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'Day of Rage' brings Libya protest deaths to at least 24, says human rights group

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At least 24 people have been killed in Libya's antigovernment protests since activists took to the streets late Tuesday night and staged a "Day of Rage" yesterday. A number of other activists have been wounded in the clashes with security forces, [reports Human Rights Watch](#).

Libya's protests, which are expected to continue today, come on the heels of popular revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt that resulted in the removal of the leaders of both nations. Libyan demonstrators are seeking the removal of [Muammar Qaddafi](#), the Arab world's [longest-ruling dictator](#). He has controlled the country since taking power in a 1969 coup.

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While major demonstrations have not yet spread to the capital city of Tripoli, there are reports of protests in [at least five different cities](#). The biggest are taking place in Benghazi and al-Bayda, where activists are setting up camps.

According to the BBC, the government has taken a harsh stand against protesters, firing on them with live ammunition and withholding supplies from hospitals.

"The police are using their guns... I have a video which shows the police shooting people but the government has blocked the internet in al-Bayda. We are asking the authorities to unblock the internet service," one protestor in al-Bayda told the BBC in a late night interview on Thursday. "The biggest problem now is that doctors are not treating the injured and so they die. It's a crime.

The demonstrations will continue though. People are bringing tents to the streets to sleep in during the night.”

Residents of Benghazi, the second largest city in Libya, also reported protests turning violent in the evening Thursday, a day that had been dubbed by activists as a “Day of Rage.”

“Last night was very hard, there were a lot of people in the street, thousands of people. I saw soldiers in the street,” a resident of Benghazi [told Reuters](#). “I heard shooting. I saw one person fall down (from a gunshot wound) but I don't have a figure for casualties.”

The situation was considerably calmer by Friday morning. But more protests are expected in Libya today as demonstrators bury the dead from clashes during this week's protests, and some observers worry that the funerals could be a catalyst for further violence.

Al Jazeera reports that the government’s strict control over the news media has made it difficult to determine the scale of the violence. Using unverified tallies based on social network postings, the Arab broadcast network estimates that [as many as 50 people may have been killed](#).

Although the majority of protests have taken place outside the capital city, the Daily Telegraph managed to secure a [rare video of demonstrators in Tripoli](#) setting trash cans on fire.

Meanwhile, there are several reports that pro-government rallies have taken place in the capital city, with demonstrators chanting slogans in favor of Mr. Qaddafi. As antigovernment protests took place elsewhere, CBS reports that [Qaddafi toured Tripoli](#) in an attempt to garner more support from government loyalists.

Human rights groups have condemned Qaddafi’s attempt to rally support and hang onto power as indicative as the harsh tactics he has used to remain in power for more than 40 years.

“The security forces’ vicious attacks on peaceful demonstrators lay bare the reality of Muammar Qadhafi's brutality when faced with any internal dissent,” said Sarah Leah Whitson, Middle East and North Africa director at Human Rights Watch in an article by RIA Novosti. “Libyans should not have to risk their lives to make a stand for their rights as human beings.”

The authorities should cease the use of lethal force unless absolutely necessary to protect lives and open an independent investigation into the lethal shootings, Human Rights Watch said.

"It is remarkable that Qadhafi is still copying the very same tactics that failed Hosni Mubarak so completely just across the border," Whitson said. "Using security forces and armed thugs to deny people the right to express their opposition to the government increasingly looks destined to fail."