

# NATO War Crimes: Red Cross alarmed by Libya situation, fears worse

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## Red Cross alarmed by Libya situation, fears worse

GENEVA (Reuters) - Health care and food supplies are deteriorating in Libya, but the Gaddafi government has managed to keep paying wages and subsidies in areas under its control, the International Committee of the Red Cross said on Tuesday.

The independent aid agency voiced concern the humanitarian situation could deteriorate further if fighting breaks out in the capital, Tripoli.

"Frankly, today we are in a situation where the ICRC is very alarmed by the situation, which is very dynamic and could become even more violent than today," Paul Castella, head of the ICRC delegation in Tripoli, told a news briefing.

"We are preparing to respond to urgent needs if combat erupts because we see the frontlines keep moving and fighting is ongoing," he said.

The shifting frontlines near Misrata and the Nafusa mountain region of western Libya, southwest of Tripoli, have forced more families to flee their homes, said Castella. "We don't think that the frontlines will stabilize anytime soon."

The ICRC is helping hospitals treat wounded from the Nafusa mountain areas and has delivered surgical and other medical supplies to Misrata, it said in a statement.

U.N. aid workers who reached four towns in the Nafusa mountain area found that people lacked food and had sold off most livestock, the World Food Program said on Tuesday.

The ICRC, the only aid agency to have access to virtually all of Libya, said the health sector was its priority. It has also visited nearly 1,000 detainees captured by government forces and rebels during the conflict now in its fifth month.

A measles outbreak is sweeping through Sabha in the south and has spread to Chad by Tuareg nomads, Castella said.

"There is no way the authorities can stop this epidemic," he said, noting the disease could be deadly in unvaccinated children. "It is not yet a tragedy but it might become one."

## SHORTAGE OF MEDICINES

Medicines or equipment for treating patients with chronic diseases like diabetes, who need

dialysis, or cancers, are in short supply or lack spare parts, according to the ICRC.

Libya's system for procuring life-saving medicines and vaccines has broken down and supplies are dwindling on both sides, the World Health Organization, a U.N. agency, warned.

"We are now getting to shortages, but soon we will really get to the point where there will be no more medicines and vaccines," WHO spokesman Tarik Jasarevic told reporters.

The ICRC was on alert for any sign the government of Muammar Gaddafi, being pounded by NATO allies supporting rebels fighting to topple his 41-year-old government, could no longer make payments or ensure food supplies, according to Castella.

The risk of a food crisis exists in most areas of Libya which imported up to 70 percent of its food before the war.

"We haven't identified a food crisis in government-controlled areas. ... Every family receives food subsidies, which are of great value, for a month," he said.

"Government wages are still paid, including to those who are displaced, through the banking system. This still works.

"So even if people lose their jobs, they still receive their wages as far as I understood, and this is on top of the in-kind support they receive and in addition the pension system is still working as well," Castella said.

But all Libyans are severely traumatized by the bombing and fighting, and many women have stopped nursing their babies out of fear they will transmit their anxiety, he said.

"There has been a huge psychological impact on the whole population which never thought they would see their country at war," he said.

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