

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Lincoln Case

Case concerning a Dutch national currently in detention while facing charges linked to her involvement with ISIS.

Investigation Name	Lincoln
Country	Syria
Court	District Court of The Hague
Year	2024

01

Who is the Accused in this case?

Ayada K. is a 47-year-old Dutch woman who lived in the Netherlands before traveling to Syria in 2014 with her (then) 13-year-old son and 14-year-old daughter. In Syria, they entered territory controlled by the armed group known as Islamic State (ISIS).

She was repatriated to the Netherlands in May 2023 and arrested upon arrival, together with her daughter (both accompanied by at least one child). The minors were placed under the care of the Child Protection Board. Ayada K is now facing criminal proceedings in the Netherlands, accused by the Public Prosecution Service of war crimes, specifically for her alleged role in recruiting and deploying her under-15 son in ISIS combat.

02

What specific charges have been brought against the Accused?

Ayada K. is charged with committing a war crime, specifically, the recruitment and use of a child (her own son) in armed conflict. Under Dutch law, serious international crimes committed abroad can be prosecuted in the Netherlands if there is a link with the country. Prosecutors allege that by bringing her 12/13-year-old son to ISIS territory and allowing him to serve as a fighter, she violated international humanitarian law. In other words, she is accused of being complicit in the recruitment and use of a child soldier. This falls under the category of grave breaches of international law (often referred to as war crimes).

In addition to the war crimes charge, Ayada K. is also suspected of participating in the ISIS terrorist organization. Traveling to join ISIS and live under its rule implies

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involvement with ISIS's activities, which is a crime in itself under counterterrorism laws. Many countries, including the Netherlands, prosecute citizens who joined ISIS for membership in or support of a terrorist group. For this reason her case has two layers of allegations:

- **War crime** – for the child soldier aspect, and
- **Terrorism-related offenses** – for joining and assisting ISIS.

03

What occurred in Syria?

In 2014, Ayada K. entered Syria together with her 13-year-old son and 14-year-old daughter, departing from the Netherlands. At the time, Syria was engulfed in a violent civil war, and large portions of its territory were under the control of the armed group known as the Islamic State (ISIS), which had declared the establishment of a so-called "caliphate" a self-proclaimed Islamic state seeking to govern by its strict interpretation of Sharia law.

Life in ISIS-controlled territory was harsh and dangerous, particularly for children. Her son, still in early adolescence, was reportedly recruited or used by ISIS as a child soldier. He underwent military training and eventually took part in hostilities. Around 2017, he was killed in combat near the city of Raqqa in northern Syria. Raqqa served at the time as the de facto capital of ISIS, and it witnessed intense battles resulting in heavy casualties, including the death of her son.

Her daughter, in contrast, did not participate in combat. As a teenager living in ISIS-controlled areas, she was married to a member of the group, a man who was later convicted of terrorism offenses in the Netherlands. Both Ayada K. and her daughter survived the collapse of the ISIS-held territories.

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In 2023, after spending several years in displacement camps or under local authorities' supervision referring here to periods of administrative detention or monitoring in northeastern Syria, they were repatriated to the Netherlands by Dutch authorities. Upon her return, Ayada K. was arrested and charged with serious international crimes related to her actions in Syria.

Her daughter, now an adult, was also placed under investigation. However, she was not detained and was instead released under specific conditions while legal proceedings against her remain ongoing.

04

What is the status of the case?

On 5 June 2026, the District Court of The Hague convicted a 49-year-old Dutch national and sentenced her to 7 years' imprisonment for her role in the recruitment and deployment of her son as a child soldier with the Islamic State in Syria.

The court found that by travelling to IS-controlled territory in October 2014 with her two minor children – then aged 13 and 15 – and remaining there for years, the defendant created the opportunity for her son to be recruited by ISIS: conduct that amounts to complicity in the war crime of recruiting a child soldier.

In determining the sentence, the court acknowledged that the defendant had not travelled to Syria with the purpose of having her son recruited, and that she had spent years in dire conditions in detention camps following the fall of the so-called "Caliphate." Weighing these factors against the gravity of the offences – and noting the absence of prior comparable convictions in the Netherlands – the court found a seven-year custodial sentence appropriate. In doing so, the court noted that no defendant has previously been convicted in the Netherlands for complicity in the recruitment and deployment of child soldiers.

continued on next page

05

What is the (broader) significance of this case?

The case against Ayada K. is significant because it is one of the first Dutch prosecutions of a returning ISIS family member that includes a war crime charge, specifically, the alleged deployment of her then-14-year-old son as a child soldier. This marks an important step in applying the Dutch International Crimes Act to conduct linked to the Syrian conflict.

The case also demonstrates the role of Dutch courts in addressing alleged international crimes committed abroad when there is a sufficient connection to the Netherlands, such as the suspect's Dutch nationality and residence. By bringing these charges before a domestic court, the Netherlands contributes to the broader international effort to ensure accountability for crimes committed under ISIS rule, including those involving children.

06

What does the law say about using children in conflict?

International law strictly forbids the use of children in armed conflict. Recruiting or using anyone under 18 as a soldier is widely condemned, and involving children under 15 in hostilities is explicitly defined as a war crime by treaties and courts, including the United Nations and the International Criminal Court (ICC). This rule is part of international humanitarian law (the laws of war) and is reflected in many agreements, such as the Geneva Conventions and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (and its Optional Protocol on children in armed conflict).

These rules mean that governments, armed groups, and individuals, whether commanders, recruiters, or even parents, can be held criminally responsible for

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involving children in combat. The aim is to protect children, who are especially vulnerable to the lasting harm of war.

The Netherlands has incorporated these standards into its International Crimes Act, which criminalizes the use of child soldiers. This is why Dutch prosecutors can charge Ayada K. with a war crime for involving her son in the conflict in Syria.

07

What role does The Nuhanovic Foundation play in this case?

The Nuhanovic Foundation follows the case as part of its broader trial monitoring work. This involves attending hearings, observing proceedings, and documenting key developments to ensure meaningful access to justice for victims. The Foundation's role is that of an independent observer: it does not intervene in the proceedings, but provides reliable, accessible information to the public. By monitoring such trials, the Foundation contributes to transparency, strengthens public trust in judicial processes, and helps preserve an accurate record for survivors, practitioners, and researchers.

continued on next page

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