



All-Party Parliamentary Group on Trafficked Britons in Syria Inquiry
Human Rights Watch submission
November 2021

Human Rights Watch welcomes the All-Party Parliamentary Group’s inquiry into trafficked Britons in Syria. Human Rights Watch is an independent non-governmental organisation that monitors and reports on compliance with international human rights law in more than 90 countries around the world.

In this submission, we provide a brief information note on the smuggling of women and children out of the camps in Northeast Syria. We also provide links to relevant outputs from Human Rights Watch that address several of the questions in the inquiry’s terms of reference, notably on prison and camp conditions, the human rights abuses experienced by detained nationals, pertinent international legal standards, and the repatriation of nationals from Northeast Syria.

Information on Smuggling

1. In June and July 2021, Human Rights Watch conducted interviews with two women in camps in Northeast Syria, an expert who observes social media groups where women affiliated with ISIS participate and viewed some of these groups on Telegram and WhatsApp, as well as a journalist who was tracking the issue of smuggling. Women affiliated with ISIS in al-Hol camp in Northeast Syria have been able to use their mobile phones to fundraise to be smuggled outside of al-Hol camp. The women tap into pro-ISIS and fundamentalist networks through Telegram, and then using cryptocurrency and remote funding, collect money to smuggle themselves and their children out. The number of women who have been able to do this is unclear.
2. According to one woman, the smugglers will often provide bribes to the Asayish or other guards to allow the women out, then take them to al-Hasakeh city from where they are smuggled elsewhere. Some women, according to the expert, choose to go south and then to Iraq, while others indicate that they are heading to Idlib governorate or Turkey. The amounts that the women raise for smugglers can vary between \$3,000 and \$15,000 USD.

Human Rights Watch Outputs

- [*Foreign ISIS Suspects, Families: Why a Single “R” Word Matters at the UN*](#) (17 July 2021)
- [*Nordic Countries: Repatriate Nationals from Northeast Syria - Potential Complicity in Unlawful Detention of ISIS Suspects, Children*](#) (26 May 2021)
- [*Thousands of Foreigners Unlawfully Held in NE Syria - Countries should bring Citizens Home; Ensure Due Process for ISIS Suspects*](#) (23 March 2021)
- [*“Bring Me Back to Canada”: Plight of Canadians Held in Northeast Syria for Alleged ISIS Links*](#) (29 July 2020)
 - Chapter 1 Detainees and Conditions
 - Chapter 5 Legal Standards, section on “Women and Children as Potential Victims”