

Turkey & Child Soldiers



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**Research and Studies Unit
Forum for Development and Human
Rights Dialogue**

July 2021

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Introduction

The recruitment of children is a full-fledged war crime and an explicit violation of international conventions, where millions of the world's children live under very difficult circumstances, making them vulnerable to serious violations, and these children need special protection, especially in situations of armed conflict.

In recent times, many countries around the world have witnessed armed conflicts in which thousands of children were vulnerable to abuse, as these countries and groups recruit these children into their ranks for various work, starting with cleaning up and ending up participating in the fighting.

The children of Syria have known nothing other than war, and those who were children at the beginning of the war in Syria now find themselves recruited within these militias and carrying weapons in Syria and Libya and several dangerous areas of the world, and in Libya terrorist elements supported by Turkish President Erdogan, to recruit children and Syrian mercenaries and use, finance, and train them in violence and murder.

The US State Department's **"Human Trafficking 2021"** report condemned the Turkish government's involvement in recruiting children in Syria and Libya, taking advantage of Syria's difficult political and economic conditions.

The recruitment of children is one of six serious violations against children identified by the United Nations, and the Syrian Center for Justice has pointed out Turkey's ongoing practices



of recruiting minors, the recruitment of children remains a continuing concern in Syria, and Turkish armed groups have arrested and tortured children belonging to other militant factions.

International reports condemned the Turkish exploitation of the Syrian situation and worked to recruit children and send them to the fronts of the fighting in Libya in exchange for money and flashy promises of Turkish citizenship and to get away from the life of the camps.

The opportunistic style of Turkish politics in the Arab world is taking its last breath, and the American report may be the straw that breaks the back of the Turkish Camel.

Children's Rights in International Conventions

The rights of the child in general international law have gone through many stages embodied in many different international conventions, and the Geneva Declaration of 1924 issued under the League of Nations is the first written international document on the rights of the child, and then these rights were confirmed by the United Nations in 1948 when the Association of The Universal Declaration of Human Rights issued that the rights of the child are an integral part of the rights of the human being, as stipulated in some rights of the child some other international conventions such as the International Covenants issued in 1966. The first covenant issues of economic, cultural and social rights, and the second on civil and political rights, and then the United Nations issued the Declaration of Children's Rights in 1959, which provided for the need for children to care for private and public care, because of their lack of immunity and distinction from adults, as such the declaration since its issuance has become a guide for private and public business that serves the interests of children, and finally The United Nations General Assembly issued the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1989, which came into force in



1993 after more than 73 countries ratified it that year and currently has 173 signatories, and this agreement is purely an agreement on the legal development in the field of international protection of children's rights, especially since it has created international mechanisms to protect the rights of children.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child obliges States to "ensure that the rules of **international humanitarian law relating to children, which apply to them in armed conflicts** "and "**take all possible measures to ensure the protection of children affected by armed conflict**" and also to take all possible measures to ensure that persons under the age of 15 do not participate directly in hostilities and refrain from recruiting anyone under the age of 15 into their armed forces.

"The use of children to actively participate in hostilities is not limited to participation in combat, as the armed force needs logistical support to continue its operations, and therefore any action or support to carry out or assist in the continuation of operations in a conflict that is considered to be active participation."

Article 38 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child also states that "a child under the age of 15 may not be involved in acts of war, and provides children at risk of armed conflict with particular importance."

Stages of Child Recruitment and the position of Syrian families

Children are regarded during wars and armed conflicts as a group in need of maximum protection, and this fact is clear when looking at the situation of children in areas of armed war



and conflict. In the 2016 UN report on the situation in Syria, recruitment should never be seen as truly voluntary, but dictated by a number of factors such as attempting to survive, escape poverty, insecurity, marginalization or discrimination.

The stages of recruiting Syrian children by Syrian factions loyal to Turkey and ways of attracting them to train them and then sending them to fight in Libyan territory, the operation takes place without the knowledge of their families, and in the full exploitation of the difficult living situation and poverty.

Through brokers who are the link between the child or his or her relatives on the one hand and the faction leader or the leader of the group on the other, where it is agreed between the parties to falsify the child's identification papers and change his date of birth if he or she has an identity card, and if he does not have identification papers, an identity card is obtained with false data.

Many children under the age of 18 go from Idlib and the northern countryside of Aleppo to Afrin, under the pretext of working there at first, some of whom went without the knowledge of their relatives, to be recruited in Afrin by pro-Turkish factions, and sent to fight alongside the Tripoli government in its battles against the Libyan National Army."

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights has confirmed that Turkey's transfer of Syrian fighters from Syrian territory into Libyan territory has recently shifted from incitement to intimidation, and the International Criminal Court has agreed that the line between voluntary and forced recruitment is almost non-existent.

Turkey has provided a lot of material incentives for Syrian children and their families to recruit them in the wars inside and outside Syria, taking advantage of the difficult economic conditions



facing Syrian families, and convinced their families with a salary of up to 3,000 dollars per month.

Turkey's Position and its Opposition to International Agreements

Although Turkey has signed all international conventions on children's rights, it has not complied with those agreements at all, and the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child contains provisions prohibiting the recruitment of children under the age of 15, and also stipulated: ***"States parties must seek to give priority to older persons" with regard to children between the ages of 15 and 18.***

The Optional Protocol prohibits non-State armed groups from recruiting or employing children under the age of 18 in direct hostilities. Furthermore, the Rome Statute considers the recruitment of children under the age of 15 a war crime.

International reports warned of the danger of exploitation of Syrian child refugees outside their country, where confirmed that 60% of them are at risk being recruited to fight, in addition to the dangers of sexual violence, exploitation as labor, and organized crime. International organizations condemned Turkey's insistence on the transfer of mercenaries from Syria to Libya in flagrant violation of UN resolutions at a time when the government of reconciliation controlled by the pro-Turkish political Movement of Islam fears the ability of Operation Irene, which was launched to prevent the smuggling of weapons to Libya in the face of Turkish attempts to transport mercenaries and equipment.



The Turkish-backed Syrian National Army factions, which belong to the Interim Syrian Government, have recruited children into their ranks in the Ras al-Ain area following Turkey's Operation Peace Spring, supported by the Syrian National Army, in October 2019 against Syrian forces, and have taken control of large areas of northeastern Syria, where at least three cases of children recruited by *ahrar al-Sharqiya* factions and Sultan Murad brigades have been documented in late 2019 and early 2020, where they are still in service to date according to a UN 2020 report.

The recruitment of children was demonstrated in Ras al-Ain by the Syrian National Army factions of the groups (Sultan Murad Brigade and Hamza Division), which are among the most recruited minors in Ras al-Ain, in November 2019, less than a month after the area came under the control of these forces, and gradually increased, in addition to the fact that the recruitment of children registered with Syrian national army groups in Ras al-Ain countryside, exceeds those recorded within the city.

Turkey and the Phenomenon of Child Recruitment

The "Paris Principles" and "Paris Commitments" documents that were drafted during the conference organized by France in collaboration with UNICEF in 2007 legally defined the term "Child Soldier", as every child who is strongly associated or part of a military group under the age of 18 who was or is still recruited or employed by a military force or group in any capacity, including but not limited to children and adolescents who are used as combatants, cooks, porters, spies or for sexual purposes.



Armed conflicts deprive children of the most basic social rights, such as the right to education and living in their families and the right to health, education and life.

Since the outbreak of the crisis in Libya, children have been subjected to various kinds of violence and violations, and the International Treaty on the Rights of the Child has not prevented the targeting of this vulnerable group, where Turkey has not stopped recruiting Syrian mercenaries to fight in Libya alongside the government of reconciliation, but it did not stop there; **as dozens of Syrian children were recruited, in order to travel to Libya and fight there and die for the ambitions of Erdogan and his allies, in flagrant violation of protocols for children's rights and international law.**

The 2021 U.S. State Department report on human trafficking indicated that Turkey had provided "concrete support" to the Sultan¹ Murad faction in Syria, a long-time Syrian opposition faction backed by Turkey, and groups that recruited and used children as soldiers. The United States has included Turkey, in a list of countries involved in the use of child soldiers over the past year 2020, multiple crimes carried out by Turkey in Libya, from flooding the country with weapons

¹ Sultan Murad, the most prominent reason for Washington's inclusion of Ankara in the list of countries recruiting children after this pro-Turkish armed group used minors in its battles in Syria, Libya and Azerbaijan International human rights organizations and organizations, including the International Commission of Inquiry on Syria, accuse the group of committing war crimes against Syrians in areas of its northwestern and eastern presence, the most radical faction among those supported militarily and logistically by Ankara..



and escalating the conflict, to bombing Libyans and spilling their blood, to spreading sedition and preventing consensus between the parties in continuation of the series of chaos in the country; Al-Wefaq and Turkey are responsible for recruiting children largely across Libya, particularly in Misrata, and it is clear that militias affiliated with the Government of Reconciliation and Turkey are targeting teenagers and minors in orphanages and luring them for money, the Libyan Center for Human Rights said.

Turkish Phenomenon of Child Abuse

Children in many countries are subjected to abuses, both during armed conflicts and in punishment, and statistics fail to describe the social and psychological abuse inflicted on children who have endured war.

Turkey provided military support to support the Sarraj government in the face of the Libyan National Army and succeeded in transferring many Syrian children to Libyan territory who had to face their inevitable fate, after Turkey forced them into the midst of Libya's burning civil war, and it is clear that mercenaries chose to fight in Libya out of hope for money or because of loyalty to Erdogan, who promised them a \$2,000 monthly salary.

The crime of recruiting children in Libya began to emerge after the Libyan army captured a large number of them and killed a number of others who could not be rescued or incapacitated because they were caught in the crossfire, and the Turkish government's crimes included the of recruiting Syrian children and adolescents and sending them to fight alongside al-Wefaq militias in addition to Turkish forces, as well as falsifying their age, by targeting teenagers and minors in orphanages and luring them in exchange for money.



The Libyan Center for Human Rights (LCHR) has confirmed that the recruitment of children by al-Wefaq and Turkey factions in Libya is widespread, particularly in Misrata, where minors are lured to fight for weekly salaries of up to 1,000 Libyan dinars (\$200), and orphanages are the main targets for recruiting children and putting children on the front lines without any training.

Recruiting children to fight in Libya is a phenomenon that continues, according to the Libyan Center for Human Rights, which accuses the Turkish government of exploiting the situation in Libya, where Misrata militias, which are engaged in the most vicious confrontation against the National Army, rely on young children trained in the 2016 Battle of Sirte.

There are 295 children between the ages of 13 and 18, the majority of whom are from the Sultan Murad Brigade, who were recruited to fight in Libya through a process of material temptation to take full advantage of the difficult living situation and poverty

He noted the killing of 287 mercenaries from Syria, including 16 children, in the ranks of militias in Libya, stressing that the number of Syrian mercenaries reached more than 11,000 armed men.

The 2017 UN annual report found that 961 documented cases of child recruitment occurred in Syria, 90% of which performed combat roles, more than a quarter of whom were under the age of 15 with most of the cases found in Idlib, Hama and Aleppo.

During 2018, 16 Syrian children were found to have been killed during recent battles against the Libyan army in Tripoli after being recruited and sent to fight in the ranks of the Libyan Government of Reconciliation forces by pro-Turkish factions. The Syrian Observatory for



Human Rights indicated that the number of Syrian children who arrived in Libya within the ranks of the mercenaries amounted to 150 children, ranging between the ages of 16-18.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights also revealed that the number of dead children exceeded 90 children in clashes with the Libyan army on the axis of Ain Zara out of a total of 295 children recruited and trained to use weapons in Turkey and sent to Libya to join the militias of al-Wefaq, and that Erdogan's mercenaries recruited about 150 Syrian children from the areas of Afrin and all areas of Turkish occupation in Syria to fight in Libya, in addition to these factions trying to attract children displaced from Idlib and Syrian provinces and Afrin

A UN report, April 2021, documented serious violations against millions of Syrian children under the age of 10 living in Syria between July 2018 and June 2020.

The report stated that the killing, mutilation, recruitment and use of children was one of the most "serious" violations investigated by the report's participants, and explained that the actual number of violations against children was more than 4,724.

Conclusion

The issue of protecting children's rights will only be achieved in the light of the provision of the necessary guarantees, and the provision of guarantees at the national level is a priority in protecting the rights of the child, but guarantees at the international level have become increasingly important in the current international situation, and the development of the perception of human rights, particularly the rights of the child.



The standards and rules for protecting children from the effects of armed conflict, despite their development, remain insufficient to meet the challenges and threats posed by international and internal armed conflicts to children,

Turkey has targeted teenagers and minors in orphanages and lured them to fight against the Libyan army, in exchange for weekly salaries of about 1,000 Libyan dinars, and exploited the conditions of poverty of children's families in the camps with promises of \$3,000 per month and Turkish citizenship

The suffering of all children in Syria, where some of them were deprived of their rights and others were forced to work, while others were recruited to become mercenaries fighting in the most dangerous and burning areas of the world, international reports confirmed that the most affected children of Syria are those in the Turkish-controlled north of Syria, whether under military control by Turkish army forces or control by Erdogan-backed armed militias

Erdogan recruited children to fight in Libya, a process that amounted to a full-fledged war crime, a humanitarian disaster and a clear violation of the International Convention against the Recruitment, Use, Financing and Training of Mercenaries.

The crime of recruiting children was documented by the fact that the Libyan army captured a large number of them

Erdogan recruited children to fight in Libya, taking advantage of the conditions of their families' poverty, and these children are chosen especially from the camps, with huge financial incentives and temptations of \$3,000 a month, and promises to rid their families of their lives from the camps and that they will receive Turkish citizenship, money and return within three



months loaded with dollars, while the reality of the war has made them return home in unidentified coffins to be buried in mass graves away from the spotlight.

Syria's children are victims of Erdogan's ambitions to take control of Libya and plunder its wealth.

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