

Airstrikes led by Saudi Arabia kill dozens in Yemen prison

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Airstrikes by the Saudi-led coalition fighting Yemen's rebels Houthi hit a detention center in southwestern province of Dhamar, officials and the rebels' health ministry said Sunday. (AP Photo/Hani Mohammed, File)

Sanaa: Airstrikes by the Saudi-led coalition fighting Yemen's rebels hit a detention center in the southwestern province of Dhamar on Sunday, killing at least 60 people, officials and the rebels' health ministry said. The officials said the airstrikes targeted a university in the city of Dhamar, which the rebels, known as Houthis, use as a detention center. Dhamar is located around 100 kilometers, 62 miles, south of the capital Sanaa.

The center is one of dozens of detention centers run by the Houthis in areas under their control in the conflict-weary country. Yemen's bloody civil war erupted in September 2014, when the Houthis swept into the capital city of Sanaa. The Saudi-led coalition intervened half a year later to back the internationally recognized government of President Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi.

The strike occurred as Sweden's foreign minister was holding talks in Jordan on Sunday, part of her attempt to relaunch talks between Hadi's government and the Iran-backed Houthis and break the war's long stalemate.

The rebels' Health Ministry said in a statement at least 60 people were killed in the airstrikes. Another 60 were wounded. It said they have been pulling bodies from the site.

The Saudi-led coalition said it had hit a Houthi military facility used as storages for drones and missiles in Dhamar, in accordance with international humanitarian law.

A man walks past the wreckage of government force vehicles destroyed by air strikes near Aden, Yemen, August 30, 2019. REUTERS

It said all precautionary measures were taken to protect civilians.

Mohammed Abdul-Salam, spokesman for the Houthis, posted on his telegram account graphic photos that showed bodies under the rubble. Abdul-Qader el-Murtaza, a rebel official, said there were 170 captured government fighters in the detention center.

The targeted prison housed over 170 prisoners of war, most of whom were supposed to be part of a local exchange deal, he was quoted as saying by the Houthi-run al-Masirah TV.

Local residents, however, said family members arrested for being critical of the Houthis were imprisoned in the detention center. They said at least seven airstrikes hit the area.

The officials spoke on condition of anonymity because they weren't authorized to brief the media. Local residents demanded anonymity for fear of reprisals.

The coalition faces widespread international criticism for airstrikes that have killed civilians and Sunday's attack was bound to trigger reactions by human rights groups.

Yemen's civil war has claimed tens of thousands of lives, thrust millions to the brink of famine and spawned the world's worst humanitarian crisis.

- AP