

At least 83 killed in 'war on children' across Mideast in January



Amman, Feb 16 (RHC)-- The UN children's agency (UNICEF) says at least 83 children were killed in Middle East war zones in January. Geert Cappelaere, UNICEF's regional director for the Middle East and North Africa, announced the figure in a statement in the Jordanian capital Amman.

"In the month of January alone, escalating violence in Iraq, Libya, the State of Palestine, Syria and Yemen has claimed the lives of at least 83 children," the statement read. "They were killed in ongoing conflicts, suicide attacks or frozen to death as they fled active war zones," it added. According to UNICEF, the highest death toll was in Syria where 59 children were killed in violence. Syria has been grappling with foreign-backed militancy since March 2011.

In Yemen, 16 children were killed in the past month amid the ongoing Saudi invasion of the impoverished country which enters its third year in March. "UNICEF is receiving reports of killed and injured children on a daily basis as fighting escalates across the country (Yemen)."

A new report says Saudi Arabia and its allies killed 68 children in Yemen in the course of three months last year. According to a confidential document obtained by al-Jazeera news broadcaster, the Saudi-led

military coalition also wounded 36 others in war-torn Yemen from July to September 2017.

Since March 2015, the Saudi regime, together with a coalition of its allies, has been heavily bombarding Yemen as part of a brutal campaign against its southern neighbor in an attempt to reinstall Yemen's former president Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi, a staunch ally of Riyadh.

Meanwhile, UNICEF said in its Monday statement that in Libya's eastern city Benghazi, an attack killed three children while three others died while "playing near unexploded ordnance" and a fourth child was critically wounded. A child was killed in a "booby-trapped" house in Iraq's second city Mosul, seized for three years by the Daesh Takfiri terrorist group before the militants were driven out by the Baghdad government forces and popular fighters in July following fierce battles, the agency said.

UNICEF said at least four children were among 16 Syrian refugees who "froze to death" in a snowstorm as they were fleeing their country to neighboring Lebanon, adding that more children suffered frost bite.

Calling January a "dark (and) bloody month," the UN official said it was "unacceptable that children continue being killed and injured every single day."

"Not hundreds, not thousands but millions more children in the Middle East and North Africa region have their childhood stolen, maimed for life, traumatized, arrested and detained, exploited, prevented from going to school and from getting the most essential health services; denied even the basic right to play," stressed Cappelaere. He also vowed children's voices "will never be silenced."

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