

Human rights group says hundreds of children facing terrorism charges after forced confessions



New York, April 13 (RHC)-- A Human Rights Watch report says that Iraqi and Kurdish governments have imprisoned hundreds of children who have been forced, through torture, into confessing that they are Islamic State or ISIS members.

In a scathing 53-page report, HRW alleges that some 1,500 children have been charged with IS terrorism offences. It confirms that many are based on dubious accusations and forced confessions extracted via torture. In addition, 185 foreign children have already been convicted on terrorism charges and sentenced to prison, according to Iraqi government officials cited by HRW.

This is despite the fact that international law recognizes children, recruited by armed groups, primarily as victims. "This sweeping, punitive approach is not justice, and will create lifelong negative consequences for many of these children," said Jo Becker, children's rights advocacy director for HRW.

Many of the children claim circumstantial evidence, mistaken identity or even personal grievances are behind their detention and that they are sentenced after hastily-prepared trials which can often last mere minutes. They also fear reprisals once they are released.

The Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), in particular, has been accused of employing “beatings with plastic pipes, electric cables, or rods; electric shocks; and being forced into stress positions,” to elicit confessions.

“Iraq and the KRG’s harsh treatment of children looks more like blind vengeance than justice for ISIS crimes,” Becker said. “Children involved in armed conflicts are entitled to rehabilitation and reintegration, not torture and prison.”

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