

Syria: Children among 22 killed in airstrikes outside school in rebel-held Idlib

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Beirut: At least seven children were among 22 civilians killed in Syria on Wednesday when warplanes struck a residential area housing a school complex in the northern rebel-held province of Idlib, activists and rescue workers said.

Airstrikes outside a school in Idlib killed 22 people, mostly children.

A team of first responders, the Syrian Civil Defense in Idlib, said 22 people were killed and at least 50 wounded in the raids on the village of Hass. Most of those killed were children, the group said in a posting on its Facebook page.

Another activist group, the Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, gave the same death toll and said 14 children and a woman were among those killed.

The group said that "warplanes - either Russia or Syrian - carried out six strikes" in the village of Hass, including on a school complex.

The activist-operated Idlib News network, which gave a lower toll of 17 people killed, said the strikes hit as the children were gathered outside the school complex. It said the death toll could rise as some of the wounded were reported to be in critical condition, the network added.

Idlib is the main Syrian opposition stronghold, though radical groups also have a large presence there. It has regularly been hit by Syrian and Russian warplanes as well as the U.S.-led coalition targeting Islamic State militants.

Footage posted by activists online shows a huge plume of smoke rising from the area of the strikes and rescuers rushing casualties away along a dusty road lined with destroyed buildings.

A woman's body is seen being carried on a stretcher while other bodies, covered in cloth and one with only a hat, lie under shrubs and other casualties are ferried away in pick-up trucks.

An activist at the scene, Muaz al-Shami, said as many as 10 airstrikes were believed to have hit the residential area.

The video content couldn't be independently confirmed.

However, it conforms with AP reporting on the events depicted.

Earlier in the day, the northern Aleppo province saw a new escalation as a helicopter believed to belong to Syrian government forces dropped barrel bombs in a deadly attack on Turkey-backed opposition forces in the border area, Turkish officials said.

A statement attributed to the field commander of Syria's pro-government troops said any Turkish advances in northern Syria under the pretext of fighting IS militants would be dealt with "forcefully and appropriately."

The barrel bombing was said to have occurred in the village of Tal Madiq, in a part of northern Aleppo where rival groups have been operating, mostly to rout Islamic State militants.

If confirmed, it would be the first attack by Syrian government forces on the Turkish-backed fighters. Turkey's state-run news agency didn't say when the attack occurred and said at least two Syrian opposition fighters were killed and five

others wounded. A Syrian opposition spokesman said it took place yesterday.

The Observatory's chief, Rami Abdurrahman, said helicopters struck as intense clashes were underway between Kurdish-led fighters and Turkey-backed forces in Tal Madiq and that 11 Syrian opposition fighters and five Kurdish fighters were killed.

Syrian government forces and their Russian ally have been criticised by rights groups and Westerns countries for indiscriminate attacks on civilian infrastructure.

Different groups estimate that over 300,000 people have been killed since Syria's conflict erupted in March 2011.

- (With AP inputs)