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Syrian Arab Republic: Regime air raids kill 42 near Syria capital: new toll

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BEIRUT, September 12, 2014 (AFP) - Syrian government air raids on a rebel-held area near Damascus killed 42 people, including seven children, a monitoring group said Friday, giving an updated toll.

Thursday's air strikes were carried out in Douma, a satellite suburb northeast of the capital that has been under siege for more than a year.

"The toll from regime air raids on Douma has risen to 42 dead, including seven children and two women," said the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, which on Thursday had given a death toll of 17.

Among those killed were an unspecified number of rebels who have been fighting to oust the regime of President Bashar al-Assad for more than three years, said the Britain-based group.

Activists posted videos on YouTube showing the destruction caused by the raids in Douma, a frequent target of deadly strikes.

People could be seen carrying the charred remains of victims amid scenes of panic as firefighters battled to put out blazes in several buildings.

Elsewhere, the army announced that it had taken control of the area of Halfaya in Syria's central province of Hama.

In a statement, it said the capture came after it gained control of several villages in the area and killed a number of "terrorists", many of whom it said were non-Syrian.

On Thursday, the Observatory said Syrian troops backed by Iranian officers had taken large parts of Halfaya from rebels including jihadists from Al-Nusra Front, Al-Qaeda's Syrian affiliate.

The Observatory says more than 180,000 people have been killed in the Syrian conflict since it erupted in March 2011, while the United Nations puts the figure at 191,000.

Opponents of Assad took up arms in response to a bloody crackdown on peaceful pro-democracy protests inspired by the Arab Spring uprisings.

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