

UN says 20,000 foreign fighters in Libya poses serious crisis

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UN envoy Stephanie Williams criticized foreign governments for 'behaving with complete impunity' in Libya. (Photo: Fethi Belaid / AFP)

United Nations, December 3 (RHC)-- At least 20,000 foreign fighters and mercenaries are in Libya causing a “serious crisis” as weapons continue pouring into the war-ravaged North African nation, a United Nations official has warned. “That is a shocking violation of Libyan sovereignty ... a blatant violation of the arms embargo,” UN acting envoy for Libya Stephanie Williams told an online meeting of the Libyan Political Dialogue Forum.

The 75-member forum is trying to get Libya’s warring sides to agree on a mechanism that would establish a transitional administration to lead the country through presidential and parliamentary elections in December 2021. The gathering is part of UN efforts to end the chaos in Libya, a major oil producer, which has been gripped by violence since a NATO-backed uprising in 2011 overthrew and killed veteran leader Muammar Gaddafi.

The country has since 2015 been dominated by armed groups and divided between two bitterly opposed administrations: the UN-brokered Government of National Accord (GNA) and a rival administration in the east backed by renegade military commander Khalifa Haftar.

“It is incumbent upon all actors to respect Libyan requests for them to depart the country so that Libyans can come together, so that the ceasefire can actually be implemented, that military forces can withdraw,” Williams later told Al Jazeera. Her remarks reflect her exasperation over the lack of progress on the departure of foreign fighters and mercenaries from Libya, which was part of a ceasefire deal signed in October.

“Time isn’t on anyone’s side here,” added Williams. “There is now a constituency of change in the country to come together. There are well-justified fears, a justified lack of confidence between the different parties. But the country is slipping away.”

Williams also slammed unspecified foreign governments for “behaving with complete impunity” and deepening the Libyan conflict with mercenaries and weapons.

Williams also warned about a looming “collapse of the electrical grid” in Libya because of corruption and mismanagement, noting that a \$1 billion investment in infrastructure is immediately needed, given that only 13 of Libya’s 27 power plants are functioning. She said 1.3 million of Libya’s more than 6.8 million people are expected to need humanitarian assistance in January.

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