Beat: Politics

Barrel bombs in Syria;s Aleppo killed 517 since Dec. 15 - activists

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USPA News - Barrels packed with explosives and dropped from Syrian aircraft over the northern province of Aleppo have killed more than 500 people since mid-December, activists said Sunday, just a day after another such attack claimed at least 21 lives at a crowded vegetable market. The Britain-based activist group Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR) said at least 517 people had been killed in so-called barrel bombings since December 15, when government forces launched an ongoing aerial assault on the rebel-held city of Aleppo and its surrounding areas.

The observatory, which relies on a network of activists on the ground, said 471 of the victims were civilians, including 151 children and 46 women. It said 34 rebels and 12 fighters affiliated with the al-Qaeda linked Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) were also killed, although none of the figures could be independently verified. "In the face of continuing large numbers of casualties by the air bombardment, the SOHR renews its demand that the international community and the Secretary General of the United Nations work immediately on a ceasefire to end this indiscriminate violence," the observatory said, calling for the barrel bombings and other incidents to be taken to the International Criminal Court (ICC). Barrel bombs are oil drums filled with explosives and shrapnel that are dropped by aircraft. Activists said barrel bombs were dropped onto a crowded vegetable market in the Tariq al-Bab neighborhood of Aleppo on Saturday, killing at least 21 people and injuring a number of others. Earlier this week, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon condemned the continued and indiscriminate use of heavy weapons and mortar shelling against civilian areas. "He reiterates his utter condemnation of the use of `barrel bombs` by government forces," his spokesman said, emphasizing that all parties to the conflict must adhere to international humanitarian and human rights laws. The crisis in Syria began as a pro-democracy protest movement in March 2011, similar to those across the Middle East and North Africa. The Syrian government violently cracked down on the protests, setting off an armed conflict between pro-Assad forces and anti-government forces. The United Nations estimates that more than 100,000 people, many of them civilians, have been killed and millions more have fled to neighboring countries since the start of the uprising that has escalated into a full-blown civil war. Opposition groups estimate the number of deaths has already exceeded 166,000, but those figures cannot be independently verified.

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