

Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

Bilagsnr.:	574
Land:	Syrien
Kilde:	Human Rights Watch
Titel:	Syria. Kurdish Forces Violating Child Soldier Ban
Udgivet:	15. juli 2015
Optaget på baggrundsmaterialet:	17. september 2015



Syria: Kurdish Forces Violating Child Soldier Ban

Publisher [Human Rights Watch](#)

Publication Date 15 July 2015

Cite as Human Rights Watch, *Syria: Kurdish Forces Violating Child Soldier Ban*, 15 July 2015, available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/55adf6324.html> [accessed 7 September 2015]

Disclaimer This is not a UNHCR publication. UNHCR is not responsible for, nor does it necessarily endorse, its content. Any views expressed are solely those of the author or publisher and do not necessarily reflect those of UNHCR, the United Nations or its Member States.

The Kurdish armed group that controls territory in northern Syria, despite some progress, is still not meeting its commitment to demobilize child soldiers and to stop using boys and girls under 18 in combat, Human Rights Watch said today.

On June 5, 2014, the People's Protection Unit (YPG) signed a "Deed of Commitment" with the nongovernmental organization Geneva Call pledging to demobilize all fighters under 18 within one month. One month later, it demobilized 149 children. Despite this promise and the initial progress, Human Rights Watch documented cases over the past year of children under 18 joining and fighting with the YPG and the YPJ, its female branch. Some children under 18 with those forces, based on public sources, apparently died in combat in June 2015.

"The YPG promised to stop sending children to war and it should carry out its promise," said Fred Abrahams, special adviser at Human Rights Watch. "Of course the Kurdish forces are fighting groups like ISIS that flout the laws of war, but that's no excuse to tolerate abuses by its own forces."

The YPG and YPJ are not the only offenders among the many armed groups in Syria using child soldiers, but they can do more to stop the practice, Human Rights Watch said.

Based on information provided by local and international organizations, Human Rights Watch compiled a list of 59 children, 10 of them under 15, who were allegedly recruited by or volunteered for YPG or YPJ forces since July 2014. Human Rights Watch confirmed seven of these cases by speaking directly with the children's relatives. In some cases, the groups enlisted children without their parents' consent.

"My daughter went to school and was taken from there by a group of YPJ," a father of a 14-year-old girl near Qamishli said. "We knew nothing about her until a YPJ commander called and informed us that she had joined YPJ."

Human Rights Watch sent a letter to the YPG on June 10, 2015, asking for a response to the allegations. In its reply on June 24, the group acknowledged that it faced "significant challenges" to stop its use of child soldiers due to the ongoing armed conflict. It acknowledged that there had been "some individual cases" over the past year.

The letter noted that, on June 13, the YPG had demobilized 27 boys and, on April 20, the YPJ had demobilized 16 girls. In addition, seven YPG officers had been punished for accepting child soldiers - three expelled from the force and four demoted, although the group gave no names or dates.

On July 5, the YPG and YPJ issued a circular to commanders and heads of recruiting centers saying they were not to recruit or accept anyone under 18. Those who fail to comply will face "maximum disciplinary measures," the circular said.

The internal regulations of the YPG, as well as the Kurdish-run police force, called Asayish, forbid the use of children under 18.

Human Rights Watch acknowledged the difficult conditions in Syria, with the extremist group Islamic State (also known as ISIS) repeatedly committing war crimes in Kurdish-held areas, including the deliberate killing of more than 200 men, women, and children in the town of Kobani (Ayn al-`Arab in Arabic) on June 25.

In September 2014, ISIS opened a major attack on Kobani and seized parts of the city. Kurdish forces and Syrian opposition fighters, aided by US-led airstrikes, expelled the group in January 2015.

At the same time, the YPG and its affiliated political party, the Democratic Union Party (PYD), which governs the northern Kurdish-run areas, can better uphold their obligations under international human rights law and, when related to armed conflict, international humanitarian law, Human Rights Watch said. This includes the prohibition on recruiting or using children under 18 as fighters, scouts, or couriers, or at checkpoints.

An additional concern is the Kurdish group's creation of a "non-combatant category" for children aged 16 and 17, based on a reservation the group entered with Geneva Call's Deed of Commitment. The reservation says the group will continue to recruit and accept 16- and 17-year-olds but not have them perform military functions.

The YPG said in its letter to Human Rights Watch that it is accepting recruits into this category and is keeping them at "centers" far from the front lines, but it did not know the exact number of children in this group or specify what tasks they perform.

Human Rights Watch urged the YPG and YPJ to stop recruiting 16- and 17-year-olds, even if they are not serving a military function. The Optional Protocol to the Children's Rights Convention on Children and Armed Conflict says that non-state armed groups should not recruit children under 18 for any purpose.

Under customary international humanitarian law and the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC), it is a war crime for members of armed forces or non-state armed groups to conscript or enlist children under 15, or to use them to participate actively in hostilities. Ten of the 59 children who allegedly joined the YPG or YPJ over the past year were 15 or younger.

The June 5 report of the United Nations secretary-general to the Security Council on children in armed conflict said that the recruitment and use of children in combat in Syria had become "commonplace." The United Nations verified cases of 271 boys and 7 girls who had been

recruited and used by groups affiliated with, among others, the Free Syrian Army (142), YPG and YPJ (24), ISIS (69), and al-Nusra Front (25), and the actual numbers are believed to be higher. Some armed groups fighting with the Syrian government, such as Hezbollah and the Popular Committee, also reportedly recruited children in small numbers, the report said.

"Armed groups in Syria are placing children in direct harm by giving them weapons and sending them to fight," Abrahams said. "The YPG has a chance to stop this practice and show that it's serious about keeping its commitments on human rights."

Copyright notice: © Copyright, Human Rights Watch

Search Refworld

by keyword
and / or country

[Advanced Search](#) | [Search Tips](#)

Countries

- [Syrian Arab Republic](#)

Topics

- [Armed groups / Militias / Paramilitary forces / Resistance movements](#)
- [Child soldiers](#)
- [Children's rights](#)
- [Children-at-risk](#)
- [Kurd](#)
- [Terrorism](#)