
DJIBOUTI

Republic of Djibouti

Population: 693,000 (343,000 under 18)

Government armed forces: 9,850 (estimate)

Compulsory recruitment age: no conscription

Voluntary recruitment age: 18

Voting age: 18

Optional Protocol: not signed

Other treaties ratified (see glossary):

CRC, GC AP I and II, ICC

There were no reports of under-18s serving in the armed forces. Over-16s could volunteer for military training.

Context

In May 2001 a peace accord was signed between the government and an armed wing of the opposition Front for the Restoration of Unity and Democracy (FRUD). This faction had continued its armed insurgency after the FRUD mainstream signed an accord in 1994. The new accord officially ended the decade-long armed conflict.

Since independence in 1977 Djibouti has relied on France for its defence. Several thousand French troops, including Foreign Legion forces, were stationed in the country. In 2001 the USA also established a permanent military presence.

Government

National recruitment legislation and practice

The constitution states that “the defence of the Nation and the territorial integrity of the Republic is a sacred duty for every Djiboutian citizen”.

The security forces include the army, an elite Republican Guard controlled by the presidency, and the police and gendarmerie.¹ The army is composed mainly of members of the Issa, the dominant Somali clan in Djibouti.

Until the 1994 peace accord between the FRUD mainstream and the government, recruits were conscripted into the armed forces. From 1994 recruitment was on a voluntary basis only. In a report to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in 1998, Djibouti stated that “as is the case for all civilian and military jobs, young people under 18 may not be accepted into the army. Moreover, there is still no compulsory military service in Djibouti”.²

In 2003 the government piloted the *Service National Adapté*, a voluntary national service program for those between the ages of 16 and 25. They undergo three months’ military training at

the Holl Holl military school, and learn vocational skills for public service.³

Other developments

As a member of the African Union, Djibouti supported the Common African Position, agreed at the Pan-African Forum for Children in Cairo in May 2001. The document included provisions to stop children, defined as anyone under the age of 18, being used as soldiers and to protect former child soldiers. The Common Position was presented to the Special Session of the UN General Assembly on Children on 8 May 2002.⁴

- 1 US Department of State, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices 2003*, February 2004, <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/hr/c1470.htm>.
- 2 Initial report of Djibouti to UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, UN Doc CRC/C/8/Add.39, 3 August 1998, <http://www.ohchr.org>.
- 3 “Le SNA ou le pari d’une insertion sociale des jeunes citoyens”, *La Nation*, 2 October 2003; Journal Officiel de la République de Djibouti, Arrêté n°2003-0914/PR/MDN portant Organisation et modalités de fonctionnement du Service National Adapté.
- 4 The African Common Position as Africa’s contribution to the special session of the General Assembly on children: Declaration, Pan-African Forum on the Future of Children, Africa Fit for Children, Egypt, 28-31 May 2001, in UN Doc. A/S-27/13, 16 April 2002, <http://www.unicef.org/specialsession/documentation/documents/A-S27-13E.pdf>.