

Rights Groups Demand War Crimes Inquiry of U.S. Attack on Afghan Hospital



New York, November 26 (RHC)-- The United States is facing calls to submit to an international war crimes investigation into the deadly strike on a Doctors Without Borders' hospital in Afghanistan after Washington has admitted that it was caused by "human errors."

Human Rights Watch demanded on Thursday for an independent inquiry into the October 3 attack on the charity-run hospital in the northern city of Kunduz that killed 30 people.

The rights group said "serious questions" remained about "whether the attackers knowingly or recklessly fired on a functioning hospital." Human Rights Watch said: "This warrants a criminal investigation into possible war crimes, but the Pentagon did not clarify today whether recommendations made to senior commanders include possible criminal charges."

"Moreover, we are deeply concerned that any decision making about possible criminal charges remains within the chain of command responsibility for military operations in Afghanistan," it added.

Doctors Without Borders (MSF), the charity that run the hospital, also demanded an international investigation. It called for the International Humanitarian Fact-Finding Commission (IHFFC) to investigate the attack. The independent body, which was created under international law, has never been used so far.

To launch an investigation, the body would need permission from the U.S. and Afghanistan, and neither country has so far agreed. "The frightening catalog of errors outlined today illustrates gross negligence on the part of U.S. forces and violations of the rules of war," said MSF general director Christopher Stokes.

According to an investigation by the medical charity, U.S. military commanders continued to attack on the hospital for 17 minutes after being warned by MSF that their aircraft was firing on a medical center full of doctors and civilians.

The AC-130 gunship fired 211 shells at the compound. MSF reported this month that several doctors and nurses were killed immediately, and patients who could not move burned to death in the ensuing fire.

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