Kunduz Hospital Airstrikes “Inexcusable” -- Zeid

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Press Release - UN High Commissioner for Human Rights

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GENEVA (3 October 2015) – UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein said Saturday that there must be a swift, full and transparent investigation into the overnight airstrikes that hit a clinic in Kunduz killing and injuring many patients and medical personnel.

“This event is utterly tragic, inexcusable, and possibly even criminal,” Zeid said. “International and Afghan military planners have an obligation to respect and protect civilians at all times, and medical facilities and personnel are the object of a special protection. These obligations apply no matter whose air force is involved, and irrespective of the location."

According to Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF), pro-Government forces had been informed of the precise location of the medical facilities. While it has yet to be established whether or not the hospital or immediate surroundings were the target of the attack, or were recklessly endangered by it, according to MSF airstrikes continued to hit the area for a further 30 minutes after pro-Government forces were informed they were endangering a medical facility. A U.S. spokesperson has reportedly been quoted saying U.S planes were carrying out airstrikes at around the time the hospital was hit.

The UN Human Rights Chief said it was essential to ensure any inquiry was independent, impartial, transparent and effective. “This deeply shocking event should be promptly, thoroughly and independently investigated and the results should be made public," he said. "The seriousness of the incident is underlined by the fact that, depending on circumstances, an airstrike on a hospital may amount to a war crime."