

Libya's former PM Mahmoudi 'tortured' on forced return to Tripoli

Extradited politician had ribs broken and lung punctured, claims lawyer, but Tripoli officials dismiss allegations as naked lie

By: Chris Stephen in Tripoli and Luke Harding



Al-Baghdadi al-Mahmoudi in Tripoli on 24 June 2012, with a prison guard. Photograph: Anis Mili/Reuters

The lawyer acting for [Libya's](#) former prime minister Al-Baghdadi al-Mahmoudi, who was extradited to Tripoli from [Tunisia](#) at the weekend, claims his client has been tortured.

Marcel Ceccaldi, a French lawyer, said on Wednesday Mahmoudi had been badly beaten by Libyan security officers and left with broken ribs and a punctured lung.

"According to the information I have, it seems that he has been beaten," said Ceccaldi. "He is in hospital, under guard."

But Libya's government denied torture had taken place. Tripoli officials said reports of Mahmoudi being wounded were rumours, amounting to a "naked lie".

A Libyan government spokesman, Nassar el-Manaa, on Wednesday denied claims that Mahmoudi was mistreated in prison. "We would like to say it's wrong, a naked lie ... that he was attacked and is in a sort of coma. Al-Baghdadi al-Mahmoudi is in good health and he is in need of nothing, god willing."

He said [human rights](#) groups had yet to visit the former prime minister, who, he said, was being held in a justice ministry facility. "In the near future a visit will be given to any Tunisian entity to see for themselves the condition."

Tunisia's president, Moncef Marzouki, has branded the extradition "illegal", saying it was done behind his back.

Mahmoudi served as Muammar Gaddafi's prime minister from March 2006, until, [in August 2011, fleeing to Tunisia after the fall of Tripoli to rebel forces](#). He was reportedly handed over to Libyan officials in Tunis on Sunday and flown by helicopter to a Libyan prison.

In what has become a political crisis in Tunisia, pitting parliament against president, government officials insist the extradition came after it was ensured Libya could guarantee a fair trial. They say they did not need presidential permission for the move to return him.

But Ceccaldi claims such assurances were breached within hours of Mahmoudi arriving back in Libya. He alleges that his client was moved to a detention facility at Tripoli's Mitiga military airport where the beating took place.

Speaking from Paris, he said hospital workers told him that Mahmoudi, 70, had extensive wounds. "People said to me he has broken ribs, he has perforated lung, and he fell into a coma," he said. "If something bad happens to Al-Baghdadi Al-Mahmoudi the accomplices of his action are the members of the Tunisian government who organised his extradition."

But a spokesman for Libya's ruling National Transitional Council, Saleh Darhoub, denied that mistreatment had occurred. "The Libyan authorities would like to assure that Mahmoudi has not been tortured," he said. "He will be brought to justice lawfully."

The International Committee for the Red Cross in Libya said it was still waiting for permission to visit Mahmoudi. "[He] has been visited 10 times in Tunisia," said Soaade Messoudi, the organisation's Tripoli spokeswoman. "We have not visited him [here] yet."

[Amnesty International had urged the Tunisian authorities not to extradite Mahmoudi](#), and warned that he could be subjected to human rights violations in Libya.

"He faces a real risk of torture and other ill-treatment, unfair trial and possibly extrajudicial execution," said Hassiba Hadj Sahraoui, Amnesty International's deputy director for the [Middle East and north Africa](#). She condemned the decision to return him to Libya.

Mahmoudi had been arrested in Tunisia late September and sentenced to six months' imprisonment for "illegal entry".

He was acquitted later that month. According to Amnesty, [the Libyan authorities have charged him with "misuse of public money", "insulting civil servants", "threatening security officials with weapons" and "incitement to commit rape"](#). The charges relate to incidents that allegedly took place between 2006 and 2011.

Tunisia's court of appeal approved Mahmoudi's extradition last November. But Marzouki, a former human rights activist, blocked the extradition, citing human rights concerns.

The allegations of mistreatment come at a sensitive time for Libya, which has been criticised by Amnesty and Human Rights Watch for failing to investigate allegations that some of the 7,000 prisoners held in detention have been beaten and tortured.

Since August at least 20 prisoners have died in custody, Amnesty said, with Libya's official and semi-official detention facilities under the control of armed militia.

On Tuesday militia groups also cut the main highway linking east and west Libya, demanding changes to the rules of the country's first post-Gaddafi national elections, due to be held on 7 July.

Armed units, backed by Jeeps mounting anti-aircraft guns, blocked the highway at Red Wadi, 40 miles from Libya's main oil refinery at Ras Lanuf.

The militia say they will stay in place until Cyrenaica, Libya's oil-rich eastern province, is given a greater distribution of seats in the new national parliament, the national congress. It is backed by the self-declared Barqa council – the Arab name for Cyrenaica – which is calling for a boycott of the national elections unless seats are shared equally between Libya's three provinces.

The roadblock, which government forces have not opposed, comes with doubts over whether Libya can hold free and fair elections on schedule as violence continues in many parts of the country.

Fresh fighting has broken out in the southern town of Kufra, where battles between the indigenous Tibu people and Arab tribes this year have left 70 dead.

Tense ceasefires continue around the towns of Zuara and Zintan, where battles cost more than 100 lives in June. Benghazi has also been the scene of attacks blamed on Jihadists, including a rocket attack on the British ambassador's convoy this month.

The explosion of an IED outside the Tunisian consulate in Tripoli on Tuesday night put many international organisations on edge. The International Committee of the Red Cross has had two of its four offices in Libya bombed this June and is now reviewing security.

"There are some security incidents that affected several targets," said the organisation's head of mission in Libya, Georges Comminos. "We have to take certain precautions."

Opposition to Libya's ruling National Transitional Council, which is seen by critics as both secretive and dictatorial, is growing in the main former rebel towns of Benghazi, Misrata and Zintan, each of which has established its own ruling council.

"At the moment, we're protesting over our demands for an equal number of seats in the national general conference, [national congress]" Brigadier General Hamid Hassi, in charge of the highway roadblock, told the Libya Herald newspaper. "Libya is currently divided and the best proof of that is that Misrata has now in effect a separate government, and Zintan likewise."

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