

Mass grave found in Tripoli traced back to 1996 massacre

By Colleen Gonzalez
STAFF WRITER

On Sept. 25, Libyan officials announced the discovery of a mass grave site that is believed to hold the remains of 1,270 victims near Abu Salim prison. The victims are rumored to be inmates that were executed in a massacre carried out in June of 1996 by Muammar Gaddafi's security forces, the BBC reports.

"There's no rule of law in a dictatorship," said Visiting Assistant Professor of Political Science Robert Duncan. "Dictators will do anything to stay in power, and they'll kill anybody who gets in their way."

According to The National, the mass grave is the first physical evidence of a massacre that has haunted Libya and ignited the revolt that brought down Gaddafi's regime.

The killings in the prison became a focal point for the opposition movement in Libya. Gaddafi, who was in power until just recently when he was expelled by rebel forces, was known for using brutality against anyone who did not favor him. The victims are believed to be political prisoners who had spoken out against Gaddafi and were

consequentially disposed of by prison guards 15 years ago.

When the rebels swept through the country's capital, Tripoli, in late August, Gaddafi was forced into hiding.

Libya is now represented by the National Transitional Council. The council consists of 31 members from 31 different cities in all

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different directions. According to its official website, it is the council's hope to "liberate cities still under Gaddafi's regime and then guide Libya to free elections and establishing a constitution."

According to the BBC, the NTC discovered the grave site when they questioned security guards who were working at the prison and were present during the massacre. Bone fragments and clothing were found in the

top soil but Libyan officials have to wait for international forensic help due to a lack of sophisticated equipment.

Family members of the victims have visited the grave site and have displayed a wide spectrum of emotions. Many of them suffered through years of silence and unanswered questions, but a flicker of hope

remained to assuage fears of their loved ones not returning home. Sami Assad was told his brothers died five years ago of natural causes. Now he knows the truth.

"We are really happy this revolution has succeeded," Assad told BBC News. "But when I stand here, I remember my brothers and many friends have been killed just because they did not like Muammar Gaddafi."

Similarly, Nadia Trabelsi, who lost her husband in the killings, couldn't understand why her husband was taken away.

"He was a good man and he did nothing wrong," she told The National.

The findings of the grave hold symbolic importance for Libyans seeking justice after decades of repression and crimes under the regime.

"The cruelty people commit against their species is unfathomable," said Duncan. "Power, for some people, is so important they will do anything to get it — even if that means doing all these horrible things to people — and they don't care."

Gaddafi's power is slowly decreasing as the rebels move forward to establishing their own form of justice. However, there have been many casualties due to one man's hunger for power and oppression, and the violence is likely to continue. Dictators do not like to have their power threatened, and Gaddafi is no different.

"It's standard operating procedures for tyrants," said Duncan. "With people who want to eliminate any opposition, they just round up those opposing them and kill them. They just never existed."

Obama reiterates support for nations seeking democracy in Arab Spring

By Ellen Nicholas
STAFF WRITER

In his speech to the U.N. on Sept. 21, President Obama renewed his promise to support the Arab Spring, a wave of democratic uprisings in the Middle East and North Africa that began last spring.

"The United States will continue to support those nations that transition to democracy with greater trade and investment, so that freedom is followed by opportunity," said Obama according to the White House press office website. "We will pursue a deeper engagement with governments, but also with civil society — students and entrepreneurs, political parties and the press."

While this pledge is a good show of support for countries like Egypt, Libya, and Syria, what will it actually mean in real terms?

"Probably not a lot," said Visiting Assistant Professor of Political Science Robert Duncan. "It was good P.R. I think as a matter of principle, our country stands behind people who are struggling for freedom and democracy. Wherever they are ... And yeah, we will help as much as we can but we're not going to send in any Marines or any B-52s. Once you sort it all out and if you need help, we'll be glad to extend a hand."

Obama also made the rather vague oath in his speech saying that he would take measures, "to pursue a meaningful dialogue that brings peaceful change that is responsive to the people."

Though some may crave a more concrete plan of action, Obama's hands are tied when it comes to providing the countries in the Arab Spring with tangible forms of aid. The \$1 billion Egyptian debt relief package, as well as the economic development funds Obama proposed last May, have yet to make any headway in Congress, according to the Seattle Times.

"The Republicans are not going to do anything that will in any way, shape, or form give any kind of support

or advantage to Obama or the Democrats," said Duncan. "They're playing the blame game. They're intentionally gridlocking Congress for their own petty ideological ends."

However, there has been some progress in supporting the Arab Spring with monetary aid. According to the Washington Post, the Senate Appropriations Committee authorized \$140 million in economic-development funds for Egypt, Tunisia and Jordan.

The Egyptian debt forgiveness has been restricted to \$500 million, half the amount that was originally proposed, with only \$50 million of that accessible in 2012.

The revolution in Egypt seems to be serving as something of a barometer of the Arab Spring. The outcome of the Egyptian uprising will likely determine not only the success of the other countries' rebellions, but also whether or not the U.S. will send more aid their way, according to the Washington Post.

On the likelihood of Egypt being able to successfully establish a democratic government, Duncan is not optimistic.

"The Muslim brotherhood is the leading political organization over there," said Duncan. "They do not like secular governments. So whatever form of government does emerge, it may be more democratic, in that opposition voices may be allowed to be heard

and may be represented in the Congress, but I think the overwhelming majority would be in support of a theocracy, a sharia government ... That's my reading of those tea leaves."

While this prediction for the future of Egypt's revolution may well be an accurate one, many agree that the real power and hope of the Arab Spring lie with the youth of North Africa and the Middle East.

"The youth are delivering a powerful rebuke to dictatorship and rejecting the lie that some races, some peoples, some religions, some ethnicities do not desire democracy," said Obama according to the White House press office website.

"The advantage of a dictator is they control the press ... the TV stations, (and) the radio stations," said Duncan. "They keep the people deaf, dumb, and happy. They don't know



President Obama addresses the UN General Assembly on the Arab Spring, renewing his vow of support.

what's going on. You're in control. Now you can't because communication's out there ... Now the government has lost control of the communication and you've got probably 50 percent of the population in these countries under (the age of) 25."

Duncan thinks that in addition to the increasing access to online communication outlets such as Facebook and Twitter, the global economic crisis has also incited the recent rebellions across Arab world.

"They're very young," Duncan said. "They've had some education but they have no opportunities. There's no industry. There's no career for them. There's no future. And they see what the West has and what's going on in the rest of the world and they're pissed off. And so now that they can communicate, and this can be shared — boom. There you go."

In the end, Obama communicated the message that the U.S. supports the fight for freedom, equality, and democracy wherever it may be found.

Though the road ahead will undoubtedly be a rough one for the countries in the Arab Spring, Obama ended his speech on a hopeful note, saying, "Peace is hard, but we know that it is possible. So, together, let us be resolved to see that it is defined by our hopes and not by our fears. Together, let us make peace, but a peace, most importantly, that will last."