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First UA: 12/25 Index: MDE 19/9001/2025 Libya of February 4, 2025

LIBYA

ELDERLY SUFI SHEIKH MISSING FOR A YEAR AFTER FORCED ARREST

Muftah Al-Amin Al-Biju, a 79-year-old Sufi Sheikh, has been missing since his arrest on February 4, 2024. Armed groups allied with the self-proclaimed Libyan Arab Armed Forces (LAAF) took him from his home in Benghazi. His arrest is part of a broader crackdown on Sufi clerics and activists in eastern Libya.

For a year, his family and community have had no information about his whereabouts. He is believed to be held in Gernada prison, where reports of torture and abuse have raised serious concerns for his health and safety. Given his age and fragile health, his immediate release is urgent.

Write to the General Commander of the Libyan Arab Armed Forces urging the authorities to:

- Immediately disclose Sheikh Al-Biju's fate and whereabouts and release him, as his detention is solely for exercising his human rights, including freedom of religion.
- Until his release, grant him access to his family, lawyers, and necessary medical care, including treatment in outside hospitals if needed.
- Ensure he is protected from torture and other ill-treatment and held in conditions that meet international standards.
- Allow independent monitors unrestricted and unannounced access to Gernada prison and all other detention facilities under LAAF control in eastern and southern Libya.

Write to:

Field Marshall Khalifa Binqasem Haftar
General Commander of the Libyan Arab Armed Forces (LAAF)
Email: pmoffice@libyangov.info
Salutation: Dear Field Marshall Khalifa Haftar,

And copy:

Mr. Nouri F M Elkasah
Chargé d'affaires, a.i.
Embassy of Libya
170 Avenue Laurier West, 1100
Ottawa, ON K1P 5V5
Tel: 613-842-7519 Fax: 613-842-8627
Email: assistant@embassyoflibya.ca ; info@embassyoflibya.ca

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

On February 4, 2024, around 20 armed men stormed Sheikh Al-Biju's home in Benghazi. They ransacked his belongings and stole 150,000 Libyan dinars (about \$33,270). They then took him to the Security Directorates' Support Body base in Ras al-Minqar, an area under the nominal oversight of the Ministry of Interior of Libya's Acting Prime Minister, Ossama Hamad.

Officials at the base denied holding him. His family filed a complaint with the Attorney General of the Benghazi Appeals Court on February 15, but it remains unanswered.

Unofficial sources later told relatives that Sheikh Al-Biju was in Gernada prison near al-Bayda. His health has worsened since his detention. Even before his arrest, he had diabetes and a weak immune system due to surviving cancer. In September 2024, he was briefly transferred to Cyrenaic Teaching Hospital in Shahat, but his family was denied access or further details.

Sheikh Al-Biju has long faced threats from Salafi groups. In 2013, he survived an assassination attempt. In 2016, his Quran teaching center in Benghazi's Gardens area was shut down, forcing him to teach from home.

Amnesty International reports that the Security Directorates' Support Body, which follows Salafi Madkhali ideology, initially detained him. This group has also arrested other Sufi clerics and activists. It frequently posts videos online, accusing detainees of "witchcraft and sorcery." Unofficial sources indicate Sheikh Al-Biju was later transferred to Gernada prison.

In November 2024, the Supreme Council for Islamic Sufism in Libya condemned the ongoing persecution of Sufi leaders and followers. They highlighted cases of arbitrary detention, torture, deaths in custody, and forced "confessions" linking Sufi sheikhs to "witchcraft." They also warned of efforts by Salafi Madkhali groups to discredit Sufi traditions since the fall of Mu'ammar Gaddafi in 2011.

Libya's parliament, aligned with the LAAF, passed a law on January 9, 2024, criminalizing "witchcraft and sorcery." Punishments range from 14 years in prison to the death penalty. This law has fueled arrests of Sufi clerics and others accused without evidence.

Amnesty International has documented widespread abuses by LAAF-linked armed groups, including the Internal Security Agency (ISA) and Tariq Ben Zeyad Brigade. Since January 2024, heavily armed ISA agents have abducted dozens of people—some in their 70s—from homes, streets, and public spaces. Detainees remain cut off from their families and legal representation. They face months of arbitrary detention without charges or trials.

Reports from Gernada prison describe torture, extreme cold, lack of bedding, and denial of medical care. Former detainees have confirmed the use of brutal methods, including beatings with water pipes, flogging, suspension in painful positions, and threats of sexual violence. Families of detainees have long complained about the lack of visits or communication.

On January 16, 2025, the Military Attorney General under the LAAF announced an investigation into reports of torture at Gernada prison. This followed leaked videos showing guards beating and flogging detainees. According to Libyan Crimes Watch, at least five former prisoners confirmed that the footage

was filmed in the prison's "administration wing," near the director's office. Some guards wore military police uniforms.

Amnesty International has urged Libyan authorities to ensure a thorough, independent, and impartial investigation. Military courts should not oversee cases involving crimes under international law and human rights violations. Those responsible must be removed from positions of power and held accountable through fair trials.

Since the investigation was announced, no further details have been made public. Amnesty International continues to document ongoing abuses in LAAF-controlled prisons and calls for urgent reforms to end arbitrary detentions, enforced disappearances, and torture.

Please take action as soon as possible until August 4, 2025! The UA will be duly updated should there be the need for further action.