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HRW: No mercenaries in eastern Libya

Published on : 2 March 2011 - 4:02pm | By [RNW News Desk](#) (photo: [YouTube/QuatchiCanada](#))

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Human Rights Watch says it has seen no evidence of mercenaries being used in eastern Libya. This contradicts widespread earlier reports in the international media that African soldiers had been flown in to fight rebels in the region as Muammar Gaddafi sought to keep control.

In an interview with Radio Netherlands Worldwide in Libya, Peter Bouckaert from Human Rights Watch said he had conducted research and found no proof of mercenaries being used. Investigator Bouckaert, who has been in the region for two weeks, told RNW that he had been to Al Bayda after receiving reports that 156 mercenaries had been arrested there.

Black Libyans

The town is to the east of the city Benghazi and is also in the hands of the anti-Gaddafi protesters. The rights investigator said that what he found there were, in fact, 156 soldiers from the south of Libya and not from another African country. After talking to them he found out that they were all black Libyans of African descent. The soldiers have since been released by the protesters.

According to Bouckaert, the support of the black southern Libyans for the Gaddafi regime is explicable as Gaddafi fought to counter discrimination against this group in Libyan society.

In the west

RNW's Mohammed Abdulrahman, who interviewed Bouckaert in Benghazi, says that the fact that there are few economic opportunities in the south also leads to southern Libyans joining the army.

HRW has so far only conducted research in the east of the country which is under the control of the protesters, but it says it could well be the case that reports of mercenaries being used in the areas still under government control in the west are also inaccurate.

Unverified

International media report that the mercenaries are gathering in the central southern town of Sabha, known to be loyal to Gaddafi, and are being sent out from there.

Our reporter says the southern location of the town means it is possible that the soldiers here are also from the south of the country and not African mercenaries as claimed in the international media. As the area is under control of Gaddafi's forces this cannot be verified.

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Anonymous
 6 March 2011 - 1:23am / [libya](#) [reply](#)
 hi
 the black community in libya is about 35%of the public of libya and those u see even in the west of libya are libyans and i tell you it is a propaganda that they r messineries
 thanks

Leigh Meyers
 5 March 2011 - 7:21pm / [USA](#) [reply](#)
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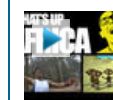
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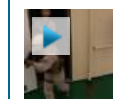
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