The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Dozens of Russian Women Vanish After Fleeing Syrian Camp – Reports

October 28, 2019

Maya Alleruzzo / AP / TASS

An estimated 50 Russian women have disappeared after fleeing from a prison camp for the wives and children of Islamic State fighters in northern Syria, BBC Russia has reported.

Russian women held in the Ain Issa camp had sought Moscow's help earlier this month amid Turkey's mounting offensive to clear the region of Kurdish rebels. Chechen human rights activist Kheda Saratova said she sent their appeals to Russia's human rights chief, Foreign Ministry and Federal Security Service (FSB).

Related article: Russian Women Stranded in Syrian ISIS Prison Seek Help as Turkey Mounts Offensive – RTVI

The relatives of the women and children said they vanished sometime around Oct. 17 en route to the Turkish border, BBC Russia reported Friday.

Authorities in Russia's republic of Chechnya are working to find and return the women and their children, Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov's spokesman told the RBC news website Sunday.

"Any Russian-speaking woman is a valuable asset for terrorists, especially if she turns out to be a capable recruiter," Russia's human rights chief Tatyana Moskalkova was quoted as saying.

Relatives have identified at least 1,779 Russian women and children in Syria and Iraq who want to return from former Islamic State territory, Saratova said earlier this year. She had previously said that 21 women and 105 children had returned to Russia over a two-year period.

Unnamed sources close to Turkey's interior ministry told BBC Russia that pro-Turkish forces that hold foreigners plan to notify their countries of origin to begin negotiations on their fate.

Turkey launched a cross-border operation against the Kurdish YPG militia in northeastern Syria earlier this month after U.S. President Donald Trump decided to withdraw forces from the area in a move that drew strong international criticism.

The Turkish assault has prompted alarms that it could allow Islamic State militants to escape Kurdish-run prisons in northern Syria and regroup. Ankara has dismissed those concerns.

Islamic State is a terrorist group banned in Russia.

Original url:
https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2019/10/28/dozens-russian-women-vanish-fleeing-syrian-camp-a67932