

U.S. airstrikes kill 30 civilians in Afghanistan's Helmand



Kabul, November 29 (RHC)-- Airstrikes conducted by the U.S. military have killed at least 30 civilians, including children and women, in Afghanistan's southern province of Helmand amid a spike in civilian deaths from aerial attacks.

The U.S.-led NATO force in Afghanistan said on Wednesday that American advisers and Afghan government forces called in an airstrike as they came under fire from Taliban militants in a compound in Garmsir district.

"At the time of the strike, the ground force was unaware of any civilians in or around the compound; they only knew that the Taliban was using the building as a fighting position," a force spokeswoman said in a statement.

Helmand provincial governor Mohammad Yasin Khan also said forces had called in air raids against Taliban militants in the district, adding that civilians and Taliban militants were among the casualties caused by the aerial attack.

Meanwhile, Feda Mohammad, a resident of the area, said all of the victims of the Tuesday airstrike were civilians, adding that some people were still buried in the rubble of the compound. "The area is under the control of [the] Taliban but all of the victims of last night's bombing are civilians," he said.

Mohammadullah, another resident, said the fighting began late on Tuesday. "Foreign forces bombed the area and the bombs hit my brother's house," he said, adding women and 16 children were among the victims.

The United Nations said last month the number of civilians killed or injured by airstrikes in Afghanistan in the first nine months of the year was already higher than in any entire year since at least 2009.

The increase comes as the U.S. has stepped up its air operations in an attempt to exert pressure on the Taliban militant group to force them to accept a negotiated end to the 17-year war.

The U.S., along with a number of fellow-NATO members, invaded Afghanistan in 2001, toppling a Taliban regime in control of most of the country at the time, but it has failed to restore security in the country plagued by militancy and terrorism.

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