
IRAQ: CAR BOMBINGS IN MOSUL KILL 15 CIVILIANS, 8 POLICEMEN

23.12.2016

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS, 22 Dec 2016

Three car bombs ripped through an outdoor market in Mosul on Thursday, killing at least 15 civilians and eight policemen, the Iraqi Defense Ministry said in a statement.

The attack occurred in the eastern district of Gogjali, which Iraqi forces retook from Islamic State militants weeks ago as part of a massive operation to drive them from Mosul, the brief statement said. It did not say whether the explosions were caused by suicide attackers.

Earlier Thursday, the United Nations denounced the killing of four aid workers and seven other civilians in two mortar attacks in Mosul this week. The U.N. mission said the attacks occurred on Tuesday and Wednesday in eastern Mosul, and wounded up to 40 others. The U.N. did not identify the aid workers or provide their nationalities.

On Wednesday, Human Rights Watch said Islamic State fighters are deliberately targeting civilians in areas they have lost to government forces. The New York-based group said that Mosul civilians were increasingly being caught in the crossfire, with at least 19 killed and dozens wounded in the period from the third week of November into the first week of December.

Backed by the U.S.-led international coalition and paramilitary forces, the Iraqi military launched a campaign in October to retake Mosul, the country's second largest city and the last major IS urban bastion in Iraq. The troops' advances slowed once they pushed into more densely populated areas.

IS captured Mosul in the summer of 2014 as part of a blitz that placed nearly a third of Iraq under their control. Since last year, IS has lost large swaths of territory in western and northern Iraq.

PKK COMMITS WAR CRIME BY RECRUITING CHILD SOLDIERS IN IRAQ, HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH
Rudaw, 22 Dec 2016

ERBIL, Kurdistan Region--The rights organization Human Rights Watch (HRW) has said in a report released on Thursday that groups affiliated with the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) are committing war crimes by recruiting child soldiers in the Shingal region of Iraq and in neighboring countries.

The PKK should categorically denounce the recruitment and use of child soldiers," said Zama Coursen-Neff, children's rights director at HRW, "commanders in affiliated armed groups should know that the recruitment and use of children under age 15 constitute war crimes."

The rights organization documented 29 cases in Iraqi Kurdistan in which Kurdish and Yezidi children were recruited by the PKK's armed wing, People's Defense Forces (HPG), and the Shingal Protection Units (YBS).

Residents described an incident in February when HPG fighters badly beat a 13-year-old Yezidi girl

in their ranks after she argued with a commander, the HRW report detailed. When the girl, who had a broken leg, tried to escape, the fighters tracked her down and took her back, even after she threatened to jump off the roof, residents said.

The report said they observed that the YBS is using a school as a military barracks in Khanasoor, a town in Shingal Region, where there were four children under the age of 18 among the uniformed recruits, including a child, aged 14, who had "volunteered" two years ago when he was in fifth grade.

The YBS recruits told HRW that they received salaries from the Iraqi government that were only supposedly paid to fighters age 18 and older, but that the armed group "collected and pooled the money and used it to pay children."

A YBS commander told Rudaw in January that they were part of the mainly-Shiite Hashd al-Shaabi paramilitary.

"Since last June [in 2015], our forces have formally been recognized by the Iraqi government as part of the Hashd al-Shaabi,

The Iraqi parliament passed a law late November that recognized the Shiite paramilitary as part of the Iraqi forces.

The HRW report also accused the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) of arresting children who had been recruited by PKK armed groups, calling on Kurdish authorities to deal with such cases as victims, not criminals.

In Khanasoor, Shingal, HRW met a 14-year-old girl from Turkey who said she had joined the group in Syria two years ago, where she had also received military.

She had recently moved to Shingal and joined the YBS as a fighter, although they had refused to allow her to participate in combat.

"Children under age 15 affiliated with both groups told Human Rights Watch that they have participated in fighting, while others said they had staffed checkpoints or cleaned and prepared weapons," the report said, adding that even those who are not directly involved in direct combat, are placed at risk by being trained in areas targetted by the Turkish bombardment.

The PKK and the Turkish military have been involved in a decades-long conflict mainly in Turkey, but also in border areas in Kurdistan Region with Turkey.

"The HPG should investigate and hold accountable those responsible for abducting or otherwise abusing children," the HRW said, "the Iraqi government in Baghdad, which has paid salaries to YBS forces, should pressure the group to demobilize all child soldiers.

The PKK is a signatory party to the Geneva Call, an international nongovernmental organization that promotes adherence to the laws of war by armed groups, including prohibiting child soldiers.

There was a rule that if you were under 18 you could not fight, a boy, aged 16, told the rights organization. He fought alongside the HPG both in Syria and Iraq. But the fighters dont care about the rules. When I wanted to go to fight, no one stopped me. They told me not to go to the fighting

but didnt stop me. He said he had seen "many" such cases. He joined the armed group in late 2014, and left it in mid 2016.

Twenty boys and five girls from the Halabja area have joined and remained with PKK-affiliated forces since 2013, HRW detailed, another 38 children joined but returned home, according to the Kurdistan Regional Governments Human Rights Commission office in Halabja.

The father of a Kurdish boy from the city of Halabja, about 278 km southeast of Erbil, said his son left school at 15 to join the group in early 2016. He said that the HPG officials had repeatedly refused to acknowledge the boys whereabouts.

"I just want to contact him, just let him call me to say he hasnt been shot, said the father who showed HRW researchers a video, believed to had been filmed by the HPG, showing the boy at an unknown location, in uniform with an assault rifle, in which he encouraged others to join the group. the father said.

Residents of Khanasoor also told the rights organization that the HPG had recruited children from another school in the Yezidi town, which teachers said is run by the PKK using a curriculum from Kurdish-controlled parts of northern Syria, also known as Rojava.

It said the PKK officials did not respond to a letter from Human Rights Watch asking if the HPG has penalized commanders for violating these internal rules, and other questions including the minimum age of recruitment.

Responding to questions from HRW, the KRG officials in Dohuk province said that it was strictly prohibited to recruit children from camps for displaced people, that the authorities protected the civilian nature of the camps, and that if any child recruits were found, they will be given attention and rehabilitated through specialized centers and special programs.

Rudaw could not immediately reach the media office of the Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi for comments.

Kaynak/Source: