



Statement on sponsorship procedures implemented by military and local authorities
in SDF-controlled areas

Freedom of movement and the voluntary choice of destination by IDPs must remain the rule, in line with International Humanitarian Law (IHL) and human rights standards including the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement.

Restrictions to freedom of movement can only be admissible for security reasons, and should be applied with the sole intention of protecting the civilian population. They must be communicated in a timely, transparent and clear manner. Freedom of movement is recalled in fundamental international human rights instruments, including those to which the Kurdish Self-Administration (KSA) declares to be abiding by.

Screening procedures can be admissible on security grounds, provided that they respect due process and abide by key IHL and human rights standards. Screenings must however remain exceptional, temporary, and should be terminated as soon as security conditions so permit.

The application of appropriate screening procedures renders moot the need for any kind of “sponsorship system.” The screening procedures already implemented should satisfy security imperatives and military necessity. In this context, the implementation of a sponsorship system to allow IDPs to leave transit camps or reach the destination of their choice should NOT be endorsed or applied.

The sponsorship system enacted by the Kurdish security and civil authorities is at the core of freedom of movement concerns currently observed in SDF-controlled areas and has given way to a number of protection and humanitarian concerns. In particular, the application of this sponsorship system has led to involuntary and prolonged stays/permanence of IDP families in transit sites, living in sub-standard conditions and in a situation of dependence on humanitarian assistance. The sponsorship system has allegedly triggered/incentivised IDPs to find ways to leave the sites by any means necessary, including through smuggling/corruption schemes. It has created anxiety, frustration and resentment among the IDP population, in an environment where social cohesion and reconciliation efforts will be key to ensure protection of civilians in a post-offensive context.

While there have been efforts by the KSA to produce written rules on sponsorship, they remain unclear, restrictive, inconsistent and go beyond any security imperative. Additionally, despite assurances that medical cases will be exempted from sponsorship, the complicated and unclear procedures for medical case fast-tracking has already had serious consequences for some with urgent medical needs.

Sponsorship should therefore be discontinued as a matter of priority.