

German Woman Killed Defending Christians From ISIS

A young German woman fighting alongside Kurdish forces in Syria was killed over the weekend in clashes with Islamic State fighters, Kurdish officials and a Turkey-based communist group said on Monday.

The Kurdish forces, backed by U.S. air strikes and local rebel fighters, have been battling Islamic State in northern Syria since the al Qaeda offshoot captured large tracts of land along the border with Turkey.

The woman, Ivana Hoffmann, was killed in a village near the town of Tel Tamr in northeastern Syria, Kurdish official Nasir Haj Mansour said. She had joined female Kurdish fighting units, known as the YPJ, two to three months ago, he said.

Nawaf Khalil, a spokesman for the Kurdish PYD party in Europe, confirmed she had died over the weekend. He sent a photo of the woman in uniform posing in front of a red and yellow flag representing the Turkey-based Marxist-Leninist Communist Party (MLKP).

Her photo was included with images of two other foreigners killed fighting alongside the Kurds in recent weeks.

The MLKP, a militant left-wing group close to the YPG and PKK separatist movement in Turkey, said Hoffmann was a member of its organisation. In a statement on its website it described her as a 19-year-old German-born communist of African descent who had joined the MLKP at young age while living in Germany.

It said she had joined Kurdish fighters to defend Christian villages in northeastern Syria following attacks by the Islamic State. It described her as a sharpshooter and said she had been killed in frontline fighting.

German officials declined to comment.

The British-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said she was the third foreigner fighting alongside Kurdish forces to be killed in Syria's four-year-old civil war.

Last week the Observatory, which tracks the conflict using a network of sources on the ground, reported that another European had been killed further east, days after an Australian man died. The European has been identified as former British Royal Marine.

The Observatory estimates that just over 100 Western fighters have joined the Kurds in Syria and include Americans, French, Spanish and Dutch fighters, among other nationalities.

A Canadian-born immigrant to Israel was the first female foreign fighter to join the Kurds in Syria, a Kurdish source said last year.

The number of foreigners fighting alongside the Kurds is small in comparison with the thousands of foreign jihadist recruits to Islamic State and other hardline groups.

© 2015 Thomson Reuters. All rights reserved.