

Civilians in Syria must be spared from anti-ISIL airstrikes – UN rights chief

26 May 2017 – The United Nations human rights chief today urged all warring parties in Syria to take every feasible measure to spare the civilian population from the effects of the armed conflict, noting that civilians are increasingly caught in fighting between the Government forces and the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Da'esh) terrorist group.

In particular, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein urged the air forces of the Government and other States fighting ISIL in Syria to take much greater care to distinguish between legitimate military targets and civilians.

The rising toll of civilian deaths and injuries already caused by airstrikes in Deir-ez-Zor and Al-Raqqa suggests that insufficient precautions may have been taken in the attacks, Mr. Zeid [said](#) in a news release from the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights ([OHCHR](#)).

Just because ISIL holds an area does not mean less care can be taken. Civilians should always be protected, whether they are in areas controlled by ISIL or by any other party, he added.

Places such as the border city of Albo Kamal where retreating ISIL fighters and their families are mixed in with some 100,000 people, including displaced Syrians and Iraqis are of particular concern, Mr. Zeid said.

The same civilians who are suffering indiscriminate shelling and summary executions by ISIL, are also falling victim to the escalating airstrikes, particularly in the northeastern governorates of Al-Raqqa and Deir-ez-Zor, according to numerous credible reports of such incidents, he said, citing an airstrike of 14 May that reportedly killed 23 farm workers, including 17 women, in a rural village of eastern Al-Raqqa Governorate.

Airstrikes on two residential areas of the ISIL-controlled city of Albo Kamal in eastern Deir-ez-Zor Governorate on 15 May reportedly killed at least 59 civilians, including 16 children and 12 women and injured another 70.

The day after that, ISIL fighters are said to have cut the throats of eight men at the sites of the airstrikes, after accusing them of providing coordinates for the strikes. On 18 May, an ISIL attack on the Government-controlled village of Aqareb in rural eastern Hama Governorate allegedly resulted in the deaths of 36 civilians including women and children.