Beat: News

Iraqi airstrikes killed at least 75 civilians since June, HRW finds

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USPA News - At least 75 civilians have been killed since early June and hundreds more have been wounded in government airstrikes against jihadists in Iraq`s north, where an al-Qaeda splinter group has declared itself an Islamic "caliphate" after seizing parts of the region, Human Rights Watch said Wednesday. The New York-based watchdog investigated 17 airstrikes which took place since June 6, though the majority occurred in the first half of July.

So-called barrel bombs - in which oil drums are filled with explosives and shrapnel before being dropped from an aircraft - were used in six of the airstrikes, killing at least 17 civilians, including seven women and two children. "The Iraqi government may be fighting a vicious insurgency, but that`s no license to kill civilians anywhere they think ISIS might be lurking," said Joe Stork, deputy Middle East director at HRW, adding: "The government`s airstrikes are wreaking an awful toll on ordinary residents." The Iraqi government carried out the airstrikes as part of increased efforts to reclaim areas currently under the control of the Islamic State, which was previously known as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/ISIS). Other allied Sunni armed groups have also seized areas in northern Iraq. Human Rights Watch said the airstrikes, especially those involving barrel bombs, violate international law due to their nonselective nature. The barrel bombs, which the Syrian regime has also employed against rebels over the past two years, killing thousands of people, are crammed with fertilizer, shrapnel or any extemporized explosive concoction. While these weapons are cheaper than conventional weapons, they are also less accurate. HRW said Iraqi government forces used helicopters, jets and other aircraft to drop bombs against jihadists in residential areas, mainly hitting populous areas surrounding mosques, government buildings, hospitals, and power and water stations. In addition, HRW reported that hospitals in Fallujah and Baiji, both of which cities are currently held by the Islamic State, have repeatedly come under attack by Iraq`s air force. Since jihadists seized significant areas of Iraq, neighboring Iran and the United States have offered military assistance in various ways in its battle against the Islamic State. However, HRW said that, in accordance with U.S. law, the U.S. "should immediately end its military assistance until the government of Iraq complies with international law." HRW called on those who have committed war crimes to be held accountable for the civilian deaths they have incurred. "Governments that are helping Iraq in its military campaign should pull back their aid until Iraqi forces and any other groups supporting them end their indiscriminate attacks on civilians," said Stork.

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