



12 October 2020

Military Instructions Issued By the General Command of the Syrian Democratic Forces

"Confirmation of Our Policy towards the Protection of Cultural Properties"

In accordance with the Law of Armed Conflict (in particular the 1954 Hague Convention and its 1999 Second Protocol), United Nations Security Council Resolution 2199 (2015), and Law No. 4 (2019) of the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES) regarding respect for cultural properties, the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) pledge to ensure respect for cultural properties during armed conflict. The SDF also pledges to ensure that cultural properties are not affected in areas under its security and military control.

Cultural properties are understood as movable or immovable property of great importance to the cultural heritage of every people and nation, such as archaeological sites, historical monuments, places of worship, museums, libraries, archives, manuscripts, works of art, monuments and centers containing a large amount of cultural properties.

The SDF, in particular, affirms its commitment to:

1. The immediate evacuation of archaeological sites and every place related to the cultural heritage from any military presence, if any.
2. Not to destroy or damage the cultural heritage on purpose.
3. Refrain from any use of cultural properties and their immediate surroundings for military purposes, and not place military forces, equipment, or weapons near them. The devices and equipment that protect cultural properties cannot be removed or used for purposes that are likely to expose them to destruction or damage.
4. Take all feasible precautions to avoid and reduce accidental damage to cultural properties in any way. All members of the SDF will fully comply with the principle of distinction between civilian objects and military objectives and the principle of precautions against the effects of attacks, as stipulated in the Law of Armed Conflict.
5. Take precautions and protection measures in the event of an imminent or potential attack on cultural properties by other parties of the conflict.
6. Take measures to protect cultural properties even in the absence of conflict, such as removing cultural properties from areas adjacent to military objectives in cooperation with the civilian authorities in north and east Syria.
7. Effectively provide support to the Internal Security Forces in their efforts to ensure the protection of cultural properties from unlawful practices such as theft, pillage, illicit trafficking of cultural properties, and acts of sabotage or destruction of cultural properties, illegal excavation and manipulation of cultural, historical or scientific artifacts.

8. Allow civil authorities and actors working in the field of cultural heritage, after coordination and obtaining the approval of the competent civil authorities of the AANES (Cultur– Directorate General of Antiquities) to access cultural heritage sites, review the status of cultural properties, and conduct an assessment of damage and proceed with evacuation of individuals or authorities, which use historic buildings or archaeological sites, in order to confirm and ensure the civilian nature of cultural properties.

9. Train all SDF military commanders at headquarters, as well as field and military officers under their command, to be fully aware of these instructions and to include them in all training manuals in the military schools and academies of the SDF.

10. Incorporate these instructions into military rules of engagement, related military policies, and into the overall military planning, preparation, and implementation of military operations by the SDF.

11. Penalize all commanders and officers if they do not abide by the above-mentioned instructions.

12. Receive and handle complaints through a joint mechanism between the AANES, the Internal Security Forces and the Military Police, which in turn will consider any complaints about non-compliance with these instructions provided by individual or collective actors.

These instructions shall come into force with effect as from the date of their publication.

General Command of the SDF

For further information please contact : sdf.forces@gmail.com

P.S.

This military instruction has been elaborated with the legal advise of the Cultural Authority of Autonomous Administration of North East Syria and Organization Fight For Humanity, @FfH_geneva