
U.N. URGES IRAQ AND ALLIES TO RETHINK TACTICS AS AIRSTRIKES KILL CIVILIANS

- 29.03.2017

New York Times (28 March 2017)

Airstrikes against Islamic State fighters are killing so many civilians that Iraq and its American-led coalition of allies should reconsider their tactics, the top human rights official at the United Nations said on Tuesday.

Zeid Raad al-Hussein, the United Nations high commissioner for human rights, said he did not underestimate the difficulty of rooting out the Islamic State forces from their remaining strongholds in Mosul, Iraq's second-largest city. But he urged Iraq and the coalition to undertake an urgent review of tactics to ensure that the impact on civilians is reduced to an absolute minimum.

There were clear indications that the militants were using large numbers of civilians as human shields, he said, and under those conditions, airstrikes on densely populated areas can have a lethal and disproportionate impact on civilians.

The United Nations reported that as of March 22, at least 307 people had been killed and an additional 273 had been wounded in Mosul in a little more than a month, as Iraqi troops pressed their attack on Islamic State forces entrenched in the city.

In one especially deadly incident, a strike against Islamic State snipers by Iraqi or coalition aircraft on March 17 hit a house where the militants had forced 140 civilians to gather as human shields, the United Nations reported.

The organization said at least 61 people were killed in the strike. Amnesty International gave a higher estimate on Tuesday, saying that as many as 150 people may have died in the attack.

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The fact that Iraqi authorities repeatedly advised civilians to remain at home, instead of fleeing the area, indicates that coalition forces should have known that these strikes were likely to result in a significant number of civilian casualties, Donatella Rovera of Amnesty International said in a statement.

She said the mounting number of civilian casualties suggested that Iraqi and coalition operations failed to take adequate precautions to prevent civilian deaths, in flagrant violation of international humanitarian law.

In another incident, the United Nations said aircraft struck a house where Islamic State fighters were firing rocket-propelled grenades at Iraqi security forces. The militants had filled the house

with civilians, including children, from the surrounding neighborhood, the United Nations said; a 7-year-old girl was killed and eight more children were trapped in rubble.

Airstrikes are not the only way civilians are being killed in the Mosul fighting. The United Nations reported that shelling, sniper fire and bombs planted in vehicles and elsewhere had killed at least 95 civilians in several west Mosul neighborhoods between March 23 and March 26.

The United Nations said it had received reports in the past week that Islamic State fighters had forced scores of civilian families to move to strategic locations in west Mosul to serve as human shields, while in other areas the militants forced families to stay in houses on the battle lines as Iraqi troops advanced.

Kaynak/Source: