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HRW – Human Rights Watch

Key Steps Taken to End Use of Child Soldiers in Syria

September 11, 2018 2:09PM EDT Dispatches

Forces in Northeast Issue Order to Prohibit Recruitment, Verify Ages

The Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), a coalition of forces controlling parts of Syria's northeast, has taken an important step towards ending the use of child soldiers (<https://www.newsweek.com/us-ally-syria-declares-end-using-child-soldiers-1112289>) in their ranks. The SDF issued a military order banning the recruitment of anyone under 18 and ordering their military records office to verify the ages of those currently enlisted.

In August, Human Rights Watch documented the recruitment of children (<https://www.hrw.org/report/2014/06/22/maybe-we-live-and-maybe-we-die/recruitment-and-use-children-armed-groups-syria>) by the SDF's largest constituent, the People's Protection Units (YPG), from three displacement camps in northeast Syria, including six girls who enlisted voluntarily but without permission from families. Families told us of their debilitating fear for their children, and few had any contact with their kids after they enlisted. "We just want to know if she's alive or dead," the mother of a 17-year-old girl recruit said.

A report by the United Nations Secretary General found 224 cases of child recruitment (<http://undocs.org/s/2018/465>) by the YPG and its women's unit in 2017, an almost fivefold increase from the previous year. If the order banning child recruitment is implemented, these children should be demobilized and reunited with families or transferred to civilian authorities who should protect them in cases where they are at risk of domestic abuse if returned to their family.

The order calls for SDF commanders to transfer any member under 18 to the educational authorities in northeast Syria and to end salary payments. It makes military commanders responsible for appointing ombudspersons to receive complaints of child recruitment, and orders punitive measures against commanders who fail to comply with the ban on child recruitment. We and other groups, like Geneva Call (<https://genevacall.org/syria-new-measures-taken-by-the-kurdish-peoples-protection-units-to-stop-using-children-under-18/>), have called on the YPG (<https://www.hrw.org/news/2015/07/10/syria-kurdish-forces-violating-child-soldier-ban-0>) to end child recruitment in Syria (<https://www.hrw.org/report/2014/06/22/maybe-we-live-and-maybe-we-die/recruitment-and-use-children-armed-groups-syria>).

die/recruitment-and-use-children-armed-groups-syria) since 2014, but the abuse proliferated during heavy fighting last year. If implemented, the new SDF order is a welcome step towards protecting the children of Syria, many of whom have already had to flee their homes, and whose future remains so uncertain.

ecoi.net summary:

Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) issued a military order banning the recruitment of anyone under 18



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Syrian Arab Republic

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HRW – Human Rights Watch [\(/en/source/11207.html\)](/en/source/11207.html)

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