

Russian airstrikes killed 9,300 Syrian people in past year: Opposition monitor group

04/10/2016 21:56 by admin

Beirut: A year of Russian airstrikes on areas outside government control in Syria have killed more than 9,000 people, displaced tens of thousands and caused widespread destruction, an opposition monitoring group said Friday.

Syrian Civil Defense group inspect damaged buildings after airstrikes

On Sept. 30 last year, Russia began an air campaign backing the ground forces of Syrian President Bashar Assad, turning the balance of power in his favor in many areas — including the northern province of Aleppo and the suburbs of the capital Damascus.

Opposition activists have blamed Russia for most of the recent airstrikes against rebel-held neighborhoods of east Aleppo city that have killed more than 320 civilians in the past two weeks and demolished many buildings.

The anniversary came as violence in different parts of Syria claimed more lives Friday, mainly in Aleppo city where at least 12 people were killed and dozens more wounded.

A Syrian opposition monitoring group that tracks Syria's civil war said a year of Russian airstrikes have killed 9,364 people in the war-torn country.

The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said the dead include 3,804 civilians, among them 906 children. The dead also include 2,746 members of the Islamic State group and 2,814 from other rebel and militant groups, including al-Qaida's affiliate in Syria.

Russia on Friday is marking one year since it launched its air campaign in Syria in support of Assad. In light of that, the Russian Foreign Ministry issued a warning to Russians abroad about possible "provocations," urging them to exercise caution.

A spokesman for Russian President Vladimir Putin said Russia's involvement in Syria is justified by the fact that militants have not managed to capture the capital, Damascus. Marking the 1st anniversary, Dmitry Peskov said that Putin never gave a timeline for how long the bombing mission might last and still won't.

Russia's declared goal was to support the Syrian government of Russia's long-term ally Assad and Peskov insisted that in that respect the operation has been a success.

If it wasn't for the Russian involvement, the Islamic State group and other "terrorists" would have been "sitting in Damascus," he told reporters.

Regarding figures cited by the Observatory on casualties as a result of the airstrikes, he said he would not comment reports by "a group based in the U.K." The Observatory relies on a network of activists on the ground inside Syria.

Also Friday, Russia's Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said Moscow is doing all it can together with the Syrian government to help the U.N. arrange weekly pauses in Aleppo to deliver humanitarian goods. "It's the Nusra-controlled people in eastern Aleppo who refuse," he said referring to the al-Qaida-linked Fatah al-Sham Front, which used to be known as the Nusra Front.

Speaking to BBC about his country's military operations in Syria, Lavrov said: "We are not using any munition which is

prohibited by the United Nations. I can assure."

The backers of the opposition blasted the Russian intervention.

"Russia claims to be committed to a political solution in Syria, yet since its military intervention, the brutal Assad regime still clings to power. Russia's action has not curbed the regime's atrocities," said Britain's Special Representative to Syria, Gareth Bayley. "Russia has proved to be either unwilling or unable to influence Assad and must bear its responsibility for the Assad regime's atrocities."

A video posted on the opposition's Shaam News Network described Russia's military operations in Syria as "a year of crimes." It said that after a year of airstrikes Russia has not been able to defeat the insurgents.

Russia continues to blame the U.S. government and U.S.-backed insurgents for the collapse of a cease-fire earlier this month after only one week. Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov told U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry in a phone call Friday that Washington must force the factions it supports to split from the Fatah al-Sham Front, according to Lavrov's office. The front is deeply intertwined with multiple other factions regarded by Washington as moderates.

The State Department has threatened to end all diplomatic discussions with Moscow on Syria if the assault on Aleppo continues. On Friday State Department spokesman Mark Toner told reporters that the threat remains on the table.

"We're on the verge because we have not yet seen them take the type of actions we are looking for them to take," Toner said.

"This is on life support," he said of U.S.-Russian diplomacy. "But it's not flat-lined yet."

A year after the airstrikes began, Syrian troops pushed into rebel-held eastern Aleppo, a move that was highly unlikely before the Russian airstrikes began.

The Observatory said government forces captured a hospital in the city a day after regaining control of a nearby Palestinian refugee camp.

The Syrian military said government forces are strengthening their positions in the largely abandoned Handarat refugee camp and took control on Friday of the Kindi hospital, an unused structure that has been damaged by years of war.

The Observatory said the hospital is on the northern edge of the city, just 2 kilometers (1.3 miles) from a major intersection north of Aleppo known as the Gondol roundabout.

State TV also reported intense fighting in the central Suleiman al-Halaby area where it said troops captured several buildings. The area is home to a main water station that supplies Aleppo, Syria's largest city and former commercial center, with drinking water.

The Local Coordination Committees, another monitoring group, said eight soldiers were killed in clashes with rebels near the water station.

Syrian government forces have been on the offensive in Aleppo for days under the cover of intense airstrikes. State news agency SANA said rebels shelled the government-held part of Aleppo, killing 20 and wounding 55.

The Civil Defense volunteer first responder forces said airstrikes in Aleppo killed 24 people, adding that search operations are continuing to recover more people trapped under the rubble. The Observatory said Friday's airstrikes on

several rebel-held neighborhoods in the city killed 12 adding that the death toll was expected to rise.

The U.N. health agency decried an "unfathomable" situation for medical care in rebel-held parts of Aleppo, pleading for a halt to the violence that has prevented aid and support from entering.

Dr. Rick Brennan, emergency risk director for the World Health Organization, said the security situation is too dangerous for outside medical personnel to enter rebel-held eastern Aleppo.

Speaking Friday to reporters in Geneva, Brennan appealed for permission to evacuate the sick and injured. He said 846 people have been wounded, including 261 children, in the last couple of weeks.

He said fewer than 30 doctors doing work that's "beyond heroic" are now in eastern Aleppo, where at least 250,000 people live under siege.

- With AP Inputs