

With regards to the report published by your organization on August 3

We in the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) appreciate the effort by Human Rights Watch to spare children from the scourges and calamities of war, and would like to extend our gratitude and recognition of the efforts the organization has made in Rojava and Northern Syria and for the report published by its office in Beirut on August 2, 2018 and the remarks contained therein about our troops.

We would like to draw Human Rights Watch's attention to the fact that our troops are committed to the relevant protocols put forth by the United Nations and humanitarian organizations emerging from the laws to protect children in times of war, and that the People's Protection Units (YPG), who make up the largest part of our forces, have signed the Geneva Call's protocol about oversight on armed non-state actors.

As such, per the agreement we have made with Geneva Call, the said organization conducts visits and tours of our forces, and we in turn facilitate lectures and courses for our trainees that are given by presenters from Geneva Call as part of our training sessions and the curriculum of our military academy.

In principle, we believe that the claims put forth in the Human Rights Watch report issued from the Beirut office are no more than individual violations and not systemic ones, nor do they reflect the working mechanism of our forces. The relevant authorities within our forces will investigate these violations in coordination with the Autonomous Administration in Northern Syria in order to put an end to them, to discharge the children spoken of in the report, and to punish the offenders in accordance with the rules and regulations by which our forces abide.

We would also like to inform Human Rights Watch that we are in communication with the relevant parties at the United Nations and the child welfare agency UNICEF, keeping them apprised of the situation and discussing with them the means to be able to put an end to the sorts of violations discussed in the Human Rights Watch report. We have shared ongoing projects with these child welfare agencies and are discussing how to implement them. The memorandum we signed with Geneva Call clearly affirms the fact that we have non-combatant military personnel under the age of 18. They do not participate in hostilities, and most of them joined our forces as a result of personal compelling circumstances, running away from difficult family or social circumstances, and joined up with our forces in order to receive the protection they required. They are housed on their own in special quarters far from any military sites or frontlines. They receive an education and study according to a civilian curriculum. As such, we must express our reservations about the tone of the report.

Legal Office of the Syrian Democratic Forces
August 6, 2018