

**COI QUERY**

Country of Origin	Libya
Main subject	The Si'an tribe
Question(s)	<p>Information on the Al-Si'an (or Si'an, Seaan, Siaan) tribe, in particular:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Main characteristics of the tribe, peculiar signs, rituals- Its relationship with pro-Gaddafi's forces (2011- 2018)- Documented cases of targeting/discrimination by local militias against members of Al-Si'an based on their perceived affiliation with pro-Gaddafi's forces (2011-2018)
Date of completion	14 December 2018
Query Code	Q132
Contributing EU+ COI units (if applicable)	

Disclaimer

This response to a COI query has been elaborated according to the [Common EU Guidelines for Processing COI](#) and [EASO COI Report Methodology](#).

The information provided in this response has been researched, evaluated and processed with utmost care within a limited time frame. All sources used are referenced. A quality review has been performed in line with the above mentioned methodology. This document does not claim to be exhaustive neither conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to international protection. If a certain event, person or organisation is not mentioned in the report, this does not mean that the event has not taken place or that the person or organisation does not exist. Terminology used should not be regarded as indicative of a particular legal position.

The information in the response does not necessarily reflect the opinion of EASO and makes no political statement whatsoever.

The target audience is caseworkers, COI researchers, policy makers, and decision making authorities. The answer was finalised on the 14 December 2018. Any event taking place after this date is not included in this answer.

COI QUERY RESPONSE

1. Background information

The total population of Libya is approximately 6,7 million¹, whereby the vast majority is of Arabic descent.² Some sources report that there are about 140 tribes in the country, and that only 30 of them have social and political significance.³ The tribes live in the three historical zones of Libya; Tripolitania (site of the capital city Tripoli on the Mediterranean coast in northwestern Libya), Cyrenaica (which touches the Mediterranean but also extends into the Sahara), and Fezzan (the desert region).⁴

The Warfallah is not only the dominant tribe of Tripolitania, but due to its number of an estimated one million individuals, and its geographical spread, also the most important one in Libya.⁵ Another influential tribe in Tripolitania is the Qadhadfa of former leader Muammar Gaddafi, whose main territory comprises the areas from Syrte to Fezzan, however members of this tribe can also be found in Tripoli and Benghazi.⁶ A third important tribe in the region is the Zentan (Al-Zintan, Zinten). The Zentan are located around the towns of Nalut and Zintan, southwest of Tripoli in the middle of the Nafusa mountain range, next to the Tunisian border.⁷ The Zentan took part in the campaign to overthrow the Gaddafi regime.⁸

Other important tribes in Tripolitania are the Bani Walid and the Tarhuna. The latter makes up an estimated one-third of Libya's capital Tripoli.⁹ The Berbers compromise about 50 percent of the population of the western mountains.¹⁰

In almost all consulted sources the Al-Si'an (or Si'an, Seaan, Siaan)¹¹ is not mentioned as an important tribe in Tripolitania, except one. In a report, named 'Tribe, Security, Justice, and Peace in Libya Today', written by scholar and researcher Peter Cole and senior program officer of the United States Institute of Peace (USIP) Fiona Mangan, the Si'an is mentioned as one of the 'Major Libya Communities' in an overview map of Libyan tribes.¹²

¹ CIA Factbook, Libya, last updated 15 November 2018, [url](#)

² Al-Ahram Weekly, Tribes and abductions, Issue 1183, 6 - 12 February 2014, [url](#)

³ Al-Ahram Weekly, Tribes and abductions, Issue 1183, 6 - 12 February 2014, [url](#); Stratfor, Special Report: Libya's Tribal Dynamics, 25 February 2011, [url](#)

⁴ Stratfor, Special Report: Libya's Tribal Dynamics, 25 February 2011, [url](#)

⁵ Ben Lamma, O., The Tribal Structure in Libya: Factor for fragmentation or cohesion?, September 2017, [url](#), p. 12; Stratfor, Special Report: Libya's Tribal Dynamics, 25 February 2011, [url](#)

⁶ Ben Lamma, O., The Tribal Structure in Libya: Factor for fragmentation or cohesion?, September 2017, [url](#), p. 13; Stratfor, Special Report: Libya's Tribal Dynamics, 25 February 2011, [url](#)

⁷ Al-Ahram Weekly, Tribes and abductions, Issue 1183, 6 - 12 February 2014, [url](#); Ben Lamma, O., The Tribal Structure in Libya: Factor for fragmentation or cohesion?, September 2017, [url](#), p. 14; Stratfor, Special Report: Libya's Tribal Dynamics, 25 February 2011, [url](#)

⁸ Al-Ahram Weekly, Tribes and abductions, Issue 1183, 6 - 12 February 2014, [url](#)

⁹ Reuters, Factbox: Libya's tribal, cultural divisions, 25 February 2011, [url](#); Stratfor, Special Report: Libya's Tribal Dynamics, 25 February 2011, [url](#)

¹⁰ Reuters, Factbox: Libya's tribal, cultural divisions, 25 February 2011, [url](#)

¹¹ For ease of reference, the spelling Si'an will be used throughout this document.

¹² Cole, P. and Mangan, F., Tribe, Security, Justice, and Peace in Libya Today, Peaceworks No. 118, United States Institute of Peace, August 2016, [url](#), p. 2

2. Information on the Al-Si'an (or Si'an, Seaan, Siaan) tribe, in particular on its main characteristics, peculiar signs, rituals

Ethnographic information on the Si'an is scarce. The British scholar Clarke contributed to the research paper series 'Field Studies in Libya', published in 1960, with a case study named 'The 'Siaan: Pastoralist of the Jefara'. In this study the author reported that the Si'an is one of the tribes which inhabit the western Jefara mountains¹³ and that their total number was 7 509 in 1957.¹⁴

Furthermore, he stated that the Si'an are a homogenous tribe which comprises seven units or so-called *cabail*: Jauashia, Ulad Sharadah, Ulad Mohamed, El-hamaila, Ulad Sellam, Ulad Hamid and Ulad Talab. The seven *cabail* can be further subdivided into family groups or *lahmat*. All *cabail* except one, the Ulad talab, claim holy origin. Their claimed holiness does not only give them prestige, but also enables them to act as intermediators and arbiters of tribe conflicts.¹⁵

At the time when Clarke published his study, in 1960, the Si'an were mainly pastoralists with communal or joint ownership of the pastures. The main types of stock were camels, followed by goats and sheep. Besides pastoralism, the cultivation of cereals was the other major activity. Furthermore, he noted that only one in thirteen of the Si'an was sedentary and lived in small villages like Jaush-es-Seghira, Jaush Kebira and Tiji, which were poorly linked by unsurfaced tracks.¹⁶ The percentage of the Si'an with a nomadic lifestyle was rapidly decreasing in the mid-1970s.¹⁷

From the 1980s onwards, the Gaddafi regime started to recruit Si'an as border guards which enabled them, together with other tribes like the Nuwail, to monitor the Libyan-Tunisian border¹⁸. The Si'an, together with the Nuwail, also got control of the smuggling networks of agricultural and construction equipment and materials through Nalut to Tunisia.¹⁹

According to a report published by UNHCR in 2012, the Si'an were encouraged by the regime 'to settle in the towns of Tiji and Badu [Badr] which were located on land claimed by the local Amazigh (Berber) communities in Jadu and Nalut'.²⁰ The Si'an were also able to regain land rights which they lost in an earlier stage due to failure of tax payment.²¹

¹³ The Jefara mountains, nowadays also known as the Nafusa mountains, lie on the boundary between the Libyan coastal plain, known as the Jefara, to the north, and the Tripolitanian Plateau to the south. The mountains stretch across two districts: Al Jabal al Gharbi District (formerly Gharyan District and Yafran District) and Nalut District. See, Earth Snapshot, Nafusa Mountains Between the Jefara and the Tripolitanian Plateau, Libya, 26 February 2010, [url](#)

¹⁴ Clarke, J.I., The Siaan: Pastoralists of the Jefara, 1960, pp. 53-54

¹⁵ Clarke, J.I., The Siaan: Pastoralists of the Jefara, 1960, pp. 54-56

¹⁶ Clarke, J.I., The Siaan: Pastoralists of the Jefara, 1960, pp. 56-58

¹⁷ Berry, L.V., Chapter 2. The Environment and Its Environment, 1989, [url](#), p. 84

¹⁸ Boukhars, A., The Potential Jihadi Windfall from the Militarization of Tunisia's Border Region with Libya, January 2018, [url](#), p. 33; Lacher, W. and Labouj, A., Factionalism Resurgent: The War in the Jabal Nafusa, 2015, [url](#) p. 261, Meddeb, H., Precarious Resilience: Tunisia's Libyan Predicament, Future Notes, No. 5, April 2017, [url](#), p. 5,

¹⁹ Lacher, W. and Labouj, A., Factionalism Resurgent: The War in the Jabal Nafusa, 2015, [url](#) p. 260

²⁰ UNHCR, Housing, land and property issues and the response to displacement in Libya, 2012, [url](#), p. 77

²¹ Lacher, W. and Labouj, A., Factionalism Resurgent: The War in the Jabal Nafusa, 2015, [url](#) p. 260

3. Information on the relationship between the Si'an tribe and pro-Gaddafi forces (2011- 2018)

In a joint report written by country analysts from Belgium, the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden, it was stated that the Si'an, along with the Mashashya and Qawalishis, is quite a small tribe which was granted land in areas in the Nafusa by Gaddafi in the 1970s. Ever since, the Si'an have been seen as loyal to Gaddafi. During the 2011 upheaval, the Si'an have been accused by local militias of collaborating with pro-Gaddafi forces. As a result, between April-June 2011, the Si'an were largely displaced.²²

In a report published by the Human Rights Council in March 2012, it was reported that Gaddafi forces were based in Tiji from 25 March 2011 to 15 August 2011 and used the town 'as a base from which to attack other mountain towns'.²³ In the same report it was stated that both Tiji and Badr are largely populated by Arabs and perceived as Gaddafi loyalist by the *thuwar*.²⁴ Thuwar are persons who took part in the armed struggle against Gaddafi.²⁵

UNHCR reported in a similar way; 'Tiji, Badu [Badr] and outlying Si'an villages were used as staging grounds by Gaddafi troops' when anti-Gaddafi uprising began in Nalut and Jadu.²⁶ Tiji and Badr were taken by anti-Gaddafi troops on 15 and 16 August respectively.²⁷ Two months later 'virtually the entire' Si'an population was displaced.²⁸ After the displacement the Si'an lost control over the important Dhehiba-Wazen border crossing, which came into the hands of the Nalut military council.²⁹

On 2 October 2011, CNN reported that 'Arab Seaan forces' clashed several times with Berber forces.³⁰ In December 2011, almost the entire Si'an population returned back, except 60 families from the village Umm Alfar. Negotiations between the Tiji local council and Nalut council turned out unsuccessful. The latter council stated that the village was used for smuggling activities, while the inhabitants actually lived somewhere else. Until June 2012, security incidents occurred almost weekly, afterwards the situation calmed down.³¹

On 20 January 2017, Jamahiriya News Agency posted statement on their website issued by the Social Council of Gharyan's Tribes. The Council announced their full support for the Popular Front for the Liberation of Libya (PFL) and the son of former Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi, Saif al-Islam Gaddafi. Furthermore, it stated 'that the Social Councils of the tribes and cities of al-Ajaylat, al-Siaan, Zliten, al-Jmail, Rigdaleen, Zultin, al- Asah, Ras Jadeed, Ghat, al-Asabiaa and, Misallatah had announced earlier their accession and full support of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Libya [PFL]'.³²

²² Netherlands, (The), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Libya: Vulnerable Groups, 19 December 2014, [url](#), pp. 10-11

²³ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the International Commission of Inquiry on Libya, 2 March 2012, A/HRC/19/68, [url](#), p. 133

²⁴ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the International Commission of Inquiry on Libya, 2 March 2012, A/HRC/19/68, [url](#), p. 133

²⁵ Pusztai, W., Armed Groups in Libya after the Elections - what can be expected?, 25 June 2014, [url](#), p. 3

²⁶ UNHCR, Housing, land and property issues and the response to displacement in Libya, [url](#), p.77

²⁷ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the International Commission of Inquiry on Libya, 2 March 2012, A/HRC/19/68, [url](#), p. 133

²⁸ UNHCR, Housing, land and property issues and the response to displacement in Libya, [url](#), p. 77

²⁹ Boukhars, A., The Potential Jihadi Windfall from the Militarization of Tunisia's Border Region with Libya, January 2018, [url](#), p. 33; Meddeb, H., Precarious Resilience: Tunisia's Libyan Predicament, Future Notes, No. 5, April 2017 [url](#), p. 5

³⁰ CNN, Anti-Gadhafi tribes clash in two Libyan locales, 2 October 2011, [url](#)

³¹ UNHCR, Housing, land and property issues and the response to displacement in Libya, 2012, [url](#), p. 78

³² Jamahiriya News Agency, The Social Council of Gharyan's Tribes Announces Their Support of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Libya, 20 January 2017, [url](#)

On 24 June 2017, the spokesman of the Si'an called on Saif al- Islam Gaddafi to lead the country after he was released earlier that month.³³

4. Documented cases of targeting/discrimination by local militias against members of the Si'an tribe based on their perceived affiliation with pro-Gaddafi's forces (2011- 2018)

UNHCR reported that there were 'no reprisals against the civilian populations' when Tiji and Badr were taken by anti-Gaddafi troops in August 2011.³⁴ Contrary, in the aforementioned report by the Human Rights Council in March 2012, it was mentioned that three brothers were alleged killed by 'Nalut forces' during the taking of Badr.³⁵ However, according to UNHCR, two months later violence erupted after the 'extensive destruction' of both private and public objects in Tiji and Badr.³⁶

In the aforementioned report by UN Human Rights Council, it was concluded that 'thuwar' from Nalut 'have committed unlawful killings and torture in Tiji, as well as looting and destroying property' during the taking of the town and its aftermath in the second half of 2011.³⁷ Furthermore, in the report a representative of the Nalut military council 'indicated that the problems between the people of Tiji, Badr and other nearby towns and the people of Nalut predated the conflict and arose from that fact that the residents of these towns were not "indigenous" to the region, but had been relocated by the Qadhafi government on lands "that actually belong to Nalut"'.³⁸

In September 2014, the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) reported that approximately 9,200 IDPs from the Mashashya, Qawalish and Si'an tribes remained displaced in the Nafusa Mountains because they were 'accused of being supporters of the Qaddafi regime by armed groups and have been victims of retaliatory attacks'.³⁹

Among all sources consulted and within the timeframe allocated to respond to this query, no additional information could be traced on any act of threats or discrimination by local militias against members of Al-Si'an due to its loyalty to Qadaffi starting from 2011, until now.

Nonetheless, the below information could be of relevance.

In April 2016, the Australian government published 'The DFAT Libya Country Information Report'. In the report it was stated that:

'DFAT assesses that those who were, or are perceived to have been, high-ranking officials in the Gaddafi regime (such as ministers, senior bureaucrats, military personnel or diplomats), or who had close associations with the Gaddafi family, or those who were associated with the Libyan security forces during the 2011 conflict, face a high risk of both societal and official

³³ Al Masdar News, Protesters call on Gaddafi's son to lead Libya, 25 June 2017, [url](#)

³⁴ UNHCR, Housing, land and property issues and the response to displacement in Libya, 2012, [url](#), p. 77

³⁵ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the International Commission of Inquiry on Libya, 2 March 2012, A/HRC/19/68, [url](#), p. 133

³⁶ UNHCR, Housing, land and property issues and the response to displacement in Libya, [url](#), p.77

³⁷ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the International Commission of Inquiry on Libya, 2 March 2012, A/HRC/19/68, [url](#), p. 14

³⁸ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the International Commission of Inquiry on Libya, 2 March 2012, A/HRC/19/68, [url](#), p. 135

³⁹ IDMC, Libya IDP Figures Analysis (as of September 2014), 23 September 2014, [url](#)



discrimination throughout Libya. This may include being illegally detained, beaten or tortured; having death threats made against themselves or their families; or being killed. However, DFAT assesses that it is unlikely that a Libyan who was employed by the government at a low level unrelated to the security establishment would face discrimination as a result.⁴⁰

In March 2017, the UK Home office published a 'Country Policy and Information Note' on 'Actual or perceived supporters of former President Gaddafi'. In the Note it was stated that:

'There remains a generalised attitude of resentment towards perceived Gaddafi supporters and fighters. Given that they have been subject to serious ill-treatment, including assassination committed with impunity, it is likely that a person who was closely associated with the Gaddafi regime – particularly at a senior level, such as ministers, officials and diplomats – will be at risk of persecution or serious harm. Persons who had a low level role in the regime and family members of persons associated with the regime, even at a senior level, are in general unlikely to be at risk of persecution'.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Australia, DFAT, DFAT Country Information Report, 4 April 2016, [url](#), p. 19

⁴¹ UK Home Office, Country Policy and Information Note Libya: Actual or perceived supporters of former President Gaddafi, March 2017, [url](#), p. 17



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