitrary measures taken against residents, activists, journalists, and humanitarian workers following the disaster.

# Methodology

Given the human impact of the tragedy that hit Derna and the surrounding region, this report adopts a qualitative approach that emphasises the personal experiences of the survivors. The report relies entirely on their testimonies. They recount their suffering and that of their families in extensive detail, based on their own perspectives and priorities.

The testimonies were collected by Libya Crimes Watch (LCW) and Lawyers for Justice in Libya (LFJL), who monitored and observed the violations that took place over the year following the disaster. Researchers conducted multiple interviews through secure means with 11 victims, witnesses, and other affected people. Each case was selected to highlight a number of key human rights violations, without overlooking other violations that took place in parallel. Several violations against those affected by Storm Daniel and the dam collapses have been identified, which warrant particular coverage due to their gravity and the lack of attention they have received to date, despite the severe, ongoing, and far-reaching effects on survivors and their families.

The researchers took a holistic approach, interviewing survivors and affected communities in Derna city and the many impacted surrounding areas. The interviews are with four men and seven women from different socio-economic and educational backgrounds.

The testimonies were collected by experienced human rights documenters. They took the psychological sensitivities of the victims into careful consideration, respecting their privacy and taking measures to protect their confidentiality. The interviewees' names have been changed to avoid exposing them to harm. The risks they might face were also assessed and, with their agreement, any details in the testimonies that may affect their security or the safety of their families were excluded. Survivors were also given safe channels through which to speak freely about their experiences, and the researchers applied legal standards for taking testimonies, including by obtaining their informed consent to use their stories in this report for the purposes of advocacy.

In addition to the victims' stories, the report also drew on field and open-source research including reports from relief and human rights organisations, United Nations (UN) agencies, media reports, and relevant official statements.

During the preparation of the report and interviews, the research team faced many challenges, including tight security restrictions in the areas where the victims were located and difficulties in communicating with survivors—either due to geographical distance, as most of the victims had been internally displaced to various locations, or due to electricity cuts and poor internet service in Libya. Some interviewees lacked communication devices due to their financial situations. The researchers overcame this by communicating with them through other devices belonging to victims' acquaintances. The psychological state of the victims also affected their ability to provide full testimonies. The researchers allowed them time to rest and reflect, returning on subsequent days to complete their testimonies.

# Victims' stories of human rights violations

## Intissar



**Being displaced by a humanitarian disaster means you have nothing! You go round and round in circles, wondering, where will relief come from? ”**

Intissar, a mother of four who survived the disaster with her family, describes her tortuous search for somewhere to live.

“I’m from Al-Jubaila, in the centre of Derna. Everything in the neighbourhood collapsed because of the flood, which washed away more than a quarter of the city. The flood turned my life and my family’s lives upside down. I can’t describe what we suffered as a result of being suddenly displaced and losing everything. We haven’t had any rest or comfort since 11 September.

I’m not from a rich family in Derna, I’m middle class. After I got married, my husband and I rented an apartment and had four children. I worked as a teacher in Derna. That’s where my memories are, of my childhood, my parents, my neighbours and my students. Of course, I’m in the same situation as everyone else who was affected. I accept my fate. Actually, my situation is better than that of others, as I survived with my children. But we are all suffering psychologically. I can’t describe how I feel about what happened. It’s a nightmare, which began when the dams burst and continues today, because of the government’s incompetence in dealing with our situation. Shouldn’t the Libyan state and the authorities provide alternative housing for those affected? From my experience of losing my housing, all I can see is that everything they did just made things worse.

The house we were living in was completely destroyed. I was living with my family on the second floor of a small two-story building. On the night of the disaster, we were surprised by the rain, but the water level in the dam wasn’t as high as usual. The sight of the flood was terrifying. Within seconds, the water reached the second floor, then three of the walls of our house collapsed. We managed to survive, but the house was destroyed. Even our furniture and belongings were washed away with the torrent. The house was no longer habitable.

Of course, in the early hours we were scrambling to find a safe place. The first choice was my family home which is in a less-affected part of the city. We stayed there for two weeks, but it was cramped, and my husband decided to look for an alternative, even if it meant we had to rent. We had heard from people that the government would provide alternative housing for those who lost their homes.

We moved to Benghazi to be close to the census and statistics authorities. But as soon as we arrived, we found that all the rental properties were occupied due to the large number of displaced people. No one told us where to go, so we stayed in our car near a mosque. Good people gave us the *khilwa* of the mosque (the area for memorising the Quran). We had no choice but to stay there for a week.

Then we were told that chalets at Benghazi's Al-Manqar Resort had been made available for displaced people from Derna. It's a privately owned tourist resort that was opened to displaced people for free. The Displaced Persons Committee gave us a small chalet there. But they evicted us after two months, on the request of the owners, without providing any alternative.

We then managed to find an apartment for rent in a neighbourhood in central Benghazi, which is where we're still living now. It's unhygienic and only has two small rooms, so it's not suitable for a family of our size; it's old and located in a crowded, working-class neighbourhood, and the rent is high given the state of it.

Just before we rented the flat in Benghazi—so two full months after the disaster—was the first time we had any contact with the government's Inventory Committee. All they did was collect our information. Since then, no government agency has paid any attention to our situation as Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) without any financial resources.

What they did with the data, and when they intend to use it to help us, I don't know. Being displaced by a humanitarian disaster means that you have nothing, and unless some official body intervenes, you go round and round in circles wondering, where where will relief come from? Who will put a roof over me and my four children? How will I find work, far away from my hometown? Will I return to Derna? How?

But we are getting no response, except from a few kind people, and from God.

In April 2024, UN officials came, I don't know from which agency, maybe the refugee agency (UNHCR). They took my data and I gave them my phone number. They told me they would provide a solution, either in the form of money for rent, or furniture for the house. They offered to help us, then they left and never came back. I tried to contact them again and again, but so far it's been in vain.

I go on my own to the offices of the relevant ministries. Nobody cares about us or contacts us. The government doesn't communicate with us; we try to find things out from other disaster victims. No-one from the authorities tells us about our rights or even answers our calls and inquiries. Even government staff we visit don't give us clear information.

After a long wait, the Reconstruction Committee of the Libyan Arab Armed Forces (LAAF) gave us 25,000 Libyan dinars (approx. 5,000 USD) as a one-off rental allowance. I don't know how this amount was calculated. What can we do with that? Shouldn't we get a fixed, ongoing monthly rent allowance until we can go back to

work? This amount isn't enough to meet our needs. There are things in life that are as important as housing. We lost all our clothes, money and the documents we need to withdraw money, such as our chequebook, as well as many other essentials. Now we need to pay for transportation for our children to go to school.

We had to pay for our expenses out of the meagre rental allowance we were given. What's more, if you want to rent a house, you're required to pay three to six months' rent in advance. The rent in Benghazi is also very high compared to other cities. But imagine, the rent in Benghazi right now is lower than it is in Derna. The prices in Derna went crazy after 11 September. So we accepted where we are as a temporary solution, even though it's not fair.

Of course, they paid higher compensation to some displaced people who lost their properties, but even that was low. Nobody from the government has given any explanation of how the compensation was calculated and no-one knows anything about the timeframe for compensation or what will happen to our right to housing later on. All we have are arbitrary measures that humiliate us. It feels like you're asking for too much and begging for the government's sympathy.

I think Derna residents who own real estate and destroyed houses are going to be in a better situation than renters like me. When you're a tenant, you don't have ownership documents. Owners can claim compensation for their homes, but what about tenants? How can simple citizens prove their right to housing from the state, given that we all know that the data of the inventory committees is manipulated—especially as Libya keeps on facing new waves of displacement, either because of wars or natural disasters.

I don't think I can return to Derna, firstly because everything there is so expensive, and because of the blatant exploitation of the disaster victims and their need to stay in Derna, but also because of my current psychological state and that of my family.

How can I go back to Derna after losing so many neighbours, family and friends? We can't bear to see it after the devastation, even after reconstruction.

I don't think the government will give us housing. We're seeing difficulties even before we receive any compensation. For example, we're displaced in Benghazi now, so it's difficult to access copies of our personal documents from the civil registry and civil status office in Derna, as we have to travel to Derna to obtain any documents. After the disaster, a civil registry office was opened in Benghazi for displaced people in Derna, but it was open for a short time and then shut. On top of all that, there's the distance, the cost of transportation, and the fact it's impossible to find a place to stay when you get to Derna.

We want the Libyan government to find appropriate solutions for us as IDPs in general, either by paying us an ongoing rent or providing us with permanent housing, as we're a large Libyan family and we've been completely displaced.

But today, we have nothing but prayers. We want somewhere stable to live, because without that, our children will suffer and won't feel safe. They're suffering psychologically because of what they experienced during the flood and being displaced afterwards, but also because they can't integrate, and are constantly desiring the basics of life.

Nobody in Derna understands what has been happening for the past year, all we have is the rumours and news shared within the community; we don't know if any of that information is true. Things are moving quickly in the city of Derna, there are companies present, we can see in person or on social media that renovation and reconstruction are underway, but what we don't understand is who will be given these houses that are being built? What's the mechanism they will use to re-house people who don't own property? Will residents of the city have priority, or will those houses go to others?"

The victims suffered the destruction and damage to their homes from floods, and the authorities failed to provide adequate shelter for them. As a result, many remain without permanent housing and have been displaced multiple times. This constitutes a violation of the **right to adequate housing**, as guaranteed by Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Article 11 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

## Abdullah



**I'm really scared I'll be arrested. The people responsible for rebuilding Derna are the same people in charge of the LAAF. How can it be safe to lodge a complaint against the Derna Reconstruction Fund when it's led by Belqassem, the son of Khalifa Haftar?** ”

Abdullah is full of despair and disappointment at the Libyan authorities, due to the fear and intimidation he has faced while trying to claim fair compensation for the loss of his house.

"I've been living in Libya for 60 years, but the last months have taken decades from me. The stress of fleeing your home isn't a burden any citizen should have to shoulder alone.

Even now, I don't understand what the government's responsibilities are towards me, as a refugee in my own country. No-one has contacted me to explain how they can help me, or even just to explain how I should cope by myself. Before I was displaced, I was a state employee only supporting my immediate family. Now I'm sheltering and caring for my extended family too.

After the floods, we were inundated with siblings and cousins whose houses had been destroyed when the dam burst. Suddenly, I was head of a family of 11 survivors. My house is extremely close to Wadi Derna, separated by a few metres. Try to imagine, I lost everything of value in our lives in one fell swoop. I had an apartment



building with commercial units on the ground floor. The deluge swept away my car, all my furniture and the last money I had at home.

It was impossible to take in the scale of the devastation at first. Everything disappeared in the floods, the water had taken away my loved ones. Neighbours, friends and relatives, swept down the river and into the sea. Even the documents that prove me and my family exist were gone.

So we fled to a safer city in western Libya, but it was still impossible to find refuge, clothes and food. Everything was so expensive, and I couldn't decide what was the priority to buy. When you're on the street, everything is essential, and no one helps you make a plan of action. I used to be a man of means, bringing home 3,000 Libyan dinars (approx. 600 USD) a month for me and my family. I never thought I would become homeless, without a place to rest our heads or a source of income.

I'm in endless discussions with my wife and children, trying to work out what we can do. Everyone asks each other questions no one knows the answer to. Will we stay here? When will we ever get back to Derna? How can we rebuild our house? Will we get to go back to school and see our friends? What will our lives there really look like if we start from scratch?

I'm filled with dread every month when the rent is due. I pay it all on my own. I've moved to a completely new city and I'm having to work day and night as a taxi driver. No-one wants to hire me for anything else, and I can't even cover medical costs for my son who has special needs. I feel like a stranger in my own country.

We registered as displaced people in a city in western Libya and I was given a document confirming our status as survivors of the disaster. But it meant nothing, not a single person contacted us, and we received no help whatsoever, beyond the piecemeal efforts of a few non-governmental organisations (NGOs) that have nothing to do with the state. We met some people who cared a great deal and offered us help, but from the government, there was very little. They just registered my name on a list to get a rental allowance, but nothing came of it. Along with five other families from Derna, we've still received nothing, even though we fulfil all the criteria and provided all the documentation they requested. They know everything about us now, and still we've received nothing.

It affects us all, my wife and my children, to be cast aside like this. Especially as we miss Derna so much. How else could I feel? I'm unable to provide for my family, and I'm so disillusioned by the failure of any Libyan government to help us. I live the life of an insomniac these days, living in a bad dream. In the blink of an eye we lost everything, including a part of ourselves. And in that lowest moment, neither of the two Libyan governments could offer us the most basic necessities or give us a sense of dignity. Even to this day, we feel that betrayal deeply in our family. I just want to be able to provide for their daily needs, but right now that seems a distant dream.

Many, many refugees like me are suffering in western Libya. Most people have not received any meaningful support, just sporadic food parcels and baby formula. When we speak to local authorities, we're told that it's a central government issue, and that they don't have the resources to help us, especially when it comes to accommodation.

One charity gave us enough food for 11 people for a week perhaps, as well as blankets and cleaning supplies. This happened twice, with a month in between when we had to fend for ourselves. Another organisation provided bedding and covers, but there weren't enough to go around. There wasn't anything for women's health or hygiene, even after such a traumatic event. As for healthcare, the story was the same. No emergency medicine, medication or even painkillers. My son has very complex needs, and I've had to cover the bills entirely by myself.

And now, the further we get from the disaster, the less assistance comes from charities. They've all run out of money and resources. The last time we received anything was in November last year. There are many parts of the government that should have stepped up—the Ministry of Endowments and Islamic Affairs, to name just one.

At some point, I started to hear about plans to rebuild Derna. I couldn't quite believe it. People were talking about houses and roads being rebuilt, using compensation provided to homeowners. But no one said anything to me, even though I had lost everything. I don't have any concrete information about the compensation, or who I should talk to. No matter how many people I visit, or ministries I write to, the only response I get is that they can't help.

People say that the face of Derna has changed entirely. The disaster cut off electricity, gas and petrol, and now traders have complete control of the city, setting prices without any control or oversight. Sewers and sanitation are completely blocked by the mud and silt washed into the drains in nearly every neighbourhood of the city. Still, when I make enquiries about compensation programmes, I hear, 'we don't have any schemes of that kind.'

I visited the relief committee several times. They took my family's details without explanation and I filled in forms explaining our essential needs. Eventually they contacted me to go and collect some basic support and materials, but that was that. Other times, I signed up to lists to support refugees from Derna and discovered that our family name had been removed, along with others, for no reason. I felt so betrayed by the government, and I've lost my trust in it. I stopped making any enquiries, as it seemed pointless.

I asked people about the street we used to live on. They told me that it had been wiped off the face of the earth, as the reconstruction project had decided to widen the river's path. Apparently, even residents of houses that were still habitable had been forced to leave.

They were given 24 hours to get out, and 100,000 Libyan dinars (approx. 20,000 USD), even though their houses were worth far more. So even when you do receive compensation, it's not meaningful. You can't buy another home to live in. They should understand that our homes were in the heart of the city, and were worth more than other houses, and that even if compensation can replace a building, the land should stay in the hands of its rightful owners. But, of course, they took the land and demolished all the houses that were left. No explanation, nothing.

We don't know what might happen to us, or if we'll ever see any justice. I don't know what can excuse the government's abject failure to be transparent about compensation for damages. It's just clear and basic corruption, both at the time of the disaster and now. It seems clear to me that the government is falsely inflating the costs of reconstruction. Alongside corruption, there is also a great deal of incompetence. The state can't manage information and statistics. There is widespread mismanagement of our data, as Libya's institutions are so weak.

I'm too scared to file a formal complaint to obtain compensation because it could put me and my family in real danger. The fear is tangible. I've seen cases where people have been harassed or arrested for that. Personally, I'm not going to lodge a complaint for now. I'm miles from my hometown and I don't know how to do it without risking my family's safety. I can't hire a lawyer, because I just don't have the money to pay for it.

I'm really scared I'll be arrested. The people responsible for rebuilding Derna are the same people in charge of the LAAF. How can it be safe to lodge a complaint against the Derna Reconstruction Fund when it's led by Belqassem, the son of Khalifa Haftar?"

The victims faced significant difficulties in obtaining fair compensation for their losses, with compensation either being insufficient or delayed, and corruption and mismanagement affecting the process. This is a violation of the **right to an effective remedy**, as stipulated in Article 8 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Principle 9 of the UN Basic Principles on Remedy and Reparation. Their **right to access justice** was violated under Article 10 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and Article 2(3) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which requires effective remedies for those whose rights have been violated. In this case, the victims were wronged twice: first by the disaster that harmed them, and second by the legal system that failed to deliver justice.

## Tahani



**I don't see any solutions. We know that the government and the ministries aren't capable of dealing with any crisis, but especially the education crisis. We don't believe they even want to. If they really want to resolve the situation, why hasn't any official body come out and told us what they're doing? ”**

Tahani talks of the obstacles she has faced in registering her children at school in Derna following Storm Daniel.

“I worked for many years in Derna as a teacher. I have a family with four children: three in primary and preparatory schools, and one in university. I never thought I would see my children suffer like they are in the situation we're in today. I was renting in the Al-Jubaila neighbourhood in central Derna. Rainwater came into our house just before the dams burst. Thank God we survived, but we had to flee to the other side of the city. I later found out that the flood, which completely destroyed the Wadi area, swept away many of my loved ones and fellow teachers who worked with me at school.

The flood washed away nine schools in Derna, along with their archives and students' documents, which means that hundreds of students need to re-register in other areas, with new documents. Like everyone else in Derna, all my family's documents were lost in the flood. We didn't realise the impact that would have until we started asking about going back to school. I started teaching again about a month after the disaster, at the request of teachers and parents, to try to alleviate the students' psychological suffering. Then I was informed that the new school near where we were living would allow for interim solutions until new procedures could be put in place. My son's registration at university was delayed for more than two months, until the Derna civil registry, which had been closed due to the damage, was reopened.

I was lucky enough to be able to obtain some ID documents, such as birth certificates. The Ministry of Education has a digital system containing the data of all school students in Libya. This helped me re-register my children in the lower grades, because their information was already in the system of the Department of Evaluation and Grading at the Ministry of Education. But there were no similar, centralised digital systems for university education and for children entering their first school year. Some members of my family were displaced to other cities such as Benghazi, Tobruk and Misrata, and they told me they hadn't been able to register their children through the system because the staff in charge of the digital archive weren't properly trained in dealing with data, and couldn't locate the names and details of students.

It took longer to register displaced people in other areas. The government thought it had addressed the students' problems, because the Derna Education Supervision Directorate issued instructions that students would be registered at the nearest school to their current place of residence. However, overcrowding is severe at most of these schools. Classes have up to 45 students, while the average in normal circumstances should range from 25 to 30.

What made it worse was the fact that secondary students study in the morning and elementary students in the afternoon, in the same building, meaning that the buildings of one school are expected to handle the capacity of three. When we raised the issue of overcrowding, the school administrations responded that they couldn't refuse surplus students by instruction of the Ministry of Education which hasn't provided solutions to the overcrowding, but insists we accept more.

Some people are now trying to convince us that the government is making efforts to deal with these issues, but this information only comes through the management of the schools where we work. We have yet to see a needs assessment, for example, or a team from the ministry coming to see the number of students in each school and what they're lacking. I know that some schools are being refurbished, and maybe in the coming months they will be ready, but that information isn't clearly communicated to us by any government agency.

We're kept in a state of confusion, and we don't even know if the government is still looking for solutions for the education sector. There are many things that really require the government to play its part, but they don't seem to be getting any attention from the ministry. For example, what about the shortage of teachers and human resources needed for the educational process? We lost a lot of human resources after the disaster. There were teachers, men and women, who died, and others are traumatised and can no longer work. Many teachers left their jobs, and as a teacher myself, I can see with my own eyes the clear signs of depression among my colleagues.

Daily, my fellow teachers break down crying over their colleagues or the loss of their children or husbands who died in the flooding. The pupils, including one of my daughters, are constantly having crying fits at school or at home, mourning the loss of their loved ones. It's very important to pay attention to the effects of trauma on their learning capacity, because the levels of concentration, both among students and teachers, has decreased significantly. Psychological support offices and school social workers are doing their best to monitor students, but they're dealing with a huge number of urgent cases that need deeper interventions from experienced, specialised professionals. That said, the social support they've provided has had a tangible, positive impact, given their lack of resources. Social workers are doing their best to provide simple psychological support to students at the preparatory and secondary levels, and to female teachers.

There are also other, more urgent problems that the authorities should deal with. For example, there are two schools in Derna that are fit for study, but they've been converted into housing for workers fixing the roads and buildings, and for cleaners. Since there are so many of them, they sleep in the classrooms. Is that reasonable? Is that part of the plan for reconstructing Derna? Shouldn't the state find somewhere else for the workers? Shouldn't the priority be to use these schools for students, instead of putting them in overcrowded buildings?

As for the government's provision of curricula, textbooks are available. But there is a severe shortage of computers and printers, which we use to photocopy things. Even the tools that teachers use, such as chalk, calligraphy, erasers and other tools are scarce. I don't know if the government is working with international organisations, but UNICEF and the Libyan Red Crescent have provided some school supplies to students, such as backpacks and stationery. Maybe there are other organisations that I don't know about, but all the aid has come from NGOs, not from the government.

I don't see any solutions. We know that the government and the ministries aren't capable of dealing with any crisis, but this is particularly true of the education crisis. We don't believe they even want to. If they really wanted to resolve the situation, why hasn't any official body come out and told us what they're doing?"

Children were unable to return to school due to the destruction of educational facilities and a lack of government support in rehabilitating these institutions. Overcrowding in the remaining schools further hindered their access to adequate education. This constitutes a violation of the **right to education**, as guaranteed by Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Article 13 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. The children's right to adequate psychological and social development was violated, as guaranteed by Article 27 of the Convention of the Rights of the Child.

## Azza

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**Can you imagine the life of my daughter if I'd been killed by the flood? She'd be an orphan, whose mother was Libyan but would have no right to an inheritance. My status isn't like other Libyan women. I only get an allowance for myself; my children aren't covered by the social security given to Libyan women married to foreigners. ”**

Azza addresses the Libyan government about her only surviving child, who doesn't have Libyan citizenship.

“We were living in Derna as a family of five: myself, my husband and my three children. I'm Libyan, but I'm married to an Egyptian citizen born in Derna. I never expected that the discrimination against me would continue even after I became a widow, when my husband died in the Derna disaster.

I'm not alone, there are 10 Libyan women in Derna who were married to foreigners and who lost their husbands and sons in the floods. My husband and two of my sons died after they were swept away, along with the house. I ended up alone looking after my 12-year-old daughter. Our home in central Derna was old and dilapidated; we had rented it for years because my husband isn't allowed to own land or property in Libya. It was always hard for him and my sons to find work, as they're foreigners. Over the years, we got used to discrimination whenever we had to deal with the government for anything regarding my husband and my sons.

When the flood happened, I found myself on the roof of a car with my daughter. Everybody else's bodies were washed away. My husband and children were missing for about 60 days. Not knowing what had happened was torture.

I finally found out that people had recovered their bodies, two or three days after the disaster, and they had been buried after some of our neighbours recognised them. But I faced discrimination even in the process of documenting their deaths. At first, the court refused to give me a death certificate, as they were classified as missing foreigners. Then we found neighbours who were witnesses, who had found them and buried them. I don't know how the authorities agreed to bury people without establishing their identities first, but at least in my case there were witnesses. I had to take the witnesses to support and testify for my case, but the authorities still refused to give me death certificates, saying that because half of Derna is missing, they couldn't issue death certificates for so many people. But that didn't stop them issuing death certificates for Libyans.

All this was terrible for my psychological state. Ever since I married a foreigner, I had been struggling to guarantee my children's rights, so imagine my state now as I with the trauma from the flood, as well as fighting for my daughter's rights.

Do you know what I saw? After people rescued me from the flood zone, I remember snippets of crying, wailing, and people's bodies. When your loved ones go missing, you keep wondering if you'll find them at some point. The survivors fled to different areas and were divided among lots of hospitals and displacement centres. It was impossible to track them. I kept reading lists of survivors that people would put up. I'd see them online, as I was searching for hope, but most of the lists only had Libyan names on them.

For two months, this situation meant that I couldn't think straight. I didn't know whether to prioritise looking after my little daughter and finding enough money to rent a house, or whether to look for my missing husband and children. I didn't know where to start.

The court and the prosecution don't work properly, and don't help the families of missing persons and victims in the right way. Libyan women married to Libyans are luckier; the law gives them the advantage as their children are Libyan citizens, but the children of Libyan women married to foreigners don't have as many rights. There's also a lot of social discrimination which affects the speed of responses from people working at state institutions, as if they don't realise that the mother in these cases is Libyan.

I went many times to the Foreigners' Affairs Section of the Passports and Nationality Department, but they told me they had no answers to the question of birth certificates, and that basic procedural documents for children of foreigners weren't available because the archives were lost in the flood. There's clear racism against Libyan

women who are married to foreigners, to the point that the staff are violent and disrespectful towards us. They should make it easy for me to get a birth certificate proving that I have a daughter, so that I can put her on my family file now that her father has died. But they say that this isn't possible now and tell me to go to the Egyptian embassy or consulate to get proof. I don't have a marriage certificate now, nor a birth certificate, and instead of getting replacements from the civil registry as a Libyan, I'm told to go to the Egyptian embassy. I have to get around by taxi, even within Derna, and the nearest Egyptian consulate is in Benghazi. I only have my daughter, and I can't travel long distances. The financial burden of travelling is too much. I tried to call the consulate and they didn't respond.

Now my daughter is 12 years old, but in four years she'll have to apply for residency in Libya. Time is passing quickly and I'll have to move fast to prove that she's my descendant. It's as if she doesn't belong in this country where she's lived with her Libyan mother since she was born. She won't be able to find a job to help me either, because the state treats Libyan women's children as foreigners who can only work under certain conditions and in specific sectors.

Thank God I survived the floods. Can you imagine my daughter's life if I'd been killed? She'd be an orphan with no right to an inheritance. That's right—my daughter can't inherit my property in Libya.

My status isn't like other Libyan women. I only receive a benefits for myself; my children aren't covered by the social security given to Libyan women married to foreigners. In the future, we'll have to pay an annual fee to renew my daughter's residency. How will I manage that? Will there be any consideration for the fact I'm a Libyan widow who has lost everything and has nothing in this world but her daughter?

Some people tried to file a complaint with the Solicitor General's office. Do you know what the response was? That the constitution doesn't guarantee the rights of children of foreigners, even if the mother is a citizen. They always cite national security and preserving Libya's demographic make-up, but here in Derna we're seeing demographic changes anyway, as people are forced to leave their home city and live in other places where they have no social ties.

My main problem is that my daughter doesn't have a national number. I can perhaps understand the current arbitrary policies directed against Libyan women married to foreigners, but what about widows and divorced women with children? Maybe now it seems less difficult because my daughter can go to public schools for a basic education, but time is passing quickly. Soon she'll graduate. She's already lost her father and has no siblings. What will her life be like? Will I live to see my daughter find stability, like other Libyans?

After we were evacuated, I had no choice but to go to my father's house in the Shiha neighbourhood of Derna. When I arrived that terrible night, I found out that my sister's house had also been destroyed by the flooding and the dam collapse, and that she had moved to my father's house as well. So we're living in the small family home that also houses my brother, my sister and their families. It's very difficult, because the house doesn't have enough space for that many people—can you imagine 11 of us living in three small rooms?

I've spent ages looking for a place to rent at an affordable price. I'm starting to get frustrated by the lack of space. I need a small house for me and my daughter, but rents in Derna have hit 1,500 Libyan dinars per month (approx. 300 USD), and they ask for three months up front. I don't have that money.

Not a single government official has met me since the disaster. I don't think they care much about the wives of foreigners. As far as I know, they don't meet anyone. I don't know where to go to ask about rent assistance or ask for help from the government. I'm not from a well-off family, but it's really hard to have to beg people for favours or money.

My demand is very simple: I want the state to give me clear solutions, as a citizen. I went more than once to the Reconstruction Committee set up by the General Command of the LAAF and the Libyan government. I went to the real estate bank and to other committees set up to deal with those affected by the disaster. I submitted requests to all of them and filled out several forms proving that I have no housing and no one to provide for me and my daughter. I haven't had an answer.

This is the worst feeling you can have as a victim, that your government doesn't care about you and that you have to beg for financial support, as if you were destitute. My salary isn't enough to cover my monthly rent and other basic needs. When we and other affected people go to any official body thinking that they will help us, all we find is humiliating treatment, neglect and total chaos.

I tried twice to meet high-ranking officials in Derna, but I was unsuccessful. There are all sorts of obstacles, and you need connections, nepotism and even bribes just to be able to meet them. After struggling for months, I received a rent allowance of 20,000 Libyan dinars (approx. 4,000 USD), in the form of a cheque that I deposited in my account. I don't know how the compensation committees expect that amount to cover everything we need.

When you're displaced and your child is a foreigner, your life becomes all about trying to find accurate information. One woman who was also affected by the disaster told me there was an electronic payment card called the 'Sanad,' issued by the Libyan Relief Authority and distributed to Derna victims, but I didn't receive one because I was too late hearing about it. The cards were only valid for eight days, and if you don't activate them, you can't withdraw money—as happened to me.

Now I'm hearing that another card will be issued in the coming period, but no one knows who's behind these cards—state authorities or international organisations. The Sanad cards were only disbursed once after the disaster, just before Ramadan. There's no financial support for the basics as there was before. The Ministry of Health distributed coupons worth 600 Libyan dinars (approx. 125 USD) to buy food from shops in Derna, and I did manage to get those, but that's all the assistance we've received.

Some of these solutions may be helpful, but they are temporary and chaotic. No government is publishing information or clarifying things on social media. I've visited the same government agencies six times trying to get clear answers, to no avail. What good to us is a one-off payout?

When I received the 20,000 Libyan dinars, I bought clothes for myself and my daughter, a mobile phone and some other necessities, and I helped my sister, who didn't

receive a housing allowance like me. I also had to pay for a medical examination and treatment; I needed to have my head X-rayed because I had a bruise when our house collapsed which caused me problems and headaches. With all these expenses, I used up most of the money, even though I'm not even renting. I don't understand how Derna victims who are renting are going to benefit from a small amount of money that's only enough to buy simple things, all of which are equally essential.

Libyan women married to foreigners faced discrimination in accessing aid, inheritance, and other rights, which exacerbated their vulnerability after the disaster. This is a violation of the **right to equality and non-discrimination**, as guaranteed by Article 2 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Article 26 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Furthermore, the **right to fair treatment** before the law was violated, as guaranteed by Article 7 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Article 16 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women also emphasises the need for women to have equal rights with men in marriage and to protect their rights in cases of divorce, inheritance, and family management.

## Amjad



**We were all a bit reluctant to talk about our needs after the disaster, given the losses in Derna were so clear from the horrifying videos on social media. Some people here on the coast lost more than some Derna residents, but we didn't say anything, because of the sheer scale of casualties there.**

Amjad described the experiences of inhabitants of the Jebel Akhdar coast.

"I'm a civil society activist and a government employee. Our region extends from al-Marj to the borders of the Jebel Akhdar municipality, about 160 kilometres (100 miles) west of Derna.

The coastline, which is an agricultural region, was struck by heavy rain the day before the Derna dam broke. Floods swept down all areas of that coast, including Al-Bayadha, Batta, Talmitha, Al-Wardiya, Al-Haniya and Qasr Libya.

I remember it well: the rain began on 10 September at 3:35 a.m. and continued for more than 24 hours, accompanied by a northeast wind. There were cars passing on the highway between al-Bayda, al-Marj and Benghazi that were washed away,

because the roads were completely degraded and most of them didn't have storm drains. Most of the victims trapped in their cars were from not from the area, and were missing for a while before their bodies were found far down the valley, in places that are really hard to reach by car.

Our area suffered massive material damage. Our terrain is often inaccessible and there are lots of mountains and valleys facing the sea. Rainwater got into houses across Jebel Akhdar, especially those in low, exposed places, like mine. About 100 houses were either partially damaged or totally destroyed in the Batta area alone. The only hospital in our area was completely flooded and all the equipment was damaged. It was completely out of action during the floods and it's still being repaired to this day.

I do feel luckier than many people in my neighbourhood because my house was only partially damaged. There was only moderate damage to the building and its foundations, but 80 per cent of our furniture is unusable and I'll have to buy a whole new set now. The crops on my farm were also ruined. I had to relocate to another house in the same area, until I can repair my home and clean it myself—at my own expense.

Thank God, family and tribal ties are strong in the rural areas, and we look out for each other. Most displaced families found somewhere to stay nearby, as the water and debris stopped anyone using the roads leading elsewhere. Most of the debris removal campaigns were carried out by local residents, people like me, rather than by specialised disaster management teams.

Help arrived from the army on the first night, and there were even soldiers who died during the rescue and search operations. But hours after the news of the collapse of the Derna dams, all the rescue teams got deployed there, and we had to search for missing people along the coastline on our own.

The stench of bodies, livestock and sheep that were washed away by the floods in the area was horrific. We were all afraid that diseases and viruses would spread. We felt neglected by the authorities. They put all their focus on Derna when the two dams collapsed without looking at the rainfall in the other affected areas. So did the media.

We were all a bit reluctant to talk about our needs after the disaster. It was really hard to demand our rights and call for reconstruction and rebuilding the roads, given the losses in Derna were so evident from the horrifying videos on social media. Some people here on the coast lost more than some Derna residents, but we didn't say anything, because of the sheer scale of casualties there. It's up to the government to act, to survey all those affected immediately and try to put across the reality of what happened in the other cities, too, so the Red Crescent and other aid organisations can reach everyone to the same degree and according to priority. But they only bothered about solving problems that might affect their reputation with the media.

A good number of my relatives live in Al-Bayadha, which is part of the coastal municipality. Thirty per cent of all the houses and buildings there were damaged, and poor pre-existing infrastructure just made the situation worse. Some farms that used to be a reliable source of income for their owners were completely washed away. They won't be suitable for farming for years to come because the soil is so degraded, and now their owners have no source of livelihood.

I know one particularly tragic story, here in my area. A man from Tobruk was passing through Batta with his wife. They were newlyweds; they'd been married just two days before the storm. The husband was heading in his car to his new home in Benghazi with his bride when the storm struck. They were swept away by the torrent and disappeared for more than ten days. Rescue teams and volunteers finally found the wreckage of their car in a valley, 60 kilometres from the scene of the accident. The man's body was so badly disfigured they could only identify him through his DNA. His wife is still missing.

Frankly, there's clear neglect and discrimination by the government against every affected region except for Derna. It's not just me saying this—everyone in Jebel Akhdar says the same. There's less attention to our needs and less financial support. I'm not renting, but my neighbours and residents of my area haven't received any rental allowance due to their homes being damaged, unlike many in Derna. There are even some very small villages, a quarter of which have disappeared. Where once there might have been 20 houses in total, five have been completely destroyed.

There were also external issues that affected aid deliveries and the work of humanitarian organisations. The total lack of communications and internet access along the coast after the disaster, due to the sheer scale of the destruction, really hindered aid efforts. The closure of roads and the lack of media attention at the beginning of the disaster, as well as the media blackout by the authorities, all increased the neglect of our areas.

There were also migrant labourers and foreign farm workers who worked in agriculture and sheep herding, and they're missing as well—whole families even. This had a huge impact on residents and farm owners, because foreign labour is essential to the Libyan economy. Some of them lived with the farm owners for many years. How will their families find out that they are all missing in a foreign land?

As I work in healthcare, I've seen that stocks of medicines for chronic diseases such as diabetes and blood pressure have been depleted from some areas and villages on the Jebel Akhdar coastline for a long time. These medicines need to be taken daily. The government didn't repair the roads to deliver the medicines to those who need them until several days later, and all they've done are simple and temporary repairs, not put sustainable solutions in place.

The government didn't support us at all during the first days of the disaster, but we did receive a lot of support from civilians in western Libya. Tripoli, Misrata, Bani Walid, and Zintan all acted together under the banner of the "Al-Fazaa" campaigns. Much later, the local government in the municipality contacted us, and the coastal branch of the Endowments and Islamic Affairs Authority was tasked with documenting the damage and identifying the material losses.

Ten days after the disaster, they collected information and recorded the damage and who had been affected. Shortly afterwards, we found out that the inventory and data had been tampered with, and people who were not affected and were not eligible for humanitarian support or compensation had been added to the lists.

Some of the compensation was paid out unfairly, while other people who were actually affected didn't receive a single dinar. The assistance given by the government was just not enough for me personally or for other people in our area to survive.

Someone who lost his farm and his livelihood or whose house was damaged, the government might give him 20,000 Libyan dinars (approx. 4,000 USD)! How will that help? Or a person whose house was completely destroyed is given 100,000 dinars, what can he actually buy with it?

These amounts are unfair, and nobody knows how they were calculated. In response, residents have been submitting collective complaints to the Solicitor General in Al-Bayda against corruption in the provision of flood response services and the scandal of compensation payments to people who weren't entitled to it. The case is now part of an ongoing investigation. Volunteer lawyers are working on it.

Another thing that was disgusting was that some of the aid the government provided—blankets, mattresses, sleeping pads, and some foodstuffs—were of such poor quality that they were completely unusable. That contrasted with the aid we received from relief campaigns and the solidarity of ordinary citizens, which was of high quality.

There was serious corruption in the distribution of aid in the coastal area. In the end, there was a real breakdown of trust. Sometimes several different damage inventory committees visited us and recorded the damage in their lists, all working randomly. In the end, the lists were approved by the inventory committee of the Endowments Authority, which was assigned by the municipality.

Right now, one of my needs is need drinking water at home. The water mains in our area was completely destroyed by the floods, so we have to buy water, which is very expensive under the current difficult living conditions. We also need to repair the destroyed roads so we can travel safely. The coastal municipalities haven't seen anywhere near as much reconstruction, road repairs and so on as in Derna. Minor repairs have been made, but roads and infrastructure are still in a state of neglect. Those whose homes have been demolished haven't received adequate attention, and reparations for them have been meagre.

People whose houses were demolished haven't received enough attention, and hardly any compensation. Renters along our stretch of coast haven't benefited from government assistance and haven't been included in the rent assistance scheme—and we don't know why. We just need equality before the law. The government should help all affected Libyans according to the same standards.

The impact of Storm Daniel was felt in all coastal areas. Most of the coast's agricultural areas were affected and residents lost their usual sources of livelihood, such as livestock and agriculture. The Ministry of Agriculture has a duty to work with farms to find solutions that preserve the soil and livestock, through reforestation campaigns, for example. We need governments—both in the east and the west—to focus their efforts on the coastal regions, forge ahead with infrastructure and road building programmes, and compensate everyone appropriately.

Our region didn't benefit from any disaster response. Even the decision to give priority to disaster victims to go on *hajj* (pilgrimage) only focused on Derna, as a disaster area, and overlooked everywhere else. Derna was the 'disaster', but the coastal area was just 'affected'; this difference in terminology really reflects the government's attitude to our needs.

There are sporadic promises from government agencies and authorities here, but nothing has materialised so far. Officials in our municipality say that health facilities

will be repaired, and promise to rebuild roads, water and electricity lines. In reality, all we have seen are some very minor repairs which are a drop in the ocean compared with the huge budgets we have heard about.

We've lost all trust in the authorities over the crisis, and all residents here feel that the government is deliberately withholding assistance. It tackled the crisis in a completely chaotic way due to its lack of experience and competence in dealing with any emergency. Unfortunately, this has allowed corrupt officials to exploit these gaps, and they've found ways to loot and misappropriate the aid earmarked for the flood victims and limit the access to emergency humanitarian aid to those who so urgently need it."

Compared to residents of Derna, residents of the Green Mountain Coastal area faced discrimination in the distribution of aid and resources, despite suffering significant losses due to the disaster. This is a violation of the **right to equality and non-discrimination**, as guaranteed by Article 2 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Article 26 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. This discrimination violates the basic principles of humanitarian action established by the International Committee of the Red Cross and the United Nations, which mandate that all humanitarian aid must be based solely on actual needs, regardless of race, religion, or geographic affiliation. The humanitarian principle also emphasises the need to provide assistance impartially and fairly to all those affected by the disaster.

## Maryam

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**They burdened us with arbitrary measures with the sole purpose of restricting the work of aid groups and prosecuting civilian aid workers. ”**

Maryam, who worked with a local Libyan aid organisation providing relief to those affected by the disaster says:

"I'm a resident of Benghazi. I've always been concerned with the humanitarian situation in the city. After hearing about the Derna disaster in the media, I decided to try and help, along with a group of young men and women—we all work together for an NGO. I decided to volunteer to provide and distribute aid because I was sure from following the news that the government wouldn't do what was needed. In the first few days, it was chaos. The authorities couldn't stop anyone or any organisation from helping because the situation was so bad. People felt let down and angry due to the lack of aid.

Some of the beneficiaries asked me, 'Why did my neighbour get aid while I didn't get anything?' We were heavily criticized by those affected because we were managing

the distribution on our own. Some people may have thought that the aid was coming from government agencies. It was a fraught atmosphere, but we had to understand the impact the trauma had had on everyone in this chaotic situation and try to keep working.

I worked with charitable campaigns and international organisations. They supplied the aid, and our role was to take delivery of it and distribute it directly to the disaster victims in Derna and other affected cities.

After a few days, the security authorities started monitoring our work. They spared no effort; the Internal Security agency, Military Intelligence, and even the LAAF were all watching and monitoring who was providing aid. They didn't pay much attention to basic goods provision, instead they focused on those who were receiving support from international organisations. At first, they used the pretext of protection but then they started getting involved in the files of employees and volunteers and asking questions about the sources and nature of the aid. Afterwards, there were many unfair security measures.

While we should have been focusing on relief work, given that survivors were still arriving and were in dire need of assistance, we were surprised to find officials coming to check that the international aid groups had permits from the Libyan Foreign Ministry. If the paperwork was missing or incomplete, they prevented the organisation from working. All this interference caused major obstacles and delays in our work, harming the survivors as a result.

Despite government agencies being completely absent, they insisted that they wouldn't allow a single organisation to enter the affected areas or even distribute aid in other areas until it had gone through their bureaucratic and security procedures, which in many cases hindered or completely prevented aid deliveries.

We tried to explain to them that we were working with limited resources. We were operating under huge psychological pressure, because we were unable to provide enough aid for the huge number of victims. The scenes of destruction and displaced families haunted me. They still do. I have trouble sleeping, concentrating, and controlling myself to this day.

Next, they began demanding a series of new security approvals. Any organisation that wanted to go from Benghazi to Derna to provide aid had to fill out official application forms, which were about six pages long. There were questions regarding personal details and our families. They wanted complete profiles of every worker in each organisation, and they demanded that everyone fill out detailed information about the exact nature of each project, the type of aid that would be distributed, where, how, and the amount and source of the funding.

They would give us approval for a week, with the names of employees who were allowed to travel outside of Benghazi, with a car registration number and the name of the driver, and this had to be renewed every week or 10 days. This situation continued until two weeks before Ramadan.

It was clear that problems between the Civil Society Commission and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the parliament-backed Libyan government made it impossible to meet these unreasonable demands.

After gathering a lot of information about us and burdening us with arbitrary procedures designed solely to restrict the work of organisations and keep tabs on civilian humanitarian workers, they suddenly decided to suspend all security permits.

These obstacles took a heavy toll. Sometimes we had to call the beneficiaries to ask them to come from their cities to Benghazi to collect relief supplies. We asked victims in Sousse, Al-Bayadha and other areas to travel hundreds of kilometres, which some did. These measures delayed some projects and stopped others altogether, for two weeks at a time.

A convoy of aid we transported from Benghazi to Derna was detained for five hours at a security checkpoint at one of the entrances to Derna. When I asked why, they said the security forces would take over distribution. We refused to hand it over and the aid waited at the gate while I made calls with contacts and officials. A lot of time was wasted for no reason other than that they wanted to take the aid. Nobody had any idea how and when they planned to distribute it. We heard from several sources that the security services in the east were confiscating aid arriving either at airports or by road, and in other cases obstructing and delaying its delivery on the pretext of inspecting it. Finally, we were allowed to go into Derna, on the condition that we were accompanied by security personnel to supervise the distribution of aid.

We weren't allowed unconditional access to all areas, only to sites where IDPs were staying. It was clear that they wanted to control our movement—or maybe they didn't want us to know what was going on inside the city. If I had been aware of these practices beforehand, I might not have helped at all because of the dangers of delivering aid in an environment dominated by fear. It was as if we were doing something illegal. We were active for about a month and a half, then stopped due to the lack of donations and the suspension of the campaigns.

The needs were not limited to material support. You could see the signs of psychological trauma on everyone, especially the survivors. Given there were no psychological support programmes from the government, there was a need for international organisations to set up that kind of programme. Some of these organisations scheduled two sessions per week for psychological support for victims.

What's tragic is that many of the victims are still in dire need of assistance today, but there are no longer any activities in Derna and the other affected cities because most of the emergency response campaigns and projects implemented by international organisations have shut down.

I don't know where Libyan citizens can turn to now. I also don't know how many humanitarian workers and volunteers have stopped working because of the terrible treatment they received from the authorities.”

Humanitarian workers faced harassment and restrictions from authorities, violating their **right to freedom of association** under Article 20 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and freedom of movement under Article 13 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The Geneva Conventions, which protect humanitarian workers, and UN General Assembly Resolution 46/182, which emphasises the implementation of humanitarian operations in accordance with principles of humanity and neutrality, were also violated. Furthermore, this situation contradicts the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders.

In addition to these international violations, these harassments also constitute a violation of rights guaranteed in the Libyan Constitutional Declaration of 2011. The Constitutional Declaration, in Article 14, guarantees the protection of freedom of association and freedom of expression and movement, making these violations contrary to Libya's domestic and international obligations in protecting human rights.

## Nabil



**They were very direct in their efforts to prevent anyone doing journalism, which is why they cut off the internet. ”**

Nabil, a journalist from Derna, describes the arbitrary measures, campaign of arrests and obstacles the media faced after the disaster.

“As a journalist, I'm haunted by a feeling of constant, burning anger. What I do now isn't real journalism. Libyan journalists can't cover what is happening in the areas affected by the disaster.

A number of protestors were arrested, around 20 or 30 of them, on 18 September 2023. Many were just normal people who had lost family members. Their one demand was that the government should investigate why the two dams collapsed.

Among the detainees were two people who came with relief teams from the western region. Both were originally residents of Derna but had been previously displaced. They are still being held on terrorism charges to this day. The entire group of detainees were held at a prison run by the internal security services in Benghazi, after being arrested by the security services, the 166<sup>th</sup> Battalion and the Tariq Ben Ziad brigade.

Two of the volunteers, who I know personally, were eventually released. They told me that while they weren't tortured physically, they were interrogated for long periods over nearly ten days. Some of those arrested had lost family members and friends in the disaster, but the authorities didn't care in the slightest about their psychological state. They just treated them as if they were criminals.

They pushed them over their comments and posts on social media—this is also what they did in my case. They asked about our demand for accountability, ‘What do you mean by this, and who are you asking for accountability from? Who are you working for?’. Questions about activism and our calls for an investigation into corruptions were also asked. They asked about what people mean by corruption, as if Libyans aren’t aware of the corruption going on in all the (reconstruction) programmes. They kept going— ‘How do people know about corruption? What proof they do have?’

All this is meant to show that there’s some agenda to turn activists against the Libyan government and the head of the armed forces and his sons. They use pressure and threats to convince activists that corruption isn’t a matter for journalists and civil society, but one of national security.

I remember well that on the same day as the arrests, I received direct threats from the security services telling me to stop my journalistic coverage. Thank God they didn’t arrest me—they decided my silence was enough. They were very direct in their efforts to prevent anyone doing journalism, which is why they cut off the internet. They did it because Libyans see everything over the internet, and journalists depend on it to deliver their reportage directly to the people. Even now, all media outlets and activists are forced to fill out security clearance forms whenever they want to cover topics related to advocacy for victims or survivors.

When they threatened me, they told me I couldn’t publish anything in the media about what had happened in Derna, even on my personal social media accounts. It was the first time I had been threatened in such a clear way. These challenges are still there to this today, in the form of threats passed to journalists through indirect means, via militia members or people within the security services. They have given no clear reason to limit press freedom, but they explicitly ask us not to talk about missing persons or holding perpetrators accountable, and they try and stop us from finding out what is really happening with the mishandling of reconstruction projects and funds.

I stopped covering events because I had no idea what would happen to me if I didn’t. I can’t endanger my life and risk my own security and that of my family. We could risk arrest or enforced disappearance. I’ve tried to distance myself from all activism, even though I wish I could shed light on the tragedies that I’ve seen with my own eyes in Derna—especially the violations committed by the government itself.

I’m sometimes asked why the general public don’t support activists who speak out. It’s quite clear to me. I wouldn’t expect anyone to come to my aid if I was arrested. I don’t blame anyone, the fate of anyone who raises their voice is well known. If I spoke out, I know what would happen. Either they would arrest me and frame me as a terrorist, as they have done to many citizens over at least the past ten years. They would accuse me of being an ideological saboteur working for some foreign body, or they would just enforcibly disappear me and deny my existence.

Everything is broken in Libya, all our institutions have been weakened apart from the security apparatus, which works day and night to curtail the work of journalists and activists. They have clear instructions to suppress any activity that might hamper the work of companies involved in the reconstruction of Derna, especially foreign contractors.

Their means and methods leave me terrified. Sometimes security personnel sit with journalists in meetings, or during supposedly ‘casual’ moments in person, trying to

lure them into conversations where they might reveal their real position towards the authorities. They talk about arrests against activists and media professionals to see if people are willing to criticise the government. This is how they prey on us.

Nowadays, no one dares to take part in protests, and there is no free space for journalists. Only photographers and media workers aligned with the armed Libyan factions are allowed to publish images of what's happened inside the city, especially when it comes to the reconstruction projects. They have to paint a glittering portrait of the government. Even local radio stations engage in praising the government over what happened in Derna. Everyone knows that this is to polish their image with the international community and with the Libyan people ahead of any elections.

Nowadays, I just do journalistic work that steers clear of criticising the government. I have to, I need the salary. It's my livelihood. Even so, I still feel that the government is watching me.

After the disaster, every single element of the military and security apparatus turned up, working under the guise of security and protecting the people. Their real reason was to make sure that everyone was monitored. The fears of Derna residents, including mine, grow every day under a blackout on the media. There is a pervasive fear that we will never see accountability for those responsible for the dam disaster—and that an even greater one could happen again.

We all feel that there is no serious weight behind the current investigations, and many people suspected of involvement have not been arrested. They walk among us, and our greatest fear is that those real culprits will be acquitted, while others are sacrificed in their place as scapegoats.”

Journalists faced restrictions and arrests while covering the Derna disaster, violating **freedom of opinion and expression** (Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights) and the public's right to access information. These violations contradict the Windhoek Declaration, which promotes press freedom, and UN General Assembly Resolution 59/201 on the safety of journalists, which calls for the protection of journalists from violence and persecution and the provision of a safe environment for media work.

These actions also violate Article 15 of the Libyan Constitutional Declaration, which guarantees freedom of the press, publishing, and media. Article 21 of the Constitutional Declaration, which emphasises that the law should be applied equally to everyone without discrimination, is also violated, as these actions represent unconstitutional breaches subjecting perpetrators to legal accountability.

## Lubna



**My mother's healthcare card, which gives her access to free treatment, was lost during the flood along with all her other medical records, and I couldn't get a replacement card. What's more, since October 2023, diabetes drugs haven't been available in public pharmacies.**

Lubna relates how her family has suffered due to the incompetence of the public health sector and government neglect:

“My family lost more than 50 members in the disaster. We've been in a terrible psychological state since 11 September. We haven't been able to comprehend what happened. We're sleeping badly, we eat intermittently, and we're in a constant state of stress. We're not mentally, morally or physically stable. We're still having these health problems to this day.

I lost my sister, her sons and her husband, which had a deep impact on our health and psychological condition. On the night of the flood, the water washed me out of the house along with some of my sisters and my elderly mother. She's about 70 years old, and she was the one that had the worst injuries. The floodwaters went into her ear and perforated her eardrum. Mud went down her throat, which still gives her problems in swallowing and talking. Her leg hit a wall and she's still suffering from severe pain in her knee. The shock of the disaster meant we didn't realise that she needed rapid medical treatment. We were busy looking for my sister, her children and our other relatives, until they found my sister's body buried under the mud.

My mother herself didn't tell us that she had lost her hearing in one ear until a week later, because she was in shock. The early days were horrifying and chaotic, because the hospitals near Derna were overcrowded with wounded survivors. My mother was in severe pain, but she didn't tell us until a while later because she wanted to give priority to the other survivors.

The clinics and pharmacies near us were severely damaged. The nearest functioning clinics were overwhelmed with wounded people, especially in the first few days. I think the health situation began to improve when international organisations and foreign medical teams arrived. The situation improved a little over the first few weeks, but after about a month there was a major shortage of medicines, medical equipment and staff.

A lot of doctors, nurses and paramedics died in the disaster. As far as I can tell, there has been no effort to improve the health of the disaster victims since. Currently, public hospitals like the Shiha Women's and Maternity Hospital and the Surgical Hospital still have no doctors or staff. You're lucky if you can find a single GP or gynaecologist.

Most doctors are at private clinics and hospitals because the salaries of the Ministry of Health are usually delayed and they need the money. That's another reason for the staff shortages at government hospitals. I don't blame the doctors, but how can someone pay for expensive treatment in the private sector when they've lost everything?

Medical examinations and tests are very expensive. We temporarily moved to Misrata where the situation is more normal, and we got tests and checks for my mother at private clinics. We stayed there for a short time, but we didn't feel stable, so we went back to Derna and now we're currently living in the suburbs on the eastern coast. There's more overcrowding than usual in the eastern coast region in general.

Since the disaster, public health sector services have become weaker and don't even meet the basic needs of patients and disaster victims who need special attention and care, such as my mother. I'm looking after her and my sisters now, and I feel totally helpless. I thought the government would help us access medical care at private clinics due to their better care, but they didn't bother to provide medical support or even facilitate the bureaucratic procedures.

My mother has diabetes and since the flood her condition has become more unstable due to her psychological state and her age. She needs to be on medication permanently because it's a chronic disease. I buy her medication from private pharmacies, but it's very expensive given my other basic needs. My mother's healthcare card, which gives her access to free treatment, was lost during the flood, along with all her other medical records. I couldn't get a replacement card. What's more, since October 2023, diabetes drugs haven't been available in public pharmacies. I expected someone from the Ministry of Health to contact me to ask about our situation, but not a single government official has reached out to me yet.

It's also important to talk about another abnormal thing since the flood. We keep hearing about medical errors during childbirth operations at the Shiha hospital, including that which has impacted my family. The Shiha hospital is unhygienic and badly sterilised. The situation there is appalling. Women are afraid to give birth there, so they go to the private sector or other cities instead. However, giving birth in a private hospital can cost 4,000 Libyan dinars (approx. 800 USD).

Another issue is that a lot of children who have survived the disaster, including children from my family, have developed diabetes since the flood. This has increased the demand for insulin, and now I know that every time I go to a public pharmacy, they'll tell me that the drugs aren't available.

Now even the health sector is so nepotistic that you need the right connections to navigate it. Everyone knows you can get free treatment, but you need to know officials and influential people.

Huge sums of money are being spent on reconstruction now, but shouldn't the government prioritise fixing the health sector, given the urgent need for healthcare? They should provide disaster victims with free treatment until we can get back on our feet. They should also visit the hospitals to see how dirty they are and how germs are spreading there. In some clinics, you can see insects running around. Doctors in the public sector should be monitored, and they should finish renovating the Al-Hirish and Unity Hospitals, to relieve the pressure on the other ones."

Victims suffered from a severe shortage of basic healthcare services after the disaster, particularly for those requiring ongoing treatment for chronic diseases or urgent care. This violates the **right to health**, as guaranteed by Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Article 12 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. Moreover, denying victims access to necessary healthcare also violates the principles of the Alma-Ata Declaration, adopted by the World Health Organization, which emphasises the provision of primary healthcare to all as a fundamental human right. This situation also conflicts with UN General Assembly Resolution 46/119 on the protection of persons with mental illness, which stipulates the importance of providing necessary healthcare without discrimination. These violations contradict the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, which emphasise the need to provide healthcare and essential services to displaced persons and ensure their full and safe access to these services.

## Omar



**It wasn't a normal arrest. They were really rough with us and forced us into the car in a very humiliating way. They didn't care about the trauma I was experiencing after I had lost seven members of my family. ”**

Omar, a young man from Derna, talks about being arrested after taking part in demonstrations demanding accountability over the disaster:

“In the immediate aftermath of the disaster, we young people volunteered to rescue people and provide assistance. People in Derna were extremely angry because we all knew that the dam collapse wasn't as a result of natural causes. Everyone realised that officials were responsible for the displacement and deaths of thousands of people. Everyone talked about widespread corruption and clear neglect of infrastructure well before the storm happened.

Everyone also knew that any trial or investigation within Libya would simply be a charade, a cover for senior officials. So we decided to go out and hold a demonstration on 18 September 2023 to demand fair trials and an international tribunal. No one pushed us to demonstrate, we had a clear reason for doing so—it was our basic duty.

There were only two demonstrations, one in front of the City Hall and the other in front of the Mayor's house. We shouted many slogans, including 'the blood of the martyrs won't be spilled in vain' and 'Libya will be free, Aguila must leave,' referring to the Speaker of the House of Representatives, Aguila Saleh.



We also carried signs marked 'the sad city of Derna demands its rights' and banners calling for the overthrow of all political bodies in Libya, and for those responsible for the disaster to be held to account. There were about 150 demonstrators, but we were joined by security personnel, so we knew we were being watched. Many protestors used their mobile phones to broadcast the demonstration live on social media.

I knew that my photos had appeared on one protestor's live feed, and I had also taken some pictures with my phone. The internet was cut off a few hours after the demonstration, and myself, my cousin and some friends decided to leave.

We were intercepted by civilian and military vehicles on the way. We were put in a Toyota military car with a detention box at the back. It wasn't a normal arrest. They were really rough with us and forced us into the car in a very humiliating way. They didn't care about the trauma I was experiencing after I had lost seven members of my family. The people with me were also in a terrible psychological state. Some of them had lost entire families in the flood just days earlier.

They took us to the headquarters of a military battalion in the suburbs of Derna. While we were detained, they intimidated and threatened us, asking us questions. I think they were afraid to physically torture us as they normally do because they realised that public anger was close to boiling over and that people wouldn't let it pass if something happened to us, or if they tried to disappear us.

I had a cover over my head, so I don't know who questioned me, but I heard different voices during the interrogation, it was certainly more than two people. The interroga-

tion lasted about an hour and a half. They tried to lure me into giving them information that would frame me for belonging to a certain opposition group, but they didn't find any evidence of that on my phone.

The people who were with me were released on the second day, but they kept me in detention. I wasn't allowed to contact my family for three days. On the fourth day, they let me call my mother to tell her I was okay. They asked why I had taken photo during the demonstration and who I had sent them to. They kept asking me: 'Who told you to take part in the demonstration? Do you have any displaced relatives? Do you have any relatives in prison? Do you have any relatives who were with the Shura Council (of Mujahideen in Derna, a now disbanded coalition of Islamist militias) or against the army?' Those were most of the questions I remember.

While I was being held, I found out that they had detained another group of more than ten for taking part in the demonstrations, some of whom I knew, including the people who organised the demonstration. Over the following days, I discovered that those who arrested us belonged to the Tariq Ben Ziad Brigade, and that they had arrested a total of about 25 demonstrators. All the detainees were told that they had been arrested for demonstrating in front of the Al-Sahabah Mosque in Derna, and in front of the Mayor's home, without the necessary permission, and that the opposition had used it politically.

I was only interrogated once. I was detained with others including a migrant. They put me in a small cell and gave me two meals a day; lunch and dinner. They let us out to the bathroom three or four times a day, only to urinate, but washing was forbidden. I was very angry because I had demonstrated for the rights of my relatives who had died and were lost in the disaster, and I found myself being prosecuted and punished for it. I was held for a few days, but some of the other detainees spent longer in Benghazi prison.

I was released, I was told, because an official from the General Command of the Army had ordered my release. They asked me to sign a paper pledging not to take part in any future demonstrations. They didn't find any evidence on my phone, or in their investigations. When they released me they told me, "there's nothing on you, you can go."

Now I'm living my life normally, but I'm cautious about my communications and about joining gatherings after having been detained. Now there's no such thing as freedom of expression or going out to demonstrate.

Everybody's afraid right now, the parents of the missing are suffering but they're afraid to talk or publish anything in public for fear of being arrested, because they know that anyone who's arrested can be framed on political charges. There are systematic policies in place to influence public opinion and, unfortunately, they've been successful. It's very easy to discredit the demonstrators, given Derna's past. It's easy to frame people on charges of belonging to an armed group or an enemy actor. Today, activists are just working on the humanitarian side, trying to stay in the field so they can help those affected. Nobody wants to engage in anything political or make any demands related to human rights.

If there was freedom of expression and people could demonstrate, everyone would certainly share their overwhelming desire to make demands to the government, particularly on the subject of missing persons. Nobody in government cares about the people who are missing.

People affected by the disaster are focused on making ends meet now. Most young people and their families are drowning in their everyday worries. They're just trying to rebuild their damaged homes. Some people have left the city and gone to the suburbs. Some have moved away entirely, to put their trauma behind them."

Survivors who attempted to protest or express their views on the mismanagement of the disaster faced repression and arbitrary detention by the authorities, violating their rights. This constitutes a violation of the **right to peaceful assembly and freedom of expression** under Article 20 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and the right to protection from arbitrary arrest under Article 9 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. These violations also contradict the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, which guarantees individuals and groups the right to advocate for reform and participate in peaceful protests without fear of retaliation or arbitrary detention.

In addition, these measures constitute a clear violation of citizens' rights guaranteed under Article 14 of the Libyan Constitutional Declaration, which guarantees **freedom of opinion and expression and freedom of assembly**. They also contradict Article 31 of the Libyan Constitutional Declaration, which stipulates that the law shall be applied to everyone in a fair and just manner, and that citizens shall be protected from arbitrary arrest.

## Umm Ayman

“

**Even international aid was not distributed to us as it was to the Libyans who were affected, nor were we compensated for the loss of our house, unlike other victims. Palestinians have been living and working in this country for more than six decades. We've become part of Libyan society. ”**

A Palestinian woman, Umm Ayman, describes how discrimination by the authorities has blocked aid to Palestinians in Libya affected by the floods.

"I've been a Palestinian refugee in Libya since the rule of King Idris. The Libyan state gave housing to Palestinian refugees in Libya, because under the law during the monarchy, Palestinians were given many benefits, including homes to live in. The land isn't mine, but the house I lived in was a gift from the state granted to my parents, who have since passed away.

I lived alongside Libyans, and just like them and many other Palestinians, I worked for the Ministry of Education. But the two current governments have treated us badly. As soon as we told them that we were Palestinians and that we'd had legal privileges for decades, just like Libyan citizens, they very clearly discriminated against us and we've been excluded from receiving benefits, aid and reparations, because we aren't Libyan.

I was with my six sons and my husband at our house in central Derna on the night of 11 September. We had dinner and then we stayed up for a little while. We kept following the news on social media, most of which was about the floods in the Jebel Akhdar region. I went upstairs to check on my mother who lived with my brother there, and then I went back downstairs. My kids went to sleep in their beds, and then suddenly the water started coming in. Everybody woke up and we decided to go and shelter in the kitchen.

Suddenly there was a huge deluge which washed away the entire house and everything inside. The water dragged me away and took every member of the family in different directions. I ran around desperately looking for my family.

A few hours later, I found my husband and my 15-year-old daughter, and we found my sister-in-law alive. Thank God they hadn't been seriously injured. But the flood washed away my five sons, my mother, my brother and his four sons. I lost 11 people from my family. They are all still missing.

It wasn't just us. There are 22 affected Palestinian families in Derna, with 46 people missing and 17 who died in the disaster.

In the days afterwards, I was in shock. I couldn't believe what had happened. I was in a terrible way. I couldn't sleep, eat or drink, and I spent ten days straight looking for my children, my mother and brother. We were homeless, we had nothing but our prayers, and all we could do was try to find our missing loved ones.

I didn't even have clothes in those first days. We stayed in our dirty clothes until aid organisations arrived and distributed some basic aid including some clothing items. But even international aid wasn't distributed to us in the same way it was to the Libyans who were affected. We didn't get one of the cards the GNU gave to affected families, and we haven't been compensated for the loss of our home, unlike the other victims who received 100,000 Libyan dinars (approx. 20,000 USD), even though the Compensation Commission registered us in their system as homeowners. All my neighbours received compensation, and some who weren't even affected received compensation after they tampered with the data.

Later, we asked the committee about it and they told us that the Reconstruction Committee had not taken a decision on flood victims who were not of Libyan nationality. Palestinians have been living and working in this country for more than six decades. We've become part of Libyan society, we even have adopted Libyan customs. Our situation is different from that of other nationalities, especially after the recent developments in my country, which is still under occupation.

After living in normal circumstances for decades, in a house that was given to us by the Libyan state due to our situation, we now live in a rented house, and my husband is working for a salary of 1,500 Libyan dinars per month (approx. 300 USD). I'm a public sector employee and my salary had already been suspended for a long time before the disaster.

My family depends totally on my husband's limited income, which we divide between rent and buying basic necessities. Our debts are stacking up day by day. This is nowhere near enough to meet even our most basic needs for food and drink, given the high prices of everything in Derna right now.

After the flood, my work asked to me to submit files, which we've done four times, but my salary hasn't been paid out, even though I'm still going to work every day.

There should be exceptions for disaster victims, and as I'm a teacher at the Ministry of Education, I should get the same treatment as Libyan citizens who work for the state. We're teaching the children of Libya, who benefit from our services. But no one cares and the authorities are now asking disaster victims for their national number when they go to ask for aid. If you don't have a national number, they won't give you anything, regardless of your circumstances.

We're discriminated against because we are non-Libyans and we're treated as second-class citizens in all our dealings with the state. Every time, I hear the same words: 'you're non-Libyans, you are not entitled,' or 'you're non-Libyans, we haven't set up a system for you yet.' They often ask for our national numbers, even though the boxes the aid comes in have the United Nations logo on them. Shouldn't this aid be for everyone equally? It is aid intended for those affected by the flood, it shouldn't be distributed according to nationality.

I spent a long time looking for information on our missing loved ones. No one from the government has contacted me, so I went to the Missing Persons Committee myself. We gave them all the details, then they called us and asked for DNA samples. That was in November 2023. Since then, we've heard nothing about the search effort or whether my children were among those who were buried.

When we ask if they have any answers, all they tell us is 'not yet, not yet.' There's no information on whether they've matched DNA samples with bodies, for example. No one understands what the government is doing. They took the samples, so what did they do to them? I went to them many times, but then I lost all hope. Now I've given up asking for anything. I'm taken up with everyday life and living in difficult circumstances, and I don't even have money to pay for a taxi ride. I feel like I paid for transport every time for nothing.

The lack of information coming from the government is a big problem. I think about my children and how they were buried. Were they even buried, or were they swept away by the flood? Will I ever be able to pray over their graves? I ask myself, why hasn't the DNA match come back yet? We told the Missing Persons Committee and the authorities that we just want to know where they are buried.

The situation has had a terrible effect on our household. My husband, my daughter and I are in worse health every day. We haven't got death certificates yet, and we have no idea why not.

The latest information I heard from people is that the civil registry was offline, but that now it's gradually being restored. I went to the civil registry office, and they told me they needed more time to start issuing death certificates. The only authority that's been in touch with us is the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, of Osama Hamad's Government of National Stability. They also took information and photos of our documents, but we don't know what they're going to do with the information."

Palestinians residing in Libya faced discrimination in accessing aid, violating their right to equality and non-discrimination under Article 2 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and the right to humanitarian assistance (fundamental principles of humanitarian assistance). Libya is a signatory to the Fourth Geneva Convention, which mandates the protection of civilians and ensures their access to humanitarian assistance, making these actions a breach of its international obligations under this convention.

## Narjes



**They gave people some money, then stopped working. It was like they just wanted to buy our silence for a little while. The government needs to speed up identifying which of the missing were buried. They should expedite the DNA tests and issue death certificates for the missing, so the social security processes can be completed.** ”

Narjes, a young Libyan woman studying abroad who lost five members of her family due to the disaster, describes her struggle to obtain social security.

“My father passed away years ago, and his wish was that I would get an excellent education. After he passed away, my mother and brothers supported me financially so I could get a good degree from a university abroad. When the disaster happened, I wasn’t with them, I was studying overseas.

I woke up on the morning of 11 September to read about the disaster in the news and on social media. My family had an apartment in a building that was washed out to sea; not a single brick was left standing. To this day, my mother and my four siblings are all missing.

I couldn’t get hold of clear information on what had happened because the internet was cut off during the disaster and it was not restored for two days. I was in shock, and I don’t know how many calls I made over the following days, but I remember my relatives and uncles telling me what had happened over the phone.

I booked the earliest tickets I could to go back to Derna, but I didn’t get there until five days later because so many Libyans living abroad wanted to return, as well as foreigners who wanted to help.

I arrived in Derna at 2am. I stayed at a relative's house and then went out in the morning to look for the bodies of my mother and brothers among the piles of bodies and rubble, streets covered in mud and destroyed buildings.

I went into one building near where we used to live which was still half-standing. I looked at the bodies, one by one, to try and find my mother, but I couldn't see the body of anybody I knew. They had already buried a lot of bodies. I had no idea whether my loved ones had been buried or washed away, because everything was disorganised. There was no official government body I could ask.

I went around the hospitals where the wounded were and met our neighbour, who told me that my mother had run upstairs shouting, 'oh my God, oh my God!'. When she reached the fifth floor, the building collapsed. From that moment on, nobody knows what happened to my mum and my siblings.

I stayed for a while with my relatives, but the house was overcrowded and I started to feel like a burden on them. They kept asking me when I'd leave, and when the state would give me a place to stay. There was tremendous psychological pressure.

So as soon as I received the 100,000 Libyan dinars (approx. 20,000 USD) compensation from the government for the loss of the house—an amount that nobody could buy a new house with—I decided to go back to my studies and my apartment abroad, instead of being a burden to others. I felt that I would never be able to find my parents given the government's insufficient measures to reassure the public about the missing.

My mother and father's advice to complete my PhD was ringing in my ears and so I convinced myself that I had no choice now. I spent the compensation money on my apartment overseas and part of my tuition, so that my residency would not end, because otherwise I would have to return to Libya.

I have nothing to go back to in Derna. All my loved ones are missing and I have no house. I'm also an unmarried woman and I'm alone now, and Libyan society rejects the idea of a woman living alone. So my only option is to continue my studies.

My mother was retired and had a pension, but they stopped paying it after the disaster, because the Ministry of Social Affairs requires the heir to provide a notification to the Social Security department once a year, as I understand it. I need my mother's death certificate to complete the notification process—but my mother is missing, not officially deceased, and the state refuses to issue death certificates for missing persons. I was studying for a PhD at my family's expense, but now that they're dead, there's no one to support me or pay for my studies or housing.

I contacted every relevant government agency to get some financial support so I could complete my studies. At first they made many promises, and said they would provide me with support, but they did nothing except keep me waiting and worrying. I thought they would understand my current situation, that I'm on my own, and that they would at least cover my remaining tuition fees. But the last time I asked, they said, 'Even government employees haven't been paid for some time, and we don't have any solutions right now.'

I don't understand what happened to those millions they announce every now and then. Didn't officials say in the media that they'd provide the best support to those affected? You can't possibly buy a house with the reparations we were given. I paid my tuition fees and rent to try to complete my education, as I'm in the final stages of

submitting my thesis to obtain my PhD, but I still need more support because there wasn't much money.

I contacted the Inventory Committee and the Compensation Committee, but once they had paid out the reparations, no one contacted me. The government and the authorities in Derna didn't give me anything. There are no measures to make things easier, or even humane treatment. Everyone says they're following procedures. What procedures? They gave people some money, then stopped working. It was like they just wanted to buy our silence for a little while.

The government needs to speed up identifying which of the missing were buried. They should expedite the DNA tests and issue death certificates for the missing, so the social security processes can be completed.

Now I only have 185 USD dollars left, and I don't know what will happen to me next month. I don't want to think about it, because I feel helpless. I'm overthinking so much that I get a lot of migraines.

I was told me that the government had decided to give disaster victims a priority to go on the hajj pilgrimage to Mecca this year. I thought that could be a kind of psychological treatment for me, and that maybe God would accept my prayers, but they excluded me because I'm less than 45 years old and don't have a male guardian to travel with—even though the Saudi authorities have said they will allow women to go on hajj without one.

I'm not asking for anything now because I know that no one will pay any attention. All I'm hoping for from Libya's two governments is that they cover the rest of my studies so I can graduate, just like other Libyan students who get grants from the state. Isn't seeking knowledge just as important as completing the hajj?

I don't think they'll make an exception for me to receive my mother's social security, and I don't know if they'll give me any more compensation or housing in the future. I don't trust government institutions because their decisions are always arbitrary and corrupt. I think they'll try to exclude as many of those affected as possible, in order to keep the money themselves or channel it to people who aren't eligible."

Families who lost their primary breadwinner in the disaster faced significant difficulties in obtaining the necessary social and economic support, affecting their ability to meet basic needs. This constitutes a violation of the **right to social security** under Article 22 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and the right to a decent standard of living under Article 3 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It also constitutes a violation of their rights guaranteed under Article 1 of the Libyan Social Security Law No. 13 of 1980.

The right of families to know the fate of their missing loved ones is protected under international humanitarian law, including the Geneva Conventions, which obligate states to search for and report missing persons. Libya, as a signatory to these conventions, is obliged to protect the rights of missing persons and their families. According to UN Security Council Resolution 2474 of 2019, states must take all appropriate measures to search for missing persons, ensure their families receive available information about their fate, and provide psychological and social support to them.

# Recommendations

The first-hand accounts of victims in this collection highlight a wide range of human rights violations that have affected victims' rights, including their right to an effective remedy, their right to housing, education, physical and mental health, and to other forms of reparation, as well as more broadly, civil society's right to assembly and association, and the right to freedom of expression.

Against this background, we call on the Libyan authorities and the international community to urgently take the following measures, in line with a human rights-based approach and in accordance with the principles of non-discrimination and equality:

## To the Libyan authorities:

### ***Reparation programme***

- Establish a comprehensive and adequate reparation programme capable of ensuring that all victims obtain relevant measures of reparation for their harm suffered, in accordance with international law. This includes adequate and timely compensation, restitution, rehabilitation, guarantees of non-repetition and satisfaction.
- Victims and, where relevant, their families must be able to fully and meaningfully participate in the process of establishing, planning and managing such a reparation programme.
- The following actions must be taken as an urgent priority to ensure victims can access and obtain reparation measures for the harm suffered:
  - Provide required medical treatment, including granting victims with access to relevant health support centres.
  - Facilitate and support families of the missing to obtain documentation to prove their right to inheritance, and social security.
  - Expedite the exhumation of bodies from mass graves and promptly return their bodies to their families.
  - Provide restitution, or required support, to victims who, as a result of the catastrophe, have lost permanent housing and who have been displaced multiple times.

### ***Accountability procedures***

- Ensure a thorough, transparent and impartial investigations into the circumstances of and responsibilities for the collapse of the Derna dams, as well as into any precautionary measures taken to evacuate or otherwise protect against the consequences of the collapse of the dams. Such investigations must include investigating all aspects of the collapse and its consequences, including identifying all individuals and institutions responsible, whether directly or indirectly involved.
- Provide victims with free and unhindered access to justice, including through the filing of complaints with the competent authorities, without fear of reprisals and

of prosecution by government agencies in response to complaints filed. This must also include the provision of legal aid, especially for those who have lost their livelihoods or who may otherwise not be able to pay lawyers' fees.

- Ensure that victims' and, where relevant, their families' rights are upheld during the investigation, prosecution and, in the case of a conviction, the sentencing process, in accordance with relevant international standards and Libyan legislation.

### ***Freedom of association***

- Provide CSOs and individuals, and experts, with unhindered access to those affected, including with a view to identifying and responding to their needs.
- Protect CSOs, activists and journalists against all arbitrary measures aimed at intimidating and monitoring their activities.

### ***Immediate support to all those affected by the catastrophe***

- Carry out an independent and thorough audit of the funds spent to date by the 'Derna Reconstruction Fund' to prevent corruption through the inappropriate and illegal use of resources allocated to the fund.
- Once a transparent and accountable disbursement process has been established, allocate sufficient resources to the reconstruction fund to provide for immediate, and, where required, mid- and long-term support to all those affected by the disaster, without discrimination between categories such as foreign workers, displaced persons, refugees, Palestinians who were granted real estate under the Libyan monarchy, Libyan women married to foreigners, and those women's offspring. Ensure that funds and other support resources are allocated in a transparent manner, including through publicly disclosing all relevant payments made for reconstruction and potential reparation measures, such as compensation and rehabilitation.

## **To international relief organisations and donors:**

- Increase funding and other resources to support victims, including in the longer term to cover ongoing needs, such as relief, health, educational and psychological support.
- Ensure that relevant funding and other support is made available to intended beneficiaries, including, in particular, marginalised groups, and is not abused for other purposes.

## **To the international community and the United Nations:**

- Establish a monitoring and documentation accountability mechanism designed to clarify the circumstances and responsibilities for the disaster, and to monitor the response taken by the authorities.

- Make clear to the Libyan authorities that they should take required measures to stop, protect against and prevent ongoing and future intimidation and other restrictions put in place by the authorities on CSOs supporting victims and affected communities.

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