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Forcible recruitments and the deployment of child soldiers by the Democratic Union Party in Syria



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On July 13, 2014, the legislative council for the canton of Jazirah, which was appointed by the Democratic Union Party (PYD), enacted a law on compulsory military service entitled the »Duty of Self-Defense«. The following report analyzes the text of the law and concerns itself with the recruiting practices of the PYD's paramilitary, the People's Defense Units (YPG), since the law was adopted.

The text of the law

Articles 2 and 3 of the law on compulsory military service¹ define the group of people to whom the law applies. Article 2 states:

»The duty of self-defense is a social and moral duty of the entire population. Therefore it is the responsibility of each family that resides in the region to supply a member to carry out this duty.«

Article 3 continues:

»The provisions of this law apply to all males between the ages of 18 and 30 years. Women may volunteer themselves to self-defense.«

According to Article 4, six months of military service are required and, as a rule, must be completed within

¹ The legal text can be accessed at <http://www.kurdwatch.org/pdf/KurdWatch_D035_en_ar.pdf>.

no more than one year. According to Article 5, individuals whose families

»are mourning a martyr from the ranks of the People's Defense Units, the Asayiş [security service] or the Kurdish people's liberation movement«

or individuals who are an only child are exempt from military service. There is also an exemption for people unable to perform military service for health reasons who can present a doctor's certificate to this effect. Article 6 specifies that people who have a family to support will receive a financial contribution during their military service. Article 7 states that anyone who »does not fulfill his duty to self-defense will be brought to the nearest recruitment office«. Finally, Article 8 specifies that people who have fulfilled their compulsory military service may voluntarily join the People's Defense Units.

The basic problems with the law are as follows: First, decisions are not made by an authorized state entity, but rather by a committee appointed by the Democratic Union Party (PYD). Second, the people who fulfill their »compulsory military service« do so as part of the People's Defense Units (YPG), the armed wing of the PYD. The People's Defense Units are under the direct command of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). Like the PYD, its leadership is comprised of PKK cadres and PKK commanders.² It is therefore not a quasi-state army, but a paramilitary.

In addition, the law allows no possibility for conscientious objection. It thereby violates internationally recognized human rights.

Furthermore, a certain imprecision in the text of the law is notable. For example, the law states that »each family« (understood as the nuclear family) must supply a fighter for the YPG. What is the relationship between this requirement and Article 3, which states that these regulations apply to all males between the ages of eighteen and thirty years? Does Article 3 simply describe the group of people from which the individual families must choose a recruit, or must all males between the ages of eighteen and thirty who live in the »democratic self-administered region« in fact complete military service? The policy on physical exams, the criteria for se-

² See also KurdWatch, September 2013, »What does the Syrian-Kurdish opposition want? Politics between Erbil, Sulaymaniyah, Damascus and Qandil«, <http://www.kurdwatch.org/pdf/KurdWatch_A009_en_Parteien2.pdf>.

lecting recruits, and the training of recruits are also not described.

By purportedly building a legally authorized army, the PYD is claiming quasi-state power. Beyond this rather symbolic significance, the law on compulsory military service also serves the PYD's political interests. The number of people joining the People's Defense Units voluntarily is presumably too small for the PYD to maintain control of the predominantly Kurdish regions and to present itself as an effective fighting force against the Islamic State (IS) on the strength of volunteers alone.

Recruiting practices

The first forcible recruitments by the YPG and the Asayiş, the security service of the PYD, took place in April and May of 2014, in other words prior to the passage of the law. In contrast, the first mass recruitments were reported in October of 2014. Since then recruitments have often happened randomly, for example at checkpoints or in the course of mass arrests at internet cafés or coffee houses. KurdWatch has researched the following cases of forcible recruitment in detail:³

- On May 14, 2014, fighters for the People's Defense Units forcibly recruited at least four residents of Khirbat Jammu, a Kurdish village ten kilometers west of Tall Tamr. Those in question were Sulayman 'Ali, Shukri 'Azzu, 'Abid Usi, and Mazlum 'Azzu.
- On October 11, 2014, employees of the Asayiş arbitrarily kidnapped young men between the ages of eighteen and thirty from the streets in all PYD-controlled areas of the Jazirah. The majority of those kidnapped were released the following day. Prior to their release, they had to sign that they would not leave the country and that they would be ready to fight in the People's Defense Units at any time. Should they fail to keep this agreement, their family would have to pay five hundred thousand Syrian liras. They were also told verbally that a female member of their family would be recruited should the family be unable to pay the required sum. Exact information is not available about the number of people who were immediately released, or of those

3 All of the individual cases cited here were published under the categories »News 2014« and »News 2015« on the website <www.kurdwatch.org>.

who were detained for a longer period, or who were ultimately recruited. A total of up to three thousand men, including both Arabs and Christians, were allegedly involved. According to estimates, up to one thousand people were reportedly detained at the recruitment camp in Tall Ma'ruf alone. Eight days after the mass recruitments, one of the detainees reported that numerous people, in particular Arabs, Christians, and those with contacts in the PYD, had already been released the following day. Of the remaining one hundred sixty people, eleven fled during a transfer and thirty-five others were released later. The remaining people were promised every day that they would be released. However, until that time no action had been taken.⁴ On October 21, one of the people released from the camp in Tall Ma'ruf reported to KurdWatch that upon his release, seventy people who had been forcibly recruited still remained in the camp, including students and minors.⁵

- On November 6, 2014, employees of the Asayiş fatally shot twenty-five-year-old Ziyad Salih Oso in ad-Darbasiyah when he tried to escape. Oso had been picked up by the Asayiş in the course of a mass recruitment on October 11, 2014, but was able to escape from the recruitment camp in Tall Ma'ruf.

- On December 6, 2014, employees of the Asayiş kidnapped young men between the ages of eighteen and thirty at several checkpoints in ad-Darbasiyah to recruit them against their will for the People's Defense Units. There is no information available about the exact number of people who were kidnapped.

- On December 7, 2014, fighters for the Christian Sutoro militia attempted to kidnap nine Kurdish men at a checkpoint in al-Malikiyah (Dêrik). Six of the men were able to flee. The other three were turned over to the People's Defense Units for recruitment.

- On January 30, 2015, employees of the Asayiş stopped Huzni Barzani and Yusuf Husayn at the Iraqi-Syrian border. Both men, who come from the village of Dayr Ayyub (Dêrûna Qulinga) ten kilometers northeast al-Qahtaniyah (Tirbesipî), had tried to flee to Iraqi Kurdistan to avoid recruitment by the People's Defense

⁴ See <https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?id=685019264856176&story_fbid=877050318986402>; <<https://www.facebook.com/21.syria.freedom/posts/545951928869257>>.

⁵ Interview with a former conscript from Tall Ma'ruf, October 21, 2014. According to the law on compulsory military service, students have the right to perform their compulsory service within two years instead of within one year.

Units. Their smugglers betrayed them to the Asayiş, who turned them over to the YPG.

- On February 4, 2015, employees of the Asayiş forcibly recruited young men between the ages of eighteen and thirty at several checkpoints in al-Qamishli. An Asayiş employee told the news agency ARA News that one hundred fifty people were arrested and dispersed among the YPG training camps.
- On February 7, 2015, employees of the Asayiş forcibly recruited Muhammad ‘Ali ‘Askar (b. 1996 in al-Malikiyah) at a checkpoint in al-Malikiyah. When the parents of this member of the Kurdistan Democratic Party—Syria (PDK-S) approached the People’s Defense Units and demanded his return, they were told that they would see their son in six months.
- On February 15, 2015, employees of the Asayiş forcibly recruited the student Lu’ay Muhammad Amin ‘Ali (b. 1989 in Tall Ma’ruf) in downtown al-Qamishli. He was transferred to the YPG.
- On March 14 and 18, 2015, employees of the Asayiş forcibly recruited young men between the ages of eighteen and thirty for the YPG. The recruitment took place at several checkpoints in al-Qamishli and ‘Amudah. Exact information about the number of people involved is not available.
- On April 4, 2015, employees of the Asayiş stormed internet cafés and coffee houses in Ra’s al-‘Ayn (Serê Kaniyê) and forcibly recruited a number of young men. Exact information about the number of people kidnapped is also not available in this case.
- On April 10, 2015, employees of the Asayiş picked up numerous young men in the village of Qal‘at al-Hisn (Kalhê), located twenty-five kilometers south of al-Malikiyah and only five hundred meters from the Syrian-Iraqi border. The men were trying to cross the border illegally in order to avoid forced recruitment. Their exact number could not be determined. According to eyewitness reports, approximately fifty people were handed over to the YPG.

Although the text of the law does not exempt them from compulsory military service, Arabs and Christians in the areas under PYD control have been spared recruitment by the People’s Defense Units. While members of

these sections of the population were also kidnapped in the early mass recruitments on October 11, 2014, they were released the following day. As a Kurdish-nationalist organization, the PYD ultimately has no interest in recruiting Arabs and Christians. The PYD also wants to avoid potential conflicts with the representatives of Arab tribes. Finally, recruiting Arab Syrians would put the PYD in direct competition with the Syrian military authorities. There is much to suggest that the regime and the PYD have divided the population of potential recruits amongst themselves—Kurds to the People's Defense Units and Arabs to the Syrian army. There are also Christian militias that cooperate to a certain degree with the People's Defense Units.

The cases described show that arbitrary mass demonstrations and random recruitments are most common. Many people are initially detained only to be subsequently released. Therefore it may happen, for example, that young men whose brothers have already been recruited will be arrested. If they can prove this, they are not required to do military service.⁶ The PYD appears to be attempting to adjust its strategy in order to improve its recruiting in the future. In early March 2015, the transitional administration for the canton of Jazirah began issuing new family registers in order to collect precise information about family composition and thus about potential recruits. Previously this information was not available to the PYD because the central recruiting office in al-Hasakah is still under government control.⁷

The training of recruits occurs at YPG camps in Syria. The largest known camp is located in Tall Ma'ruf, twenty kilometers south of al-Qamishli. Another large camp is located in Himu, five kilometers west of al-Qamishli. Arab militias that fought alongside the People's Defense Units were also trained here. Additional training camps are located in the district of Jirnik in al-Qamishli, in Tall Tamr, twenty-five kilometers east of Tall Tamr in Tall Baydar, two kilometers south of al-Ma'bada (Girkê Legê) in Rumaylan, ten kilometers east of al-Ma'bada in Tall 'Adas (Girzîro), in eastern Ra's al-'Ayn, in al-Malikiyah, and ten kilometers to the north in ar-Rayhaniyah. The Mela Merzê

6 Interview with an activist from ad-Darbasiyah, April 18, 2015. The rule explicitly applies only to siblings, not to other relatives.

7 KurdWatch, April 1, 2015, »Al-Qamishli: PYD wants to introduce own family registers«, <<http://www.kurdwatch.org/index.php?aid=3391&z=en>>.

camp, which is likewise located near al-Malikiyah, also trains minors before they are brought to Iraqi Kurdistan. The first recruits have since finished their training. On April 11, 2015, fifty-one recruits were released after completing their six months of compulsory service.⁸

The fear of being forcibly recruited has led an unknown number of young men to leave the Kurdish regions of al-Hasakah province, which has, in turn, prompted the PYD to react. With Circular Letter Number 145, dated August 23, 2014, the executive council of the canton of Jazirah, asked the Asayiş not to issue exit permits for people between the ages of eighteen and thirty. People who can present a letter of approval from the defense committee's recruitment office are exempt.

The recruitment of child soldiers

Along with adults, there has been an increase in the recruitment of minors as young as twelve over the past fourteen months. Sometimes the recruitment was forced; sometimes the children and adolescents joined the People's Defense Units voluntarily, but against the expressed will of their parents. It is notable that many girls are among the minors who have been recruited. While adult conscripts are trained in Syria, the PYD typically seems to bring minors to Iraqi Kurdistan. KurdWatch has researched the following cases:

- On April 8, 2014, fifteen-year-old Hanan Farhad Hajj Yunis left the People's Defense Units. Four days later the former fighter's mother, Jamilah 'Ali Kikiyah, was held by the People's Defense Units for several hours. After her release, YPG fighters kidnapped Hanan's father, Farhad Hajj Yunis, and her brother, Rashad Hajj Yunis. According to residents of the village, the People's Defense Units demanded either the daughter's return or the recruitment of any other family member.
- In early May 2014, fighters for the People's Defense Units recruited thirteen-year-old Rosin Muhammad Husayn. On May 14 and 15, family members demonstrated in front of the PYD-affiliated People's House in ad-Darbasiyah and demanded the girl's return. Employees of the Asayiş forcibly dispersed the demonstration.

⁸ KurdWatch, April 17, 2015, »Tall Tamr: First recruits complete six months of forced service«, <<http://www.kurdwatch.org/index.php?aid=3407&z=en>>.

- On May 10, 2014, fighters for the People's Defense Units recruited twelve-year-old Fatimah Salim 'Ali for military service. A family member told KurdWatch:

»The girl simply disappeared. Her parents are PYD supporters. However they weren't asked if they wanted to send the girl to the military. The YPG claims that the girl decided by her own free will. Her parents are not even allowed to accompany their daughter. They were promised that after a two week training, Fatimah would be allowed to return if she wants.«

According to unconfirmed reports, other minors were recruited along with Fatimah.

- On September 20, 2014, fighters for the People's Defense Units recruited the thirteen-year-old student 'Ali 'Abdullah 'Ali in al-Ma'bada without his parents' consent. His family knows to which base he was assigned. Upon his mother's inquiries, however, the People's Defense Units claimed to know nothing of the child's whereabouts.
- On November 4, 2014, members of the PYD-affiliated Revolutionary Youth forcibly kidnapped Chiman Muhammad Sadiq Ahmad from her school in Tall Sha'ir, ten kilometers west of al-Qahtaniyah. The People's Defense Units refused to return her to her parents and informed them that she may be brought to the Qandil Mountains. The family was also threatened if they continued to speak to the media about the kidnapping of their daughter.
- On November 4, 2014, members of the PKK kidnapped the fifteen-year-old student Najah Nerwan Ahmad from her school in the village of al-Kazimiyah, ten kilometers east of al-Malikiyah. Based on a tip from her teacher, the family assumes that their daughter was recruited.
- On November 6, 2014, fighters for the People's Defense Units kidnapped fourteen-year-old Kazim 'Adnan Farman from his parents' house in al-Qamishli. His parents tried in vain to secure the return of their son.
- In late November 2014, thirteen-year-old Nurman Ibrahim Khalifah (b. on January 1, 2001) was kidnapped by PYD members and brought to a PKK military camp

in Iraqi Kurdistan, where she was to be trained as a guerilla fighter. On December 24, 2014, she and another under-aged girl were able to escape. In an interview with KurdWatch, she reported that hundreds of minors are being held in PKK camps in the mountains of Iraqi Kurdistan. The children and adolescents do not receive sufficient food and must perform hard labor. Escape attempts are routine. If they are discovered, they are punished with a transfer to another camp, with arrest, torture, and in some cases with death:

»When I came to the mountains, a girl had tried to escape seven times already and the eighth time she was caught again. We were all gathered together. There was a meeting that lasted the whole night. She was put on a stage and they told her that a PKK bullet was too good for her and she was shot and thrown in the river.«⁹

- On December 23, 2014, fighters for the People's Defense Units recruited the ninth-grader Hamrin 'Abdulhamid Husayn (known by the family name 'Idi) without her parents' consent. The girl was picked up in front of her parents' house in 'Amudah. In a press release, her brother Marwan 'Idi said:

»I went to the Democratic Union Party's Women's Defense Units and the Asayiş. Both claimed that Hamrin was not with them. However Hamrin had contacted a friend by phone and told her that she and a group of girls were on their way to a military training ground in the Qandil Mountains.«

- On December 28, 2014, fighters for the People's Defense Units recruited the eighth-grader Hizbiyah Walid Shaykhmus (b. on January 5, 2000) without her parents' consent. The girl was picked up in front of her school in al-Qamishli. The parents of the fourteen-year-old turned to the YPG and the PYD's People's House as well as to the Asayiş to demand their daughter's return. According to Hizbiyah's father, they were told only that their daughter would be brought to the PKK's military headquarters in the Iraqi-Kurdish Qandil Mountains.

⁹ KurdWatch, May 30, 2015, »Nurman Ibrahim Khalifah, Student: »They told her: »This PKK bullet is too good for you!« and shot her in the head«<, <http://www.kurdwatch.org/syria_article.php?aid=3428&z=en>.

- On April 3, 2015, employees of the Asayiş recruited sixteen-year-old Dilbar Ahmad Hajji (b. 1999) in ‘Ayn al-‘Arab (Kobanî). The girl’s father told KurdWatch:

»When we demanded her return from the Asayiş, my wife was beaten, called an honorless traitor, and then thrown out.«

According to the Asayiş, Dilbar Hajji decided on her own to perform military service and is staying at a camp run by the PYD’s Women’s Defense Units (YPJ).

On January 15, 2014, it became clear that the People’s Defense Units also deploy minors in combat operations. Fifteen-year-old Dalil Riyad Qasim Khalil (b. in al-Qamishli) was laid to rest as part of the mass burial for YPG fighters killed in Tall Hamis and Tall Birak.

KurdWatch is also aware of a case in which a fifteen-year-old was brought to ‘Ayn al-‘Arab only a few days after her forced recruitment and without any military training. She was deployed there in the fight against the Islamic State. A week later she was brought to Iraqi Kurdistan, where she was able to escape. In addition, there are numerous known cases in which minors are being deployed at YPG checkpoints.¹⁰

Violations of international law

The recruitment of minors described in the cases above violates both the People’s Defense Units’ self-imposed commitments and international law. The recruitment of people under the age of eighteen violates the law on compulsory military service, analyzed above, which was passed by the legislative council and sets the minimum age for recruitment at eighteen years. Moreover on December 14, 2013, the YPG’s general commando issued an order that prohibited the recruitment of people under the age of eighteen and threatened anyone who violated this order.¹¹ Clearly this order is not being carried out. The cases described above also show that the deed of commitment to protect children in armed conflicts, which was initiated by the non-governmental organization Geneva Call and signed by representatives of the YPG, its women’s units (YPJ), and the »Democratic

10 See, for example, USA Today, November 16, 2014, »Child soldiers fight against Islamic State in Syria«, <<http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2014/11/16/kurds-child-soldiers/18706053>>.

11 »Circular issued by the General Command of YPG«, December 14, 2013, <http://theirwords.org/media/transfer/doc/ypg_order_en-b21b6149ccdeeb42de6c53ea83275b05.pdf>.

Self-Administration in Rojava« on July 5, 2014, has had no lasting consequences. The deed stipulates that children under the age of eighteen will not be deployed in armed conflicts and will be protected from the consequences of armed conflicts.¹²

In addition, recruiting children under the age of fifteen and deploying them in combat operations violates Article 38 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child from November 20, 1989. Paragraphs 2 and 3 state:

»(2) States Parties shall take all feasible measures to ensure that persons who have not attained the age of fifteen years do not take a direct part in hostilities.

(3) States Parties shall refrain from recruiting any person who has not attained the age of fifteen years into their armed forces. In recruiting among those persons who have attained the age of fifteen years but who have not attained the age of eighteen years, States Parties shall endeavor to give priority to those who are oldest.«

In keeping with this, the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court classifies the »conscription or enlistment of children under the age of fifteen years into armed forces or groups or using them to participate actively in hostilities« as war crimes.

In addition, forcible recruitment of people who have not attained the age of eighteen and the recruitment of this group of people against the will of their parents violates the Optional Protocol to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Optional Protocol deals with children in armed conflicts and entered into force in February 2002. Article 3 states:

»(1) State Parties shall raise the minimum age for the voluntary recruitment of persons into their national armed forces from that set out in article 38, paragraph 3, of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, taking account of the principles contained in that article and recognizing that under the Convention persons under the age of 18 years are entitled to special protection.«

12 Geneva Call, July 7, 2014, »Syria: Kurdish armed forces demobilize 149 child soldiers«, <<http://www.genevacall.org/syria-kurdish-armed-forces-demobilize-149-child-soldiers>>.

The same article specifies the special protective measures that are to be taken:

»(3) States Parties that permit voluntary recruitment into their national armed forces under the age of eighteen years shall maintain safeguards to ensure, as a minimum, that:

- a) Such recruitment is genuinely voluntary;
- b) Such recruitment is carried out with the informed consent of the person's parents or legal guardians;
- c) Such persons are fully informed of the duties involved in such military service;
- d) Such persons provide reliable proof of age prior to acceptance into national military service.«

The large number of cases outlined, in particular the large number of minors in PKK and YPG training camps in Iraqi Kurdistan, make clear that these are not isolated cases. Actions taken by the PYD to identify and demobilize a total of 149 child soldiers, which allegedly occurred after the deed of commitment in July 2014,¹³ are at best a drop in the bucket. At worst, they are a diversionary tactic to allow the PYD to continue the strategic recruitment of child soldiers. KurdWatch presumes that the YPG relies on the use of child soldiers. It is easier to recruit adolescents than adults, especially if they are told that their fight is »heroic«. For young women and girls from conservative patriarchal families in particular, entry into the Women's Defense Units also promises freedoms that they would not otherwise have. Children and adolescents are not as capable of resisting PYD's ideological training as adults; they have less mental and intellectual capacity to counter against. Young people who grow up in the PYD and PKK camps often later become especially staunch cadres. They have a particularly difficult time reintegrating into society, also because they typically have not completed their education. The recruitment of minors is a common tool that militias use to groom loyal cadres.

13 Geneva Call, July 7, 2014, »Syria: Kurdish armed forces demobilize 149 child soldiers«, <<http://www.genevacall.org/syria-kurdish-armed-forces-demobilize-149-child-soldiers>>.

Sporadic resistance is stirring in Syria's Kurdish regions, especially against the recruitment of minors. On October 14, 2014, four female activists brought traffic to a halt on a main road in 'Amudah. They carried posters demanding the release of the young men who were forcibly recruited on October 11, 2014.¹⁴ On October 17, approximately thirty to forty women in the same city protested against the forcible recruitment of their relatives.¹⁵ Similarly, on December 27, 2014, the Kurdish National Council's local committee organized a demonstration in 'Amudah against the forcible recruitment of minors. Approximately six hundred people took part in the rally, including numerous politicians and activists. The demonstration was in response to the kidnapping of the fifteen-year-old student Hamrin Husayn. One of the demonstrators' banners read: »The Islamic State is kidnapping our women and the PYD our children.«¹⁶ While the Kurdish National Council supported the family in this case, on January 18, 2015, it withdrew its support on the grounds that the PYD was involved in conflicts with regime-affiliated militias in al-Hasakah.¹⁷ Nevertheless Hamrin Husayn's family took to the streets along with a few activists. Earlier they had publicly called for the return of their daughter without the support of Kurdish parties.¹⁸ Many other families remain silent to this day. KurdWatch is aware of various cases that were not made public because of the wishes of the victims' families. They hoped—in vain—to negotiate with the People's Defense Units for their children's return and feared that they would lose all chance at their children's freedom if they went public.

Already in January 2014, the UN Secretary General's report on children in armed conflicts listed the People's Defense Units as an armed group that recruits and deploys children.¹⁹ The human rights organization Human Rights Watch also pointed in detail to the problem of recruiting child soldiers in June 2014.²⁰ However, the Western public has not yet recognized the YPG's recruiting practices as a serious human rights violation, even though the PYD's People's Defense Units

14 KurdWatch, October 20, 2014, »'Amudah: Female activists protest against forcible recruitment«, <<http://kurdwatch.org/index.php?aid=3251&z=en>>.

15 KurdWatch, October 28, 2014, »'Amudah: Demonstration against forcible recruitment«, <<http://kurdwatch.org/index.php?aid=3258&z=en>>; see also KurdWatch, January, 30 2015, »Al-Qamishli: Kurdish National Council once again cancels demonstration against forcible recruitment«, <<http://kurdwatch.org/index.php?aid=3338&z=en>>.

16 KurdWatch, December 31, 2014, »'Amudah: Demonstration against forcible recruitment of minors«, <<http://kurdwatch.org/index.php?aid=3312&z=en>>.

17 KurdWatch, January 25, 2015, »'Amudah: Another demonstration against forcible recruitment«, <<http://kurdwatch.org/index.php?aid=3333&z=en>>.

18 KurdWatch, December 31, 2014, »'Amudah: Another minor recruited by PYD against parents' will«, <<http://kurdwatch.org/index.php?aid=3311&z=en>>.

19 See United Nations Security Council, January 27, 2014, »Report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic«, <http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/2014/31>.

20 See Human Rights Watch 2014, »Under Kurdish rule: Abuses in

have been present in the Western media at least since the conflicts with the Islamic State over the city of ‘Ayn al-‘Arab. Many media outlets as well as representatives of many political parties, and not only those on the left, have uncritically accepted the PYD and PKK propaganda that in »Rojava«, as they call Syrian Kurdistan, they are attempting to build a democratic Syria in which women can contribute equally. This report shows that this is undoubtedly not the case. Only if the West recognizes the YPG’s forcible recruitment of adults, adolescents, and even children in violation of human rights as a serious problem and applies corresponding diplomatic pressure, is there a chance that the PKK and PYD in Syria will change their policies. Currently, however, the opposite is taking place: On May 16, 2015, Dijlah Muhammad, the deputy chairwoman of the defense committee for the canton of ‘Afrin, stated that the canton’s legislative council had introduced a law on compulsory military service on May 7. On the basis of the law, young men in ‘Afrin will also soon be compelled to perform military service.²¹

PYD-run enclaves of Syria«, <http://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/syria0614_kurds_ForUpload.pdf>, pp. 38-43.

21 See ANHA Hawar News Agency, May 16, 2015, »Self-defense law implemented also in Efrîn«, <<http://en.hawarnews.com/self-defense-law-implemented-also-in-efrin>>.