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## Northeastern Syria: 50 Child Soldiers Demobilized, 19 Others Still Commissioned

## **Northeastern Syria: 50 Child Soldiers Demobilized, 19 Others Still Commissioned**

*This report covers the recruitment and demobilization of child soldiers by military groups and security services affiliated with the Autonomous Administration between May 2020 and late March 2021*

## Recommendations

Syrians for Truth and Justice (STJ) recommends the Autonomous Administration and the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF):

1. To demonstrate transparency and full commitment to the agreements signed, either with Geneva Call, in July 2014, or with the UN, in late June 2019, to prevent the recruitment and use of children in military operations.
2. To immediately demobilize child soldiers and reunite them with their families and put those at risk of home violence in the care of responsible civilian authorities.
3. To monitor the functioning of the Office for the Protection of Children in Armed Conflicts in receiving complaints related to child recruitment and handling them, and to take punitive measures against those found indulged in child recruitment, including the Revolutionary Youth's Union (RYU) and Young Women's Union (YWU).
4. To disband groups and organizations that carry out child recruitments, notably the Revolutionary Youth's Union (RYU) and Young Women's Union (YWU), and to hold all parties involved in such activities accountable, whether they are individuals or entities.

## Background

It has been over six years since the People's Protection Units (YPG) and the Women's Protection Units (YPJ)— core military components of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF)— signed the 2014 Geneva Call's Deed of Commitment<sup>1</sup> protecting children in armed conflict and preventing their recruitment. Even though the enlistments of child soldiers decreased in northeastern Syria compared to previous years, armed units continue to enlist male and female minors, barely aged 16.

On 29 June 2019, the SDF again pledged to stop child recruitment by signing an Action Plan with the United Nations (UN) to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children under the age of 18.<sup>2</sup> The plan was signed by SDF Force Commander, General Mazloum Abdi— on behalf of the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria which ratified the plan— and the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Ms. Virginia Gamba, at the UN headquarters in Geneva. Under the plan,<sup>3</sup> the SDF committed

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<sup>1</sup> "Syria: Kurdish armed forces demobilize 149 child soldiers," Geneva Call, 7 July 2014, <https://www.genevacall.org/syria-kurdish-armed-forces-demobilize-149-child-soldiers/> (last visited: 30 April 2021).

<sup>2</sup> "Syrian Democratic Forces Sign Action Plan to End and Prevent the Recruitment and Use of Children," Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General of Children and Armed Conflict, 1 July 2019, <https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/2019/07/syrian-democratic-forces-sign-action-plan-to-end-and-prevent-the-recruitment-and-use-of-children/> (last visited: 30 April 2021).

<sup>3</sup> "Press Release regarding the Action Plan the SDF signed with the UN to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children under 18," SDF Press, 1 July 2019, <https://sdf-press.com/?p=29078> (Last visited: 4 May 2021).

to end this practice against children and put in place new disciplinary measures against armed forces that fail to adhere to signed terms.

On 30 August 2020, the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria announced they had established the Office for the Protection of Children in Armed Conflicts (hereinafter Children Protection Office),<sup>4</sup> with branch offices in the cities of Qamishli/Qamishlo, al-Hasakah, Raqqa, Deir ez-Zor, Kobanî (Ayn al-Arab), Tell Abyad, al-Shahba, Tabqa, and Manbij. The main office and its branches receive and process complaints regarding child recruitment by the SDF or the Internal Security Forces (Asayish), or other violations of children's rights. These offices were operated in early October 2020.

Despite the two binding agreements, Syrians for Truth and Justice (STJ) documented that the Revolutionary Youth's Union (RYU)<sup>5</sup> recruited at least 19 male and female minors, from early May 2020 till the end of the year. Additionally, STJ recorded the demobilization of four female and three male recruits after parents filed complaints to the SDF.

Over the first quarter of 2021, STJ verified that the RYU recruited an additional seven male and female minors, who were still commissioned at the time of writing on 16 April 2021.

Field researchers with STJ detected a slight decrease in the number of enlistments compared to previous year records. Furthermore, STJ verified that between October 2020—the month when children protection offices were first operated—and late March 2021, the SDF and its affiliated military units demobilized at least 43 male and female minors and reunified them with their families through these offices. The forces discharged 17 male and female child soldiers over the last quarter of 2020, and 26 over the first quarter of 2021, among them 32 in al-Hasakah, four in Kobanî, four in Qamishli/Qamishlo, two in Manbij, and one in Deir ez-Zor.

On 23 November 2021, STJ filed a complaint to the Children Protection Office regarding 17 cases of child recruitment.<sup>6</sup> STJ demanded that the Autonomous Administration monitor the operation of the office and take the harshest punitive measures against commanders and

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<sup>4</sup> "Foundation and operation of the Office for the Protection of Children in Armed Conflicts," Official Facebook Page of the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria, 30 August 2020, <https://www.facebook.com/952306884959249/posts/1406258492897417> (last visited: 6 May 2021).

<sup>5</sup> The Revolutionary Youth's Union (RYU) was established in 2011. Despite the founders' efforts to promote the RYU as an independent entity, it has been administratively affiliated with the Democratic Union Party (PYD). The union consists of young men and women, mostly PYD minor advocates. The union is led by staffers politically affiliated with the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). The union supposedly organizes youth-aimed cultural, artistic, sport, and social events. However, the union is often associated with a wide range of violations, including recruitment of child soldiers. Opponents of the Autonomous Administration have accused the union of kidnapping, hitting, and threatening anti-PYD activists and for repeatedly setting fire to the offices of the Kurdish National Council (KNC).

<sup>6</sup> "A complaint to the Office for the Protection of Children in Armed Conflicts of the Autonomous Administration, Regarding the Recruitment of 17 Male and Female Minors," STJ, 23 November 2020, <https://stj-sy.org/en/a-complaint-to-the-office-for-the-protection-of-children-in-armed-conflicts-of-the-autonomous-administration-regarding-the-recruitment-of-17-male-and-female-minors/> (last visited: 5 May 2021).

military groups that refuse to abide by the ban on child enlistments, including the RYU and the Young Women’s Union (YWU).<sup>7</sup>

The UN Secretary General’s April 2021 report on children and armed conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic reported that the SDF and its components, as well as “affiliated internal security forces under the authority of the self-administration in northern and eastern Syria”, were responsible for 35% of the 1,423 verified cases of child recruitments in northeastern Syria from 2018 to the first half of 2020.<sup>8</sup> 73% of the recruitment cases were attributed to other actors in northwestern Syria (Hama, Idlib, and Aleppo).

## Methodology

For the purposes of this extensive report, STJ conducted 26 interviews, mostly with parents and relatives of children recruited for military use in northeastern Syria, in addition to two activists from Raqqa and Qamishli/Qamishlo. STJ carried out these interviews between May 2020 and late March 2021, consulted numerous open sources, crosschecked information, and obtained additional evidence corroborating the cases reported herein.

### 1. RYU-Perpetrated Child Recruitments

The majority of interviewed families told STJ that the RYU (known as Ciwanên Şoreşger in Kurdish) is the key perpetrator of child enlistments in northeastern Syria.

Additionally, a field researcher with STJ recounted that the RYU has been recruiting children for years in northeastern Syria. The researcher added that the group quit many of their activities, such as holding social and intellectual events, in late 2020 and ramped up enlistment activities instead. Increased recruitment followed calls by the Force Commander of the SDF, General Mazloun Abdi, for all the Kurdish actors in the region to unite.

The RYU uses a practiced child recruitment method. RYU teenage members approach target children in the school or the street, establish friendships with them, and then invite them to participate in intellectual and educational lectures and courses organized by the RYU in their affiliated academic centers, where they are ultimately lured into joining military groups.

**STJ documented the recruitment of at least seven children over the first quarter of 2021— from early January to late March—, mostly carried out by the RYU. These children were still commissioned when this report was being compiled on 16 April 2021.**

<sup>7</sup> The Young Women’s Union (YWU)— the parallel all-women structure of the Revolutionary Youth’s Union— was established in 2016, during the first annual conference of the Young Women’s Union, which was held and concluded in Rmelan city on 20 February 2016. During the conference, the group changed their name into the Young Women’s Union in Rojava, seeking to organize women across northeastern Syria.

<sup>8</sup> “Children and armed conflict in the Syria Arab Republic: Report of the Secretary General S/2021/398,” The United Nations Security Council, <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/N2110167.pdf>

In early January, the RYU recruited female minor N. Shukri, 14, into the ranks of the YPJ in the city of Kobanî. Shukri is originally from Jarikh Abdi village, in the countryside of Tell Abyad city, but she fled the village with her family to Darb Tahtani village in the countryside of Kobanî during the Turkish military offensive into northeastern Syria in October 2019.

A family member told STJ that the girl's parents searched for her in both RYU and SDF centers and reported her missing to the Children Protection Office and the Asayish forces in Kobanî. They presented authorities with identity documents proving that their daughter was born in 2007— namely, that she was a minor and ineligible for enlistment with armed groups. However, the parents failed to obtain any information about their daughter's fate.



Image 1- N. Shukri, 14. The photo was obtained on 15 February 2021. Credit: The girl's family.

In February 2021, a field researcher with STJ documented the recruitment of at least six children. At the beginning of the month, male minor A. Rami, 16, was recruited in Karda village, west of Kobanî. The boy's mother told STJ that her son was recruited by an official of the Kobanî-based Peoples Union and Support Foundation— affiliated with the Autonomous Administration. The mother added that the official refused to return her son even though she provided him with identity documents proving that he still was a minor. Additionally, the mother told STJ that she went to the foundation and demanded that she be allowed to take her son home, but officials there refused to do that and kicked her out.

The mother posted a video on social networking sites condemning the recruitment of her minor son and demanding that the SDF command interfere and bring him back home.



Image 2- The boy A. Rami and an identity document proving he was born in 2005— namely, that he is a minor and ineligible for recruitment. The photo was obtained on 1 March 2021. Credit: The child's family.

A week later, on 19 February 2021, the RYU recruited male minor M. Hassan, 17, in al-Hasakah and enrolled him in one of their training camps. Hassan's family are originally from the city of Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê, but they fled to al-Hasakah during the Turkish military offensive into northeastern Syria in October 2019.

A family member told STJ that they learned that the boy was transferred to one of the RYU's camps in al-Hasakah province. He added that they failed to return him home even though they filed a complaint to the Children Protection Office and the Asayish forces.



Image 3- The boy M. Hassan, 17. The photo was obtained on 1 March 2021. Credit: The boy's family.



Image 4- Identity document proving that M. Hassan was born in 2004— namely, that he is a minor and ineligible for recruitment. The photo was obtained on 1 March 2021. Credit: The boy’s family.

On 10 February 2021, a day after M. Hassan was recruited, the RYU recruited male minor Kh. Ali, 17, in Kobanî.

Commenting on her minor son’s recruitment, Khadra Hasso told STJ that her husband Kamal Ali was so saddened by his son’s enlistment that he had a heart attack and was taken to the hospital. She added:

“Kh. is my third son to be recruited. I searched for him in all the SDF-affiliated centers in Kobanî. But they all denied having him.”

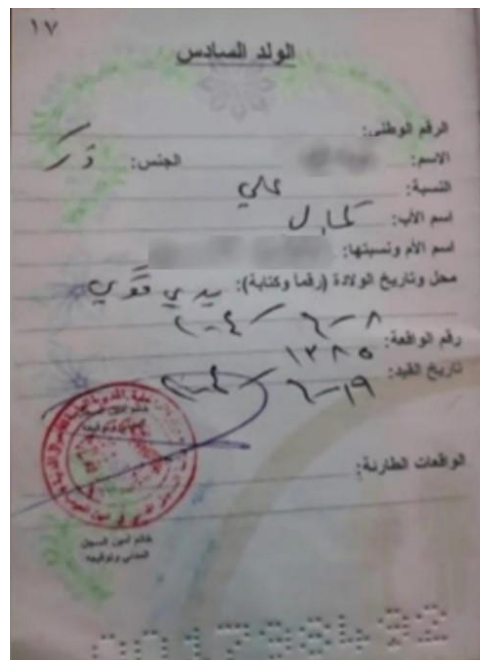


Image 5- Identity document proving that Kh. Ali was born in 2004—namely, that he is a minor and ineligible for recruitment. Credit: The boy’s family.



Once again in Kobanî city, the RYU recruited female minor S. Mahou, 16, a resident of the Jubnah village, west of the city, on 12 February 2021. After the girl's parents visited SDF-affiliated military centers, they were finally told that she was at an RYU camp. However, the family could not take their daughter back home even though they provided authorities with identity documents proving she is a minor and ineligible for enlistment.

The family told STJ that they received a message two days after their daughter was recruited. The message said: "Your daughter joined the PKK forces, and you must be proud of her." The family filed a complaint to the SDF and the Children Protection Office, but they failed to bring her home.



Image 6- The girl S. Mahou, 16. The photo was obtained on 1 March 2021. Credit: The girl's family.

A few days after S. Mahou was recruited, the RYU enlisted female minor A. Bahri, 13, in al-Hasakah city on 16 February 2021. The girl and her family are displaced from Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê.

The Bahri family is one of the Kurdish-Syrian stateless families, whose members are labeled as *maktumeen* (unregistered with the Civil Registration Department). They are originally from the city of Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê, which they fled to al-Hasakah city during the Turkish military offensive into northeastern Syria in October 2019.

The girl's mother, Widad Amin, 35, told STJ that she learned that her daughter was undergoing training in an RYU camp. The mother added:

"After searching for my daughter for two days, I received a phone call from a member of the Revolutionary Youth's Union, who told me that my daughter is with them and is attending a training program. He said that I should not be worried about her, but he did not tell me where she was or when she would come back."

The mother added that she failed to bring her daughter back home even though she filed complaints to the SDF and the Children Protection Office.



Image 7- A. Bahri, 13. The photo was obtained on 1 March 2021. Credit: The girl's mother Widad Amin.

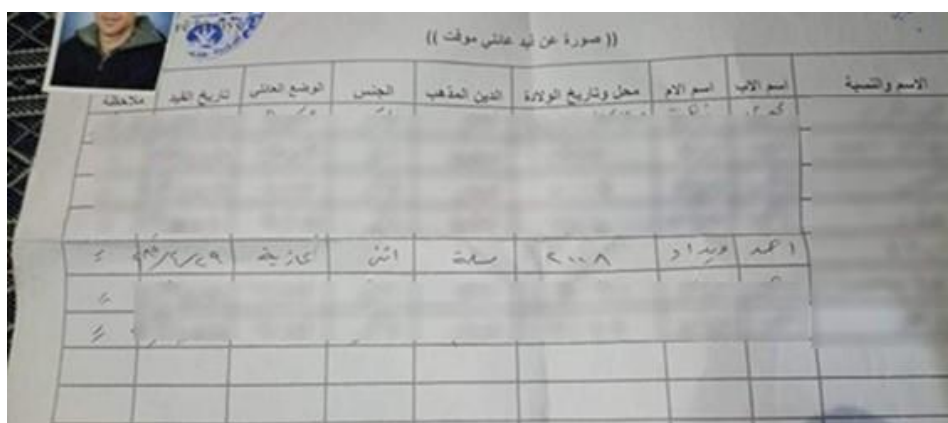


Image 8- Identity document, proving that A. Bahri was born in 2008— namely, that she is a minor and ineligible for recruitment. The document was obtained on 1 March 2021. Credit: The girl's mother Widad Amin.

On the same day, 16 February 2021, male minor F. al-Hamdo, 15, left his home in Qamishli /Qamishlo and never returned.

Searching for their son, his family, displaced from Kafr Saghir in the countryside of Aleppo, learned that he was recruited by the RYU and transferred to one of their camps to undergo military training.

The family reported the situation to the Children Protection Office and the Asayish forces in Qamishli/Qamishlo city, but they failed to learn anything about their son's fate.



Image 9 – The boy F. Al-Hamdo, 15. The photo was obtained on 1 March 2021. Credit: The boy's family.

## 2. Child Recruits Demobilized after the Children Protection Office was Established

Pursuant to the Action Plan signed between the SDF and the UN on 29 June 2019, the Autonomous Administration of Northern and Eastern Syria established a special office to receive complaints regarding child recruitment in the zones they control.

In a joint statement, published on Facebook on 30 August 2020, the Autonomous Administration and the SDF announced the foundation and operation of the Office for the Protection of Children in Armed Conflicts at the Executive Council of the Autonomous Administration, in addition to branch offices in the cities of Qamishli/Qamishlo, al-Hasakah, Raqqa, Deir ez-Zor, Kobanî (Ayn al-Arab), Tell Abyad, al-Shahba, Tabqa, and Manbij.

According to the statement, the office and its branches agreed to address complaints about child recruitment within the ranks of the SDF and the Asayish, and matters related to the violation of children's rights. The statement added that complaints can be filed by recruited children's families, witnesses, and caregivers. Complaints are first sent to the director of the Complaints Office and then transferred to SDF command, which investigates and takes necessary measures.

The Autonomous Administration also ordered children protection offices to maintain the confidentiality of the complainants, allowing them to withdraw complaints at any time, and pledged to prevent any retaliatory action against the complainants. Furthermore, the

Autonomous Administration assured that all those responsible for violating children's rights would be held accountable, including military commanders.



Image 10 – A copy of a joint statement by the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria and the SDF, announcing the establishment and operation of the Office for the Protection of Children in Armed Conflicts, dated 30 August 2020. Credit: The Autonomous Administration's Facebook page.

STJ obtained data from children protection offices and found that since their establishment in October 2020 and until March 2021, these offices received approximately 150 complaints from families of recruited children, among them at least 50 children enlisted over 2020.

Analyzing the data, STJ detected a slightly increasing commitment on the part of the SDF and affiliated forces to the provisions of child-related agreements they signed. STJ verified that children protection offices demobilized at least 43 male and female minors and reunified them with their families. The offices helped discharge 17 male and female child soldiers over the last quarter of 2020 and 26 over the first quarter of 2021, among them 32 in al-Hasakah, four in Kobanî, four in Qamishli/Qamishlo, two in Manbij, and one in Deir ez-Zor.

On 24 October 2020, North Press published a video,<sup>9</sup> showing the al-Hasakah-based Children Protection Office reunifying two minors—Y. Barakat and M. Jamil—with their parents. The two boys were recruited by the SDF.



Image 11- Screenshot from the [above-mentioned video](#), showing officials from the al-Hasakah Children Protection Office demobilizing the two minor recruits Y. Barakat and M. Jamil on 24 October 2020.

In another video on 22 December 2020,<sup>10</sup> Aso news network showed the Kobani-based Children Protection Office reuniting the two minors— S. Jam Harran, 16, and G. Muhyiddin, 15— with their families during a press conference on 16 December 2020. The two boys were recruited by the SDF.



Image 12- Screenshot from the [above-mentioned video](#), showing officials from the Kobani Children Protection Office reuniting the two minor recruits S. Jam Harran, 16, and G. Muhyiddin, 15, with their families.

<sup>9</sup> For more: <https://www.facebook.com/NPA.SY/videos/772588133289991>

<sup>10</sup> For more: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bNKXpr5JA6s>

On 21 February 2021, ROJAVA TV broadcasted a video,<sup>11</sup> showing the al-Hasakah-based Children Protection Office reuniting over 6 minor children with their families, on 13 February 2021. The SDF had previously enlisted these children into their ranks.

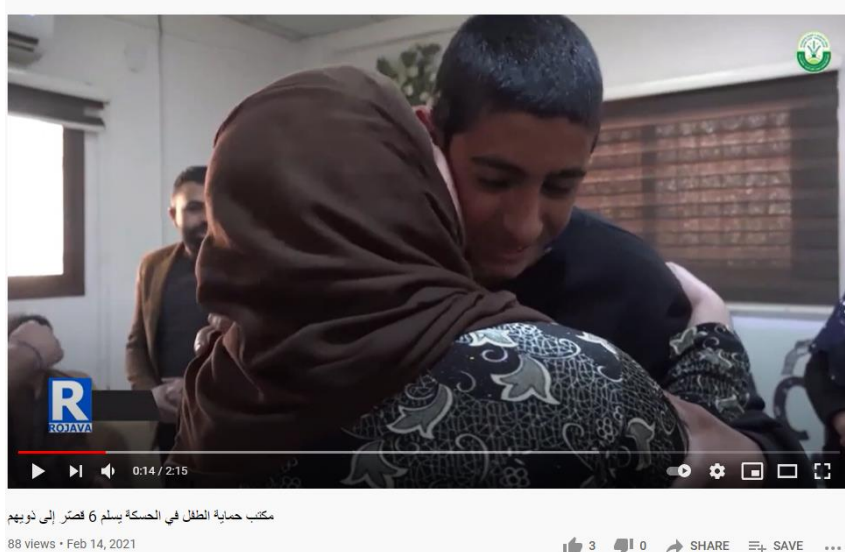


Image 13-Screenshot from the [above-mentioned](#) video, showing officials from the al-Hasakah Children Protection Office reuniting over 6 minors with their families on 13 February 2021.

On 30 March 2021, Hawar News Agency published a video,<sup>12</sup> showing the al-Hasakah-based Children Protection Office reuniting over four children with their families. The SDF had the four minors within their ranks.



Image 14- screenshot from the [above-mentioned](#) video, showing al-Hasakah-based Children Protection Office reuniting over four minors with their families on 30 March 2021. The SDF had enlisted these children within their ranks earlier.

<sup>11</sup> For more: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S4vsKiHjpSA>

<sup>12</sup> For more: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1aEWAFKno0s>

### 3. At least 19 Male and Female Minors were Recruited over 2020

This report is the latest of STJ's documentation monitoring child recruitment by different parties in the Syrian conflict. In a previous report,<sup>13</sup> STJ documented the recruitment of three female minors in 2019 and early 2020. The SDF enlisted Sultana Bakr, 16, from the town of Shaykh al-Hadid in the countryside of Afrin on 7 January 2020, Yasmeen Rashid, 14, from the Sheikh Maqsoud neighborhood in Aleppo in late 2019, and Aisha Mohammad, 15, in February 2019. For the purposes of this report, STJ tracked these three cases and discovered that all three female minors were still serving within SDF ranks.

Furthermore, STJ documented the recruitment of at least 19 male and female minors in northeastern Syria between early May and December 2020. Seven of these child soldiers were subsequently demobilized. On 23 May 2020, female minor S. Hasso, 16, was enlisted by the RYU into the ranks of the YPJ in Sheikh Maqsoud neighborhood in Aleppo.

Hasso is originally from Kafr Safra village, in Jindires district, southwest Afrin, and was displaced with her family to Tall Rifat town, in the northern countryside of Aleppo.

The girl's Mother, S. al-Rahman, told STJ that the RYU lured her underage daughter into hostilities, alleging that she will be offered intellectual training in one of their centers. The RYU then enlisted her with the YPJ. The mother added:

"I went to the RYU center in the Sheikh Maqsoud neighborhood in Aleppo to search for my daughter. However, the young men and women there were upset because I criticized them for recruiting my daughter and tried to force me out. I got into an altercation with them. One of the young men threw me out of the center and to the ground after he ripped out my jacket. They did not allow me to see my daughter or provide me with any information about her fate."

The mother added that she already lost a son in hostilities. Her son Ibrahim Hasso was a recruit within the YPG ranks and died during the military operation launched by the Turkish forces and the factions of the Syrian National Army (SNA) on Afrin. The son left behind him a wife and three children.

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<sup>13</sup> "Child Recruitment' by Parties to Conflict in Syria, a Lasting Phenomenon," STJ, 5 May 2020, <https://stj-sy.org/en/child-recruitment-by-parties-to-conflict-in-syria-a-lasting-phenomenon/> (last visited: 4 May 2021).



Image 15 – The girl S. Hasso, 16. The photo was obtained on 15 September 2020. Credit: The girl’s mother.

In a second case in Sheikh Maqsoud neighborhood, STJ documented that the YPG recruited male minor S. Zinki, 15, on 25 May 2020. The boy’s family said that they are originally from the Ma’mal Ushaghi village, in Rajo district in Afrin countryside, and they live in the Ashrafiyeh neighborhood in Aleppo.



Image 16- The boy S. Zinki ,16. The photo was obtained on 10 August 2020. Credit: The boy’s family.

On 29 May 2020, the YPJ approved the recruitment of female minor J. Suleiman, 16, into their ranks in Sheikh Maqsoud neighborhood.

The girl is originally from Kafr Shil village, in the countryside of Afrin, while she lived with her family in the Ashrafiyeh neighborhood in Aleppo.



The girl’s mother, Asmahan Ahmad, told STJ that she managed to contact her minor daughter after she was recruited into the YPJ ranks, but she failed to bring her back home. The mother said:

“After a painful search process, my husband and I were able to meet our daughter in a public park in Sheikh Maqsoud neighborhood in Aleppo. She was accompanied by three YPG fighters. The meeting was brief, we saw her for a few minutes only. We tried to convince her into returning home, but the fighters took her again in their car.”



Image 17- Identity document of J. Suleiman, proving she was born in 2004— namely, that she is a minor and ineligible for recruitment. The document was obtained on 23 August 2020. Credit: The girl’s mother.



Image 18- National exam card of J. Suleiman, proving she was only a 9<sup>th</sup> grader and ineligible for recruitment. The document was obtained on 23 August 2020. Credit: The girl’s mother.



Image 19- The girl J. Suleiman, 16. The photo was obtained on 23 August 2020. Credit: The girl's mother.

In Qamishli/Qamishlo city, in al-Hasakah province, STJ documented the recruitment of female minor H. Ghaibi, 15, by RYU-affiliated teenagers on 25 June 2020.

Activists from Qamishli/Qamishlo told STJ that the recruited minor was a 9th grader and was enlisted while sitting for middle school national exams. They added that the girl's recruitment resulted in the decline of her mother's mental and physical health because she was her only child.



Image 20- The girl H. Ghaibi, 16. The photo was obtained on 3 July 2020. Credit: Internet.

Over July 2020, STJ detected a spike in RYU-pretreated recruitments. Early that month, the group enlisted 9th grader male D. Jum'a, 15, from Kobanî city.

The boy's mother, Jamila, took to social media and demanded the demobilization of her son.<sup>14</sup> She added that RYU members threatened to kill her after she asked for her son's return.

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<sup>14</sup> For more: [https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story\\_fbid=3164638253619729&id=100002207564245](https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=3164638253619729&id=100002207564245)



Image 21- Identity document of D. Jum'a, proving he was born in 2005— namely, that he is a minor and ineligible for recruitment. The document was obtained on 25 July 2020. Credit: The boy's family.



Image 22- The boy D. Jum'a, 16. The photo was obtained on 25 July 2020. Credit: The boy's family.

The mother told STJ that this was not the first time that one of her children gets recruited. Her daughter, Zahra Jum'a, born in 1999, died in hostilities as she fought within the ranks of the YPJ. The girl lost her life less than a year after she was enlisted in mid-January 2015 while still a minor, 15.

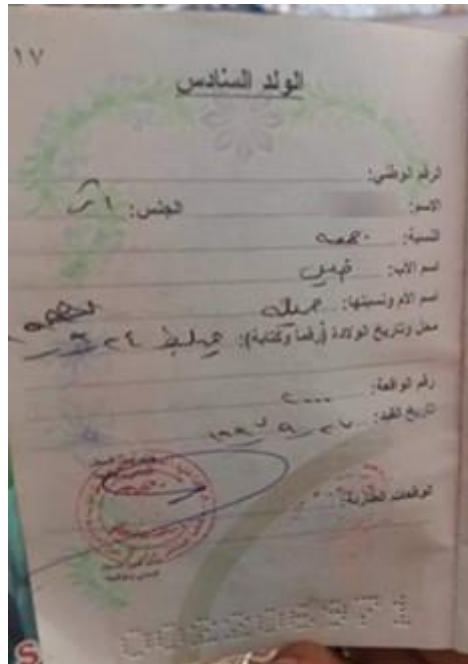


Image 23- Identity document of Zahra Jum'a, proving she was born in 1999. The girl lost her life on 15 January 2015 after she was recruited by the YPJ in 2014, while still a minor. The document was obtained on 25 July 2020. Credit: The girl's family.



Image 24- Death certificate of Zahra Jum'a, born in 1999, who died on 15 January 2015 after she was recruited into the YPJ ranks in 2014, while still a minor. The photo was obtained on 25 January 2020. Credit: The girl's family.

In Minas village, West of Kobani, the RYU recruited female minor J. Ayoub, 14, on 6 July 2020.

The girl's mother, Naela Wali, told STJ that they attempted to bring their daughter home, but they failed even to obtain information as to her whereabouts. All they managed to know was that she was transferred to a training camp in the Jazira Region/al-Hasakah province.



Image 25- The girl J. Ayoub, born in 2006—namely, she is a minor and ineligible for recruitment. The photo was obtained on 15 July 2020. Credit: The family.

On 11 July 2020, the RYU recruited two female minors— A. Hussein, 14, and Gh. Isso, 15— in Saftak village, in Kobanî countryside. Kalli Isso and Sabah Tammo, mothers of A. and Gh. respectively, appealed to the SDF through social media to demobilize their daughters because they are still minors.<sup>15</sup>



Image 26- A. Hussain, born in 2006— namely, she is a minor and ineligible for recruitment. The photo was obtained on 3 August 2020. Credit: The family.

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<sup>15</sup> Kalli Isso, child A.'s mother, and Sabah Tammo, child Gh.'s mother, appeal to the SDF to demobilize their minor daughters [https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story\\_fbid=3505779802788271&id=873077872725157](https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=3505779802788271&id=873077872725157)



Image 27- Gh. Issa, born in 2005— namely, she is a minor and ineligible for recruitment. The photo was obtained on 3 August 2020. Credit: The family.

On 28 July 2020, the RYU recruited male minor Y. Muhyiddin, 16, in the city of Qamishli /Qamishlo.

The boy's father, Muhammad Amin Muhyiddin (also known as Khambar Kol), had to take his son out of school in 2018 after RYU members started endearing themselves to the boy at school to convince him into joining them and going to Qandil Mountains. The father said:

“In 2018, my son told us that RYU-affiliated teenagers told him that they would send him to the mountains to receive military training that would qualify him to command 300 soldiers and that he will then start making a lot of money. They asked him not to tell us. so, we took him out of school at the time, fearing their influence. However, they ultimately succeeded in recruiting him in July 2020.”

The father said that he informed Asayish Forces and SDF commanders that the RYU recruited his son and presented them with documents proving that the boy was still a minor. However, all these attempts were useless. At the time of reporting, on 16 April 2021, the father still had not obtained any information about his son's fate.



Image 28- Identity document of Y. Muhyiddin, proving that he was born in 2004— namely, that he is a minor and ineligible for recruitment. The document was obtained on 20 September 2020. Credit: The boy's father.



Image 29- The boy Y. Muhyiddin, born in 2004—namely, a minor and ineligible for recruitment. The photo was obtained on 20 September 2020. Credit: The boy's father.

In mid-August 2020, the YPJ recruited female minor Sh. al-Darwish, 15, in Hamrat Jamsa, east of Raqqa city.

A Raqqa-based activist told STJ that the girl's family sought news about their daughter at the SDF centers and the Raqqa Civil Council. They also showed authorities the family book, which confirms that the girl is still a minor. However, they failed to obtain the slightest hint as to their daughter's whereabouts, for the SDF-affiliated military groups denied having any ties to the enlistment of the girl.



Image 30- An identity document of Sh. Al-Darwish, proving she was born in 2005—namely, that she is a minor and ineligible for recruitment. The document was obtained on 25 September 2020. Credit: Local social media pages.

On 8 October 2020, STJ recorded that the YPJ recruited a female minor, R. Aliko, 16, in Qamishli/Qamishlo city.

Aliko is originally from Tal Hissan, in the countryside of al-Darbasiyah. The girl's family said that their daughter— 11th grader in a school in Qamishli/Qamishlo city—was recruited during her school hours by the YPJ.

The girl's family added that they had obtained information that their daughter is at the Women's Asayish's center in Himo village. However, the center's officials denied that the girl was there. The family added:

“Our daughter's friends from school told us that YWU-affiliated teenagers recruited her. We referred to the Asayish's centers and provided them with documents proving that our daughter is a minor. They refused to release her or tell us where she is.”



Image 31- The girl R. al-Aliko. Source: The girl's family.



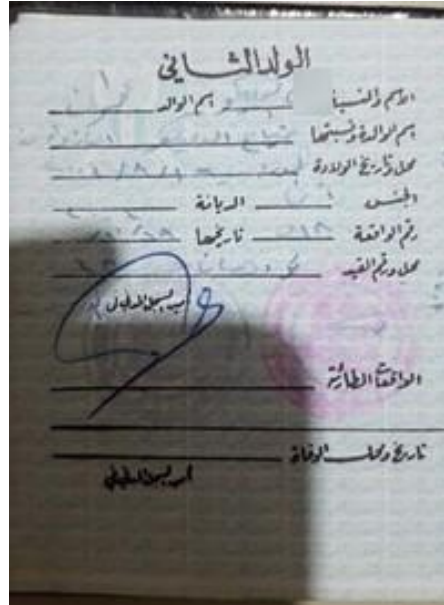


Image 32- Identity document of R. al-Aliko, proving she was born in 2004— namely, that she is a minor and ineligible for recruitment. Credit: The girl’s family.

The RYU also recruited female minor B. Al-Omari, 12, in the city of Amuda, on 17 November 2020.

The girl’s mother, Maheen Ibrahim, told STJ that her daughter was transferred to one of the RYU’s training centers in al-Hasakah city. She added:

“We went to the school in al-Hasakah, which they [RYU] turned into a training center. They gave us her cell phone and told us that she was attending a six-month-training program on administrative staff building. They did not allow us to see her.”

The mother added that the RYU refused to return her daughter even though she filed a complaint to the al-Haskalah-based Children Protection Office, including identity documents, proving that she was still a minor.



Image 33- The girl B. al-Omari, born in 2009—namely, a minor and ineligible for recruitment. The photo was obtained on 15 January 2021. Credit: The girl’s mother.

## 4. Demobilization of Seven Children Recruited in 2020

STJ detected a positive improvement in the SDF's and the Children Protection Office's performance and their responses to parents' complaints. STJ documented the demobilization of four male and three female minors across northeastern Syria.

In mid-June 2020, the SDF discharged male minor F. Omar, 14, from the village of Jum Ali, east of Kobani. The forces reunited the boy with his family nearly two weeks after he was enlisted.

The boy's mother, Zahra Ahmad, told STJ that her son was recruited on 1 June 2020. She referred to all the SDF security and military centers in Kobani, but she failed to meet her only son, or obtain any information about him. Two weeks later, an SDF-affiliated group returned her son home after she filed a complaint to the group's center in the city.



Image 34 – Identity document of F. Omar, proving that he was born in 2006—namely, that he is a minor and ineligible for recruitment. The photo was obtained on 16 August 2020. Credit: The witness, Zahra Ahmed.

In July 2020, the SDF reunited three children with their families after they lodged complaints that the RYU recruited their children. On 4 July 2020, the SDF returned a 14-year-old girl to her family, two days after the RYU enlisted her in Qamishli/Qamishlo city.

The demobilized girl is the daughter of a leading member of the Kurdish National Council (KNC) in Syria. The RYU recruited the child on 2 July 2020 while on her way to attend a course at an education center near the group's headquarters in the city.

A field researcher with STJ reported that the girl was released after the KNC reached for commander Mazloum Abdi, who supervises the Kurdish-Kurdish dialogue between the KNC and the Kurdish National Unity parties, under the US auspices.

In mid-July, the SDF returned male minor J. Omar, 14, home in Qamishli/Qamishlo, a few days after he was enlisted by the RYU.

The boy's parents told STJ that their son was learning car repair in the industrial zone before he was recruited by the RYU on 2 July 2020. They filed a complaint to the SDF, demanding the release of their son because he was still a minor. The SDF demobilized the boy several days later.



Image 35- The boy G. Omar was born in 2006—namely, a minor and ineligible for recruitment. The photo was obtained on 15 August 2020.

In mid-July 2020, the SDF demobilized female minor L. Khalaf, 14, from the village of Tall Karm, in al-Darbasiyah city, less than two weeks after she was recruited.

A source from the girl's family told STJ that the RYU recruited her into the ranks of the YPJ on 2 July 2020.

The source added that the family referred to the RYU and the SDF centers in search for their daughter and demanded her demobilization because she was still a minor. The SDF returned the girl home less than two weeks later.



Image 36 – Identity document of L. Khalaf, proving she was born in 2005—namely, she is a minor and ineligible for recruitment. The document was obtained on 20 August 2020. Credit: The girl's family.



Image 37 – The girl L. Khalaf, born in 2005—namely, a minor and ineligible for recruitment. The photo was obtained on 20 August 2020. Credit: The girl’s family.

Furthermore, a field researcher with STJ monitored the return of female minor A. Houran, 15, to her family in Raqqa city on 3 August 2020, 13 days after the YPJ recruited her into their ranks.

According to a Raqqa-based activist, the YPJ recruited the girl from al-Mashlab neighborhood in Raqqa city on 21 July 2020. The girl hails from the al-Fad’an clan, which demanded that the SDF demobilize the girl because she is still a minor. The SDF ultimately returned the girl home.

STJ also recorded the return of female minor L. Hamoud, known as R. Dari, 11, to her family on 19 August 2020, 50 days after she was enlisted.

According to a family source, the RYU recruited the girl, from Amuda city, on 29 June 2020 and refused to demobilize her, alleging that she volunteered. The source said:

“After her recruitment, the girl’s parents referred to all RYU and SDF military centers and asked them to release their daughter. They also presented them with the family book that proves she was barely 11 years old. The groups refused to return her and forced the parents out of the center.”

However, the family did not despair and appealed to SDF officials to return their daughter home. They also took the issue to media and social networking sites. The girl was ultimately demobilized.

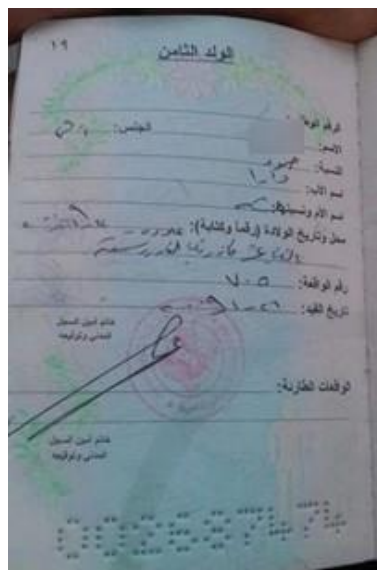


Image 38- Identity document of L. Dar, proving she was born in 2009—namely, she is a minor and ineligible for recruitment. The photo was obtained on 15 August 2020. Credit: The girl's family.



Image 39- The girl L. Dari, born in 2009. The photo was obtained on 15 August 2020. Credit: The girl's family.

STJ also recorded the demobilization of male minor S. al-Khalifa, 15, from Siha village, in the countryside of the al-Qahtaniyah/Terbeh Sbiyeh town on 14 November 2020, a week after he was recruited by the RYU.

The boy was a 10th grader at the Industrial Vocational High School. S. was enlisted by the RYU on 7 November 2020 and transferred to an affiliated training camp in Rmelan city.

A week later, the SDF released the boy because he was a minor. The father, Khalifa al-Khalifa, told STJ that he received a phone call from an SDF official asking him to come to one of the group's centers in Himo area, near Qamishli/Qamishlo to take his son after they verified, he was a minor.

The father added that the group released his son after he lodged complaints with the SDF security, military centers, and the Children Protection Office.



Image 40- The boy S. al-Khalifa. Credit: The father.

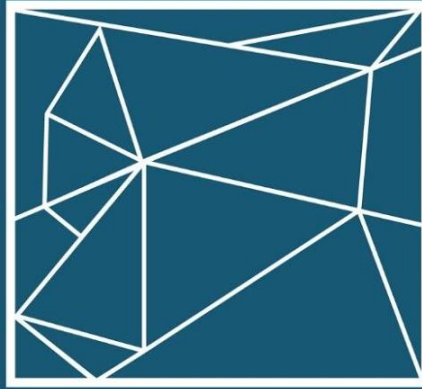


Image 41- Identity document of S. al-Khalifa, proving he was born in 2005—namely, a minor and ineligible for recruitment. Credit: The father.



Image 42- The boy S. al-Khalifa with his parents at home in Siha village, in the countryside of the al-Qahtaniyah/ Terbeh Sbiyeh town. Credit: The father.

سوريون  
من أجل  
الحقيقة  
والعدالة  
Syrians  
For Truth  
& Justice



## History

Syrians for Truth and Justice was conceived during the participation of its co-founder in the Middle-East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) Leaders for Democracy Fellowship program, who was driven by a will to contribute to Syria's future. Starting as a humble project to tell the stories of Syrians experiencing enforced disappearances and torture, it grew into an established organisation committed to unveiling human rights violations of all sorts.

Convinced that the diversity that has historically defined Syria is a wealth, our team of researchers and volunteers works with dedication at uncovering human rights violations committed in Syria, in order to promote inclusiveness and ensure that all Syrians are represented, and their rights fulfilled.

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  - ✉ [editor@stj-sy.org](mailto:editor@stj-sy.org)