

France repatriates 40 children, 15 women from camps in Syria

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Damascus, October 21 (RHC)-- France has repatriated 40 children and 15 women from Kurdish-run camps in Syria holding family members of suspected ISIL (ISIS) armed group fighters, according to the French foreign ministry. The 15 children were handed over to childcare services while the women are transferred to the judicial authorities, the ministry said on Thursday.

“France expresses its thanks to local authorities ... for their cooperation which has made this operation possible,” the ministry said. According to earlier estimates by rights groups, some women and children likely remain in the camp after Thursday’s repatriation operation, which followed a similar mission in July.

Since the fall of ISIL in 2019, some Western countries have repatriated their citizens. But the French government had long refused mass repatriations of the hundreds of French children detained in Kurdish-controlled camps, dealing with them on a case-by-case basis that rights groups criticised as deliberately slow.

Before July, in France, security for French nationals in the country was prioritised over the return of those detained after a series of attacks hit France, including the 2015 Paris attack, which left 130 dead.

But the latest repatriation is the most significant one in three months and came a week after a European rights court condemned France for refusing to return two women detained in Syria.

In September, the European Court of Human Rights ruled that France must re-examine repatriation requests from two French women who travelled to Syria with their partners to join ISIL. The requests were also for the children they gave birth to there.

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