

Iraqi troops rescue Swedish teen from Islamic State

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Irbil (Iraq): Iraqi Kurdish authorities said Tuesday their troops rescued a Swedish teenager from the Islamic State group near the extremist-controlled city of Mosul earlier this month, while a local TV station broadcast an interview with the girl in which she described how she came with her boyfriend to Iraq last year.

A statement from the regional government said the rescue operation by the Kurdish anti-terrorist forces took place on Feb. 17 near Mosul, 360 kilometers (225 miles) northwest of the Iraqi capital, Baghdad.

The statement identified the young woman by name, saying the 16-year-old from the Swedish town of Boras "was misled" by an Islamic State member in Sweden to travel to Syria and later to Mosul.

Swedish authorities and the teenager's family had contacted the Iraqi Kurdish government and asked for help in locating and rescuing the girl from the IS, the statement also said.

It added that the young woman was currently in Iraqi Kurdish territory and was being "provided the care afforded to her under international law," adding that she will be "transferred to Swedish authorities to return home once necessary arrangements" are made.

The statement provided no details on the rescue and did not say whether the teen was mistreated while with the Islamic State group. The Associated Press does not identify minors who may have been victims of abuse or may be accused of crimes.

Iraqi Kurdish officials contacted by the AP in Irbil, the capital of the Kurdish semi-autonomous region in northern Iraq, declined to provide more details on the case.

But a local TV station, K24, described the rescue as a "unique military operation" and late Tuesday night broadcast an exclusive interview with the teen in which she describes what had happened to her in the last two years.

The girl recounts how she stopped going to school at the age of 14 and met her boyfriend that year. At first all was fine, she says, but then he started speaking more and more about "ISIS videos."

"I didn't know what ISIS means, or Islam," she said, using an alternative acronym for the IS group.

The boyfriend convinced her to "go to ISIS in Syria" and the pair left Sweden by train on May 31, 2015, she said, recounting their subsequent journey across Europe until they reached Turkey and crossed into Syria and from there, they ended up in the Iraqi city of Mosul.

They were given a house but it was without electricity or water, she said, adding that it was "totally different" from Sweden.

After a while, she got a mobile phone and contacted her mother, saying she wanted to come back to Sweden. In the end, the girl thanks the Iraqi Kurdish government and asks them to send her back to Sweden. Seemingly unharmed by her experience, she did not say what happened to her boyfriend or offer other details about her life in IS territory.

Iraq's second-largest city of Mosul was the first major city to fall into the hands of Islamic State militants during their blitz

in June 2014, when the group swept across vast areas in the country's north and west.

To this day, Mosul remains under control of the Islamic State group as Iraqi forces, aided by airstrikes carried out by the U.S.-led international coalition, are battling to reclaim ground lost to the militants. Iraqi troops are also assisted by Shiite militiamen and Sunni pro-government fighters in the battle, while Iraqi Kurdish peshmerga forces are fighting IS militants to the north and east of Mosul.

- AP