

Libya Declares State of Emergency Over Unrest



Tripoli, January 20 (RHC)-- Libya has declared a state of emergency in the country after heavily-armed gunmen temporarily seized a military base in the south.

Libya's General National Congress made the decision during an "extraordinary session" on Saturday after the parliament put the army on alert as gunmen stormed the Tamahind air force base near the southern city of Sebha, where clashes have been raging for several days.

Defense Ministry spokesman Abdul-Raziq al-Shabahi told reporters in Tripoli that the army had regained control of the base after air strikes. Al-Shabahi said: "A force was readied, then aircraft moved and took off and dealt with the targets." He added that the army was pursuing the militants after they fled into the desert.

Earlier in the day, Libyan Prime Minister Ali Zeidan went on national television to announce he had ordered troops to be sent to the south to end days of clashes between rival militias and tribesmen there. He told Libyans that a group of gunmen had stormed the air force base outside Sebha, but the army was in control of the city and its civilian airport.

One political commentator said that Libya "really is close to being a failed state." He noted that the government is very, very weak "with the streets ruled by militias, affiliated with the government, but also acting unilaterally by themselves.

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