Saudi-led strike kills dozens of children on school field trip in Yemen

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Dozens of children, many under the age of 10, have been killed in a Saudi-led coalition airstrike that hit a school bus in northern Yemen on Thursday.

The children were on a field trip when their bus was struck at a market, the first stop of the day, killing 50 and injuring 77.

Most of the children were inside the bus when the airstrike hit, according to a medic, Yahya al-Hadi.

The International Committee for the Red Cross (ICRC) said that a hospital it supports in Saada had received 29 dead bodies of "mainly children" under 15 years of age, and 40 injured, including 30 children.

"(The hospital) is very busy. They've been receiving wounded and dead since the morning and it is non-stop ," ICRC head of communications and spokesperson Mirella Hodeib told CNN.

Houthi media broadcast graphic footage appearing to show the dead bodies of children. CNN has not independently verified these images.

A video from Houthi-run Al-Masirah TV shows several boys who appear to have lost their limbs. Two or more wounded children are seen sharing a single hospital bed, and one child -- soaked in blood -- screams as he is being treated at a health center.

In another video, which appears to show the immediate aftermath of the strike, several lifeless bodies of children lay under a blown-up bus. Some shell-shocked boys are seen coming to, their faces bloodied and limbs charred.

One boy, his face blackened by dust, is seen trying to hold his legs up, apparently unable to move. "My leg won't get up," says the boy.

Witnesses that CNN spoke to said the attack could be heard from neighboring districts.

### Strike followed missile

Col. Turki al-Malki, a spokesman for the Saudi-led coalition, told CNN the missile strike was aimed at a "legitimate target."

"No, this is not children in the bus," he said. "We do have high standard measures for targeting (sic)."

Earlier Thursday, the Saudi-led coalition defended the airstrike as a "legitimate military operation," and a retaliation to a Houthi ballistic missile that targeted the kingdom's Jizan province on Wednesday night, according to the country's official news agency.

"The targeting that happened today in Saada province was legal military action to target elements that planned and executed the targeting of civilians in the city of Jizan last night, killing and wounding civilians," the Saudi Press Agency cited al-Maliki as saying.

One person was killed in that attack, Saudi state media reported.

Maliki said those responsible for firing ballistic missiles and targeting civilians would "get what they deserve."

Following the strike, the United States, which largely supports the coalition's campaign, issued a statement.

"US military support to our partners mitigates noncombatant casualties," said Pentagon spokeswoman Rebecca Rebarich, according to the statement.

"Our support to the coalition consists of aerial refueling and intelligence support to assist our partners in securing their borders from cross-border attacks from the Houthis. Our non-combat support focuses on improving coalition processes and procedures, especially regarding compliance with the law of armed conflict and best practices for reducing the risk of civilian casualties," the statement added.

### UN response

The United Nations has repeatedly criticized the actions of the coalition.

"Putting children in harm's way is horrific and deplorable and making them pay such a price is unacceptable," said Hodeib.

Responding to the airstrike on Thursday, UNICEF Regional Director in the Middle East and North Africa Geert Cappelaere said, "does the world really need more innocent children's lives to stop the cruel war on children in Yemen?"