

23 Human Rights, Civil, Feminist Organizations Demand the AANES and the SDF to Eliminate Child Recruitment Policy



23 May 2022

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*AANES must hold accountable all those who recruit underage
children and demobilize all underage children*

Mrs. Berivan Khaled and Mr. Abdul-Mahbash, co-chairs of the Democratic Autonomous Administration in Syria (AANES),

Mr. Mazloun Abdi, commander of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF),

We, the undersigned organizations, are calling you in your capacity as the rulers of the area, to take serious action to quickly close the file on child kidnapping and recruitment. Children must be returned to their families and those involved in acts of child recruitment, which may amount to war crimes, must be held accountable.

The Kurdish Revolutionary Youth Movement/Tevgera Ciwanên Şoreşgerê continue to carry out widespread and systematic kidnapping and recruitment of underage children in the Autonomous Administration areas with impunity.

Mr. Mazloun Abdi,

In 2019 you signed a pledge in the UN headquarters in Geneva in the presence of Ms. Virginia Gamba, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, in which you promised to stop recruiting underage children in the SDF and to demobilize those already forcibly recruited. Disappointingly, your pledge has failed, as over the past three years the SDF has continued to kidnap children from their families and schools and send them to undisclosed military training camps.

Such acts flagrantly violate international treaties and conventions, especially the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which states:

Article 5: "States Parties shall respect the responsibilities, rights and duties of parents or, where applicable, the members of the extended family or community as provided for by local custom, legal guardians or other persons legally responsible for the child, to provide, in a manner consistent with the evolving capacities of the child, appropriate direction and guidance in the exercise by the child of the rights recognized in the present Convention."

Article 11: "States Parties shall take measures to combat the illicit transfer and non-return of children abroad."

Ironically, kidnapping children, especially girls, was often carried out under the pretext of their willingness to escape their families' homes. This is in breach of Article 19 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which states: "Governments must protect children from violence, abuse and being neglected by anyone who looks after them." This article is applicable in times of war and hard living conditions.

Thereby, as ruling authorities you should ensure the protection of children against all forms of ill-treatment by their parents, or anyone who looks after them, and provide remediation for the abused children. Certainly, the remedy cannot be sending the affected children to military camps, where they will be vulnerable to all kinds of physical and intellectual exploitation.

Keeping children in military camps is inconsistent with the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) of 1979, especially Articles 10 to 14.

Such an act amounts to the crime of human trafficking, since the perpetrators conceal the children, control their lives, and take advantage of their deprivation and poverty.

Here, we should note that the Kurdish Revolutionary Youth Movement/Tevgera Ciwanên Şoreşgerê often threaten families with death or arrest if they demand the return of their children through media campaigns or peaceful protests. This creates an atmosphere of terror and intimidation among families, which prompts them to keep silent and give up their right to raise their children.

Accordingly, we, the signatory organizations, call on you to:

1. Demobilize all underage children kidnapped and recruited by the SDF;
2. End the recruitment of underage children, which is considered a crime against children's rights;
3. Hold accountable all those who recruit underage children; practices which impact children and their families, negatively affect the local community, and destabilize civil peace and security;
4. Maintain stability in the region by ceasing intimidation which brings families insecurity and thus leads to displacements;
5. Promote the depoliticization and improvement of the education, health, and entertainment institutions dedicated for the young.

We expect your prompt action towards ending child recruitment to ensure a safe social environment, which is at the core of your ruling duties. We will continue to follow up on this critical file and work to end it by all possible means. We will also work to hold individuals and groups involved in child recruitment acts accountable.

You can contact us at:

dest.bidest@gmail.com

6 April 2022.
Qamishli, Syria.

Signatory Organizations:

1. Kurdish Feminist Voices/Dengê Femînîstên Kurd;
2. Kurdish Organization for Human Rights and General Freedom in Syria (DAD);
3. Human Rights Organization in Syria (MAF);
4. Kurdish Committee for Human Rights (observer);
5. Organization for the Defense of Prisoners of Conscience in Syria (Rewangeh);
6. Syrians for Truth and Justice (STJ);
7. General Union of Kurdish Writers and Journalists;
8. Jiyân Association to Combat Violence against Kurdish Women;
9. Democracy Center for Human Rights in Kurdistan (DCHRK);
10. National Democratic Meeting in Syria/Hevdîtina Niştîmanîya Dîmoqrât li Sûriyê;
11. Mahabad Organization for Human Rights (MOHR);
12. Free Kurdish Women's Organization/Rêxistina Jina Kurdî Azad;
13. Hero Association of Kurdish Women in Syria;
14. Keskeyî Organization;
15. Lekolin Center for Legal Studies and Research - Germany;

16. Ehmed Bonjeq's Center to Support Freedoms and Human Rights;
17. Kurdish Women's Organization;
18. Legal Construction Organization;
19. Roj News family;
20. Kurdistan Civil Society Forces/Hêzên Civaka Sivîl a Kurdistanî;
21. Komeleya Hêzên Sivîl ên Kurdî yên Sûrê/The Syrian Kurdish Civil Forces Gathering (26 components);
22. Komela ASO- Herne;
23. Neûbihar/Nubuhar Organization- Essen.

Note: About a month ago, an official delegation of personalities representing feminist and human rights organizations delivered this message to Fouzah Youssef, the co-president of the Movement for a Democratic Society, the co-chair of the PYD and the head of Star women's organization. However, Youssef and all other relevant persons failed to respond to our demands.