

Saudi Arabia must halt air strikes in Yemen, says UN panel

The conflict in Yemen has been highlighted by a UN human rights committee which on Thursday urged Saudi Arabia to “put an end to the air strikes” against its southern neighbour, amid reports that they have resulted in the deaths of at least 1,248 children since March 2015.

The recommendation was addressed to Saudi Arabia by the UN [Committee on the Rights of the Child](#), which also issued concluding observations on Benin, El Salvador, Lao People’s Democratic Republic, Mauritania and Niger.

Each country is a signatory to the [Convention on the Rights of the Child](#), which has two Optional Protocols: [involvement of children in armed conflict](#) and the [sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography](#).

Every four years, Member States are expected to provide an update to the UN on their activities and progress relating to these international accords.

In a statement, the 18-member UN panel noted that Saudi Arabia was involved in the Yemen conflict as the leader of an internationally-backed coalition “to restore legitimacy” there.

The country has been split by a devastating war involving the internationally recognized government of President Abd Rabbu Mansour Hadi, in the south, and Houthi opposition fighters, who control the capital, Sana’a to the north, and other key locations.

Saudi representatives said that the coalition had been “accidentally responsible for casualties among children”, the Committee noted in its report, before expressing serious concern that youngsters “continue to be the primary victims of that ongoing conflict” and represented 20 per cent of all civilian casualties caused by air strikes.

Of three aerial attacks in August highlighted in the UN report – on 9, 22, and 23 August – it was the initial strike which prompted particular international [condemnation](#), after at least 21 boys died when a bus they were travelling in was hit in Dahyan market in Saada governorate, in the north of the country.

All parties in the conflict had been responsible for attacks on civilians, the UN panel said, underscoring how targets included “homes, medical facilities, schools, farms, wedding functions, markets, vehicles in crowded areas”.

Cluster munitions had been used in some of these attacks, the Committee said, before highlighting how the on-going aerial and naval blockade on Yemen had “dramatic consequences” for “many millions of people, including a high proportion of children”.

Among its other concerns, the UN panel noted “the inefficiency” of the coalition’s investigative mechanism into attacks on “children and facilities and spaces frequented by children” and underscored the “lack of independence of its members”.