**Rival fighters in Libya clash; casualties reported**

**By Jomana Karadsheh, CNN**

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At least four people were killed and dozens more injured in heavy fighting around the coastal Libyan city of Zuwara on Tuesday, a city official said.

The four killed were Zuwara militia members engaged in clashes with rival fighters from two towns bordering the city, said Ayoob Sufyan, a spokesman for the city's local council.

He called the violence the worst in that stretch of western Libya since the fall of Tripoli in August.

"The situation is terrible," Sufyan told CNN. "It is a real war now."

Libyan authorities have been struggling to maintain peace in the country. Weapons have flooded the country's streets and clashes have raged between rival groups since the Moammar Gadhafi regime was toppled last year. Last week deadly tribal clashes in the southern city of Sabha left nearly 150 people dead.

The fighting in the Zuwara area broke out a few days ago, with people from the largely Berber town of Zuwara clashing with others from the Arab towns of Raghdalin and Jamail.

The latest hostilities started when Zuwara fighters were among a group of more than 60 who were driving back home recently from the Tunisian border where they were posted, Sufyan said.

They were intercepted by a large number of armed men, called Gadhafi loyalists by Sufyan.

He said some of the Zuwara militiamen managed to flee, but 25 others were captured and held for more than two days.

Sufyan said the men were severely beaten and tortured by their captors, who called them "rats" and "NATO agents" -- terms that had been used by the Gadhafi regime to describe to rebel fighters.

The National Transitional Council and government officials intervened and secured the release. But after they were freed, clashes broke out on Sunday.

The fighting intensified on Tuesday as mortars and rockets rained down on the city. Sufyan said fighters from Zuwara were on the frontline fighting back.

Tensions between Zuwara and these two towns has been historic and rooted in ethnic enmity. But Sufyan said the people of Zuwara are "more than friends" with other Arab cities like neighboring Zawiya and blamed the tensions on discrimination by the people of Jamail and Raghdalin.

Sufyan complained about what he said were empty promises by the Tripoli government and the National Transitional Council.

For months, the government has been promising to disarm the areas surrounding Zuwara after previous incidents, but nothing was done.

He said the people of Zuwara feel they have been abandoned because they are Berbers, not Arabs.

"Our people are dying, and they are doing nothing," Sufyan said.

Col. Ali al-Sheiki, a Ministry of Defense spokesman, told CNN a military committee met on Monday to resolve the situation around Zuwara.

He said the government will intervene to stop the fighting and work on national reconciliation.

If the situation escalates after peaceful intervention, al-Sheiki said the national army could be deployed to stop the fighting.

Al-Sheikhi said it was not clear what the cause of the fighting was. He said despite reports of Jamail and Raghdalin fighters being Gadhafi loyalists, "It is not 100% confirmed there are former regime elements in the towns."

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