

February 12, 2020

Statement by KRG Office of the Coordinator for International Advocacy (OCIA)

In response to UNAMI report: ISIS used underage boys and children in its suicide attacks during the conflict

On December 23, 2020, UNSRSG published its third report on Children and Armed Conflict in Iraq. In which it accused the KR Peshmerga forces of killing a number of children during the fight against ISIS. The report mentions the situation of children who became victims of ISIS war from 2015 to 2019. The report begins by giving the Iraqi government recommendations on protecting children who were under the influence of ISIS.

In response to the report, KRG Coordinator for International Advocacy, Dr. Dindar Zebari released a statement. In the statement, Zebari said that the KRG welcomes transparent and objective reports about it. The sources of the UN report are ambiguous and the accusations on the Peshmerga forces are not backed by strong evidence in particular around where the events have happened.

Dr. Zebari further commented that the UN has not sought to liaise with the KRG officials to verify this information and to get accurate information in this regard. On the other side, the ISIS mass graves have not been excavated until now and the information regarding the victims' number, the age ranges, and the time of the events is yet to be discovered. Dr. Zebari said that these are very bold accusations and making them without consideration to the fact that Kurds and Peshmerga forces were one of the biggest victims of ISIS cruelties, proves the inaccuracy of the accusations.

Dr. Zebari provided some facts and statistics and facts about Peshmerga forces' fight against terrorism and said, the Peshmerga forces fought ISIS militants within 1000 km and only in Ninevah Plain area (Zummar, Rabi'a, and Sinjar) it liberated 325 km of land. During the liberation, the Peshmerga forces engaged in heavy clashes with ISIS and they used detonated vehicles against the Peshmerga in battle in addition to suicide attacks in which they used children and juveniles who were armed by ISIS. ISIS also used Improvised Explosive Devices (IED)s after the battle as a result of which many Peshmergas were killed when they tried to defuse them.

Regarding KRG security institutions' treatment with ISIS-affiliate juveniles who were detained by the KR, Dr. Zebari said that their affiliation was verified after their arrest. Until mid 2019, 90 women, juveniles, and children were detained in the rehabilitation center in Erbil. Among the detainees, 50 male juveniles were convicted and 14 were still detained. A big number were released and returned to their areas of origin. The juvenile detainees did not file any complaints against the security forces and torture in those detention centers was utterly prohibited.

Dr. Zebari clarified that ISIS-affiliate suspects are treated as victims not criminals and special care is provided for them in collaboration INGOs. They are given legal rights and provided with legal support. They also have all other rights such as family visits and using phones. In terms of education, a special program has been designed for them to ensure that they are not disconnected from education.

Data's show that in their fight against ISIS, 1814 Peshmergas were martyred, 10725 were injured and 44 were taken as hostage, figures that the UN reports must have highlighted.

The KRG expresses its willingness to investigate into any violations to human rights as part of its long-standing commitment to the protection of rights of people from all demographics, backgrounds and affiliations.