

Airstrikes destroy part of Yemen's UNESCO heritage site

13/06/2015 12:47 by admin

Sanaa: Saudi-led airstrikes targeting Shiite rebels and their allies in Yemen destroyed historic houses today in the center of the capital, Sanaa, a UNESCO world heritage site.

Rescue teams digging through the debris pulled the bodies of six civilians from under the rubble.

The bombing drew swift condemnation from the UN cultural agency, whose chief expressed sorrow at the loss of human life and the destruction of priceless architectural heritage.

Yemen's conflict has left millions of the Arab world's poorest nation in dire need of humanitarian assistance in just about everything, from fuel to water, food, electricity and medical supplies, as civilians are increasingly caught in the crossfire.

Also, early today, random shelling killed 12 civilians in the southwestern city of Taiz, which witnessed some of the fiercest battles between rebels and southern fighters, witnesses and officials said.

In the Sanaa airstrikes, residents initially believed the warplanes had targeted a house occupied by a senior rebel commander, but officials and witnesses later said there were no Shiite rebels among the victims.

The impact of the missiles flattened at least three houses and caused cracks in surrounding buildings, which are cemented to one another, leaving large sections of the old city's district at the risk of collapse.

At a destroyed four-story building, an Associated Press reporter saw a pile of bricks, dust and wood mingled with clothes, kitchenware and water tanks, which are traditionally kept on roofs. An adjacent three-story building was split in half, wooden window frames dangling from the upper floors. Rescue workers were covered with dust as they searched for victims.

Most of the old city's three-to-four-story buildings had been emptied out weeks ago, as their residents left in fear of the airstrikes. The Saudi-led coalition launched the campaign in March, in an effort to halt the power grab by Yemen's Shiite rebels, known as Houthis. U.N.-brokered peace talks are due to start end of the week in Geneva in an attempt to end the conflict.

Mohammed al-Raddni, a neighbor whose grandfather lives next door to one of the destroyed buildings, said those killed in Friday's airstrikes included three women and two men, one of whom was a doctor. A 16-year-old teenager remains under the rubble, said al-Raddni.

"What do they want from us? This is unfair. Why don't they go search for Houthis somewhere else," shouted Zahwa Hammoud, an elderly woman dressed in traditional Yemeni clothing, as she looked at the damage.

Hammoud, one of few residents remaining in the neighbourhood, said there was a "deafening sound that made me feel my ears exploding" when the missiles struck. A police car with a loudspeaker urged residents to stay away from the rubble.