



## **Factsheet**

### **Forcible recruitment, enlistment and use of “child soldiers” by ISIL (Da’esh)**

Launch of investigation: September 2019

#### **SCOPE OF INVESTIGATION**

The investigation focused on ISIL’s (Da’esh) practices regarding the forcible recruitment, enlistment and use of underage persons in their armed group across multiple affected communities. The investigation covered ISIL (Da’esh)-controlled territories in Iraq from early 2014 onwards, with particular focus on key events and locations where ISIL’s (Da’esh) practices of forcibly recruiting and enlisting children were documented.

#### **DESCRIPTION OF VICTIM GROUP**

ISIL (Da’esh) forcibly recruited and enlisted underage male children from religious and ethnic minorities including boys as young as six years old. Most of these boys were from the Yazidi and Shi’a Turkmen communities and were forcibly recruited after being captured and separated from their families. To a lesser extent, the Investigative Team has also documented the forcible recruitment of Shabak and Christian boys. Through a variety of means, including propaganda, ISIL (Da’esh) also enlisted boys from the Sunni community.

#### **MAIN LOCATIONS/AREAS**

Yazidi boys were captured in or around their hometowns when ISIL (Da’esh) launched an attack on Sinjar on 3 August 2014. Similarly, Shia Turkmen boys were either captured in Tal Afar or in Sinjar where they had fled after leaving Tal Afar. Reports that some Shabak and Christian boys were forcibly recruited also refer to their town of origin as the location where they were captured. Sunni boys were enlisted across the territory controlled by ISIL (Da’esh). ISIL (Da’esh) set up several training and military camps for boys, including in Mosul and Tal Afar.

#### **MAIN INVESTIGATIVE ACTIVITIES**

As part of its work, the Investigative Team screened and/or interviewed dozens of witnesses. It also collected documentary and other evidence from Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), including those working with former child soldiers. The Investigative Team also collected large amounts of open-source information, including ISIL (Da’esh) propaganda. It conducted several field missions, including to identify locations in Iraq where boys were held and/or trained.



## COOPERATION

The Investigative Team held meetings and received information from non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that had information on the forcible recruitment of child soldiers. These NGOs also provided valuable information on the context in which boys were used as child soldiers, and difficulties they faced upon leaving ISIL (Da'esh).

## OVERVIEW OF FACTUAL FINDINGS

### YAZIDI

Following ISIL's (Da'esh) assault on Sinjar on 3 August 2014, Yazidi boys were systematically and forcibly recruited. After capturing Yazidi families, ISIL (Da'esh) separated boys from their families based on physical development and age, typically focusing on those aged 7 to 14. Men and older boys were often killed, while women and younger children were initially held together before being further separated.

Yazidi boys aged 7 to 14 were first detained in local schools and temporary facilities within Sinjar and Tal Afar. They were then transferred to ISIL (Da'esh) training camps in Mosul, Tal Afar and Syria, where they received extensive military training and exposure to violent propaganda. The training involved harsh conditions, physical punishments, and brutal practices designed to desensitize the boys. They were also subjected to religious lessons and given new names and weapons, with roles ranging from combatants to suicide bombers. As their training progressed, some boys were transferred to participate in battles. Others were assigned to checkpoints.

### SHI'A TURKMEN

During ISIL's (Da'esh) advance on Tal Afar, Shi'a Turkmen families were captured on or shortly after 3 August 2014. The Shi'a Turkmen boys, aged 6 to 14, were taken to an ISIL (Da'esh) orphanage in the al-Zhoor neighborhood of Mosul. Boys were divided into different sections based on age: younger boys were placed in the kindergarten section, while older boys were housed in the "al-Bara'em orphanage". Some boys were also taken directly to the Tal Afar Citadel.

At the orphanage, the boys underwent religious indoctrination, physical training, and were exposed to violent propaganda. As they advanced, many were transferred to the Abdullah Bin Omar Shari'a Institute in Tal Afar for more intensive training. Those who progressed further were sent to military camps in Syria. Some of these boys were explicitly told they were now "Cubs of the Caliphate" and received a *kunya* (nom de guerre) before being sent to these camps.

While most boys followed this path, some were directly integrated into ISIL's (Da'esh) internal security forces. For example, a 16-year-old Shi'a Turkmen boy joined the Islamic Police in Hasan Koy. He was armed, tasked with giving religious lectures, and had his loyalty tested through orders to execute others. Despite his apparent integration, he was frequently detained and tortured by ISIL's (Da'esh) *al-Amniya* (security) department due to ongoing suspicions about his allegiance. For the majority of Shi'a Turkmen



boys, the more common outcome involved serving as guards at military camps in Tal Afar, manning checkpoints, or participating in combat.

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#### CHRISTIANS

Christian boys were targeted by ISIL (Da'esh), though less systematically than other groups. For instance, a 14-year-old Christian boy from Bartella, detained by ISIL (Da'esh) while trying to flee with his mother, was initially held in Bartella for about a month, where he and his mother were coerced into converting to Sunni Islam and received ID cards and conversion declarations. In Mosul, the boy endured religious indoctrination, forced circumcision and attempts at forced marriage. The boy was later transferred to the "Khorasan camp" in Tal Afar around summer 2016, where he faced intense physical and religious training.

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#### SHABAK

Shabak boys, regardless of whether they were Shi'a or Sunni, were reportedly taken from their mothers by ISIL (Da'esh), trained and used in hostilities. These boys suffered physical and psychological abuse, perhaps to an extent amounting to torture, at the hands of ISIL (Da'esh) members at the military training camps.

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#### SUNNIS

ISIL (Da'esh) targeted Sunni boys for recruitment. The group used propaganda, psychological incentives and promises of protection or social credit to attract these boys. ISIL (Da'esh) established military training camps, including those in Mosul and Tal Afar, where Sunni boys were reportedly present. Sunni boys were involved in training at various facilities, such as the Abdullah Bin Omar Institute and al-Marashdah camp. However, there is limited direct evidence of Sunni boys being forcibly recruited into active combat roles. Sunni boys were seen in supportive or patrolling positions, but no concrete proof has emerged of their participation in hostilities or suicide attacks.

### OVERVIEW OF PRELIMINARY LEGAL FINDINGS

The Investigative Team found that there were reasonable grounds to believe that ISIL (Da'esh) may have committed the **war crimes** of forcible recruitment, enlistment and use of children under the age of 15. These acts are prohibited under Article 4(3)(c) of Additional Protocol II to the Geneva Conventions, the Rome Statute and the Statute of the Special Court for Sierra Leone.