

Civilians must not be sacrificed for military victories – UN rights chief, as thousands trapped in Raqqa

28 June 2017 – Voicing grave concern over the fate of as many as 100,000 civilians effectively trapped in Syria's Raqqa governorate amid the ongoing offensive against Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Da'esh) fighters, the top United Nations rights official urged all parties to the conflict to enact measures to allow civilians who wish to flee the fighting to do so in safety.

The intense bombardment of Al-Raqqa over the past three weeks has reportedly left civilians terrified and confused about where they can seek refuge as they are caught between ISIL's monstrosities and the fierce battle to defeat it, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, said today in a news release issued by his Office ([OHCHR](#)).

Civilians must not be sacrificed for the sake of rapid military victories, he underscored, calling on all forces battling ISIL in the city, including international forces, to review their operations to ensure full compliance with international law and taking all feasible precautions to save civilian lives.

High Commissioner Zeid also underscored the need to promptly and effectively investigate reports of civilian casualties.

According to OHCHR data, conservative estimates indicate that at least 173 civilians have been killed in air and ground strikes since 1 June. Furthermore, reports of civilian deaths continue to mount and escape routes are increasingly sealed off.

The news release also noted that while some did manage to leave after paying large sums of money to smugglers, including traffickers affiliated with ISIL, allegations continue to emerge of ISIL preventing civilians from fleeing.

There are also worrying reports of violations and abuses by the armed group, the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), in areas under its control, such as Tabqa city located west of Raqqa city including of looting, abductions, arbitrary detentions during screening processes as well as the recruitment of children, the release added.