

Attacks on Syrian health facilities condemned

Author:

Tue, 2019-04-30 22:57

HBEIT: Shelling of areas in northwestern Syria in the past three days has damaged a medical center and put two hospitals out of service, the United Nations said on Tuesday.

"The UN is deeply disturbed by three separate reported attacks on hospitals and health facilities in northwestern Syria, depriving thousands of people of their basic right of health," said David Swanson of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

"Such violence is completely unacceptable," he told AFP.

The UN did not specify who was behind the attacks but the Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights blamed the Syrian regime and its ally Russia.

On Tuesday, a medical center in the town of Hbeit in the south of opposition-held Idlib province was "severely damaged" in artillery shelling, Swanson said.

Regime shelling blew a crater into the walls of the center, said an AFP correspondent who visited the facility. Its interior was littered with rubble, he said.

Earlier on Monday, an airstrike hit a hospital in the town of Latamna in neighboring Hama province, putting it out of service, Swanson said.

The hospital used to carry out 1,300 outpatient consultations and more than 300 operations a month before it was attacked, he said. A third facility – The Madiq Castle hospital in Hama – was also put out of service when it was hit by an air strike two days ago, causing heavy damage to its outpatient clinic, pharmacy and laboratory, Swanson said.

The hospital had served about 8,000 people a month, he added.

"All three incidents further limit civilians' access to basic health care in northwest Syria," he said.

"The UN continues to call on all the parties to the conflict to end the destruction of hospitals and other civilian infrastructure that is essential for the civilian population."

Russia and Turkey in September inked a buffer zone deal to prevent a massive regime offensive on the Idlib region, near the Turkish border. But the region of some 3 million people has come under increasing bombardment since former Al-Qaeda affiliate Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham took full control of it in January.

The escalation has killed more than 200 civilians since February, the UN said last week.

The Observatory said two civilians were killed in Tuesday's shelling on Idlib and neighboring Hama.



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US urges Russia to end 'escalation' in Syria's Idlib
Extremist attacks kill 17
Syria pro-regime fighters: monitor

[Italy's top leaders in Tunisia to shore up ties, security](#)

Author:

Tue, 2019-04-30 22:43

TUNIS: Italy's prime minister and an array of top ministers on Tuesday were

visiting Tunisia, a strategic and economic partner whose shared concerns include migration and the North African country's unstable neighbor, Libya.

Present for the intergovernmental summit were Premier Giuseppe Conte, Deputy Premier Luigi Di Maio and anti-migrant Interior Minister Matteo Salvini, plus the defense and foreign ministers, reflecting the importance Italy places on its ties with Tunisia.

After taking office last May, Conte made Tunisia his first stop south of the Mediterranean in November. Accords were reached on help in controlling the more than 400-km Libyan-Tunisian border and development of Tunisia's interior, where jobless youths become candidates for migration.

Conte was meeting with Tunisian President Beji Caid Essebsi and Prime Minister Youssef Chahed.

A delegation of about 100 Italian business leaders was participating in a bilateral economic forum.

The 2011 Tunisian revolution triggered the Arab Spring, but the budding democracy is plagued with economic and security problems.

Italian and Tunisian authorities share concerns about the current situation in Libya. In recent days, airstrikes have hit the Libyan capital as forces loyal to Khalifa Haftar pursue a campaign to take Tripoli.

Under Salvini, Italy has essentially closed its ports to migrants fleeing Libya aboard smugglers' boats. According to Interior Ministry data, 722 migrants arrived in Italy in 2019 as of Monday, compared with 9,419 during the same period last year and 37,034 in 2017.

Whereas Nigerian, Eritrean and other sub-Saharan Africans often made up the majority of migrants coming to Italy in previous years, Tunisians now take the top spot.

As of Monday, 226 of the migrants arriving this year were Tunisians, according to the Interior Ministry.



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Trial for murder of Scandinavian hikers to open in Morocco

Author:

Tue, 2019-04-30 22:33

RABAT: Two dozen suspects are set to go on trial in Morocco Thursday for offenses linked to the gruesome murder of two young Scandinavian hikers late last year that shocked the North African country.

Danish student Louisa Vesterager Jespersen, 24, and 28-year-old Norwegian Maren Ueland had their throats slit before they were beheaded in December at an isolated site in the High Atlas mountains.

Three main defendants accused of direct involvement in the murders and who allegedly pledged allegiance to Daesh could theoretically face the death penalty.

A total of 24 defendants are due to appear before a criminal court in Sale to answer charges including promoting terrorism, forming a terrorist cell and premeditated murder.

A Spanish-Swiss is among the suspects who are due to face justice in the city near Rabat. But families of the slain hikers and their lawyers will not attend the trial, according to information obtained by AFP.

Nature lovers, the two friends shared an apartment and went to Norway's Bo University where they were studying to be guides.

They had traveled together to Morocco for their Christmas holidays. Their lives were cut short in the foothills of Toubkal, the highest summit in North Africa, some 80 km from the city of Marrakesh, a tourist magnet.

After the bodies were discovered, the Moroccan authorities were initially cautious, referring to a "criminal act" and wounds to the victims' necks.

But that all changed when a video showing one of the victims being beheaded – filmed by one of the killers on a mobile phone – circulated on social networks.

The video did the rounds online in Morocco, Norway and Denmark.

Danish police said last month they had launched prosecutions against 14 people suspected of sharing the gruesome video.

A separate video in the initial aftermath of the murder showed the alleged killers pledging allegiance to Daesh leader Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi, under the terrorist organization's banner.

Police quickly arrested a first suspect in the suburbs of Marrakesh, and three others were arrested a few days later when they tried to leave the city by bus.

Aged from 25 to 33, all had struggled to get by in poor districts of Marrakesh.

They made a living from “small jobs” and were educated to a “very low” level, according to investigators.

Abdessamad Ejjoud, a 25-year-old street vendor referred to as the emir of the group by peers, is the suspected ringleader of the operational cell and a wider group he formed in Marrakesh, according to investigators. Twenty others are due to face justice in Sale for links to the alleged killers.



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Morocco arrests Swiss national in connection with killing of Scandinavians
Nine more arrested in Morocco over murder of Scandinavian tourists

US urges Russia to end 'escalation' in Syria's Idlib

Tue, 2019-04-30 21:01

WASHINGTON: The United States on Tuesday urged Russia to abide by its commitments and end an "escalation" in Syria's northwestern Idlib region after a monitor said air strikes killed 10 civilians.

"The violence must end. The United States reiterates that any escalation in violence in northwest Syria will result in the destabilization of the region," State Department spokeswoman Morgan Ortagus said in a statement.

"We call on all parties, including Russia and the Syrian regime, to abide by their commitments to avoid large-scale military offensives, return to a de-escalation of violence in the area, and allow for unhindered humanitarian access to address the humanitarian disaster created by the ongoing violence," she said.

Idlib is under the control of a former al-Qaeda affiliate in one of the last areas that President Bashar al-Assad has not taken back in his ruthless, Russian-backed campaign to crush an uprising against his rule.

Russia and Turkey, which backs Syria's rebels, in September agreed to a buffer zone to prevent a potentially devastating offensive in Idlib and nearby regions which are home to some three million people.

But the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights on Friday reported Russian air strikes in two towns that killed 10 people, including a boy and a girl. The monitor also blamed Moscow and Damascus for shelling of a medical center, which the UN humanitarian office called "completely unacceptable."

Violence has separately flared in Aleppo province, where the monitor said that jihadist groups killed at least 22 Syrian government troops and militiamen on Saturday.



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Attacks on Syrian health facilities condemned Russian 'siege' chokes Syrian camp in shadow of US base

[Russia's Putin, Turkey's Erdogan call for Libya cease-fire during telephone call](#)

Tue, 2019-04-30 20:18

MOSCOW: Russian President Vladimir Putin and his Turkish counterpart Tayyip Erdogan called for a ceasefire in Libya and renewal of a political process under the aegis of the United Nations during a phone call on Tuesday, the Kremlin said in a statement.

They also underscored further close coordination between Russia and Turkey aimed at "normalization" in Syria's Idlib province and agreed on "efficient" measures against militants there, the Kremlin said.

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