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MIDDLE EAST

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Syria conflict: Raqqa air strikes death toll rises

Almost 100 people are now believed to have died in a series of government air strikes on the Islamic State-held city of Raqqa on Tuesday, activists say.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said at least 52 civilians were killed.

One activist from Raqqa told the BBC the only hospital still functioning in the city was finding it difficult to cope with the dozens of wounded.

Syrian government and US-led coalition aircraft frequently bomb Raqqa, which IS took full control of in January.

The group has since made the city capital of the caliphate it proclaimed in June and governs it according to a strict interpretation of Islamic law.

'Massacre'

Activists said that in Tuesday's air raids, government warplanes targeted at least nine sites, including a popular market near Raqqa's museum.

Most of the casualties were caused by two strikes in quick succession on the industrial area near the train station. The Syrian Observatory said people who rushed to help those wounded by the first were caught up in the second.

The UK-based group said the air strikes had killed at least 95 people, among them three women and four children. It could not confirm whether the 43 dead not listed as civilians were IS militants, but said some of the strikes took place near the jihadist group's positions.

The Local Co-ordination Committees, an opposition activist network, condemned what it called "another massacre by regime forces".

It said it had been able to document 87 deaths, and warned that more might die because of a "severe shortage of drugs, medical equipment and medical staff".

'Angry and afraid'

An activist from Raqqa also told the BBC that Raqqa's hospitals were in a "very bad situation".

"Just one hospital can work as normal but the other hospitals can't. I really don't know how they can deal with this," he said.

"There are a lot of dead bodies and injured. There are just a few doctors and because of that there are a lot of people dying from their wounds.

The activist said people were angry and very afraid.

"All the markets in the city closed after the air strikes. There is nobody walking in the streets - it's just like a zombie [film].

"They are just afraid because they say in the morning there are regime air strikes and in the evening there are [US-led] alliance air strikes and it's very, very hard to live under IS."

The US and its Arab allies have been conducting air strikes on IS positions in Raqqa and elsewhere in Syria since September.

In a separate development on Tuesday, UN humanitarian chief Valerie Amos said 12.2 million Syrians needed assistance because of increasing violence and deteriorating conditions, up from 10.8 million in July.

Baroness Amos [told the UN Security Council](#) that cross-border deliveries of aid to rebel-held areas without Syrian government approval had "made a difference" and urged member states to extend the authorisation for them beyond 9 January.

However, she warned that the UN was still failing to get enough aid to the 212,000 people living under siege - 185,000 by government forces and 26,500 by rebels.

The UN says 7.6 million people had been displaced inside Syria and 3.2 million have fled abroad since the uprising against President Bashar al-Assad began in 2011.

Map sources: areas of control and border crossings from the [Syria Needs Analysis Project](#); all other geographical detail from humanitarian organisations and Google. [Full map.](#)

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