

URGENT ACTION

SYRIAN KURDISH STUDENT DISAPPEARED IN SYRIA

Fidaa Mohammad Qassem, an 18-year-old English student who lives in Kobani, a Kurdish-majority town under the de-facto control of the Autonomous Administration of north-east Syria (AANES), was forcibly conscripted to the Women's Protection Units (YPJ), AANES's female military force, in violation of local law. The authorities deprived her from communicating with her family in violation of international law. On 6 April 2023, Fidaa Mohammed Qassem was returning from English class in Kobani when she went missing. A close relative told Amnesty International that members of the YPJ conducted an unofficial visit to Fidaa Mohammad Qassem's family about two weeks after she had gone missing and claimed that Fidaa Mohammad Qassem had voluntarily chosen to join the YPJ. The YPJ should reveal the whereabouts of Fidaa Mohammad Qassem and allow her to communicate with her family.

TAKE ACTION: WRITE AN APPEAL IN YOUR OWN WORDS OR USE THIS MODEL LETTER

General Newroz Ahmed

Commander-in-Chief of the Women's Protection Units (YPJ)

Qamishli, north-east Syria

Email: Ypj_Womensdefend@protonmail.com

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/YPJDefense>

Dear General Newroz Ahmed,

I am writing to you with regards to Fidaa Mohammad Qassem, an English student, who was forced to join the Women's Protection Unit (YPJ) against her will and has been denied access to her family.

On 6 April 2023, a day after she turned 18, Fidaa went missing as she was returning from an English language institute in Kobani in north-east Syria. A close relative told Amnesty International that members of the YPJ unofficially visited Fidaa's family about two weeks after she had gone missing and told them that Fidaa had voluntarily chosen to join the ranks of the YPJ. The close relative added that the family did not believe that Fidaa voluntarily chose to join the YPJ given her plans to finish English lessons and continue her education abroad.

Despite multiple requests via all available communication channels, the YPJ has denied the family's wish to see and communicate with Fidaa. In July 2023, the YPJ denied that Fidaa had joined their ranks and denied allegations of her disappearance in their response to a letter sent by Amnesty International which asked the YPJ to provide details on the whereabouts of Fidaa to her family members. The reported circumstances of Fidaa Mohammad Qassem's disappearance and the YPJ's refusal to allow her to contact her family suggest that she may have been arbitrarily deprived of her liberty, in violation of international law.

In light of the above, I urge you to reveal the whereabouts of Fidaa and ensure that she has regular channel of communication with her family.

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES) is the *de facto* authority controlling most of north-east Syria. The military force of the AANES consist of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), a coalition of Kurdish and Arab forces led by the People's Protection Units (YPG), which includes the YPJ (Women's Protection Units).

A close relative told Amnesty International that on 6 April 2023, Fidaa Mohammad Qassem, who had turned 18 years old on 5 April 2023, was returning from her English lessons in neighbourhood 48 in Kobani when she went missing. Since then, her whereabouts have been unknown. An individual interviewed by Amnesty International said that around three days after she had gone missing, a family member received information that Fidaa Mohammad Qassem has been conscripted to the Women's Protection Unit (YPJ) and requested that the family end their search. After about two weeks, members of the YPJ visited Fidaa Mohammad Qassem's family and informed them that Fidaa Mohammad Qassem had voluntarily chosen to join their ranks. They admitted that they had been monitoring Fidaa Mohammad Qassem for a year. They also denied the family's request to see or communicate with Fidaa Mohammad Qassem, which is unusual given that conscripts are allowed to see and communicate with their families.

According to the law in force in north-east Syria under the control of the AANES, women can voluntarily join the YPJ, while men aged 18 to 40 must complete a one-year compulsory military service.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: English, Arabic or Kurdish

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 25 March 2024

NAME AND PREFERRED PRONOUN: Fidaa Mohammad Qassem (she/her)

LINK TO PREVIOUS UA: Not applicable