

## NATO air strike kills 21 civilians

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Kabul, PAB-Online

A NATO air strike has mistakenly killed 21 Afghan civilians, including women and children, a spokesman for Afghanistan's interior ministry said Monday.

The incident happened in central Uruzgan province on Sunday when three vehicles were bombed, said Zemarai Bashary.

"As a result of the air strike, according to initial information, 21 civilians were killed, including women and children, and another 14 were injured," he told AFP.

NATO's International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) said it was investigating the incident.

"Yesterday a group of suspected insurgents, believed to be en route to attack a joint Afghan-ISAF unit, was engaged by an airborne weapons team resulting in a number of individuals killed and wounded," it said.

"After the joint ground force arrived at the scene and found women and children, they transported the wounded to medical treatment facilities."

US General Stanley McChrystal, who commands the 121,000 US and NATO troops in Afghanistan, spoke to President Hamid Karzai Sunday "and expressed his sorrow and regret for the tragic incident," ISAF said.

Bashary said the victims were travelling in three vehicles and "were bombed by ISAF in an area between Kijran district and Chahar Chino district of Uruzgan.

"ISAF thought they are armed enemy elements who are driving towards their bases," he said.

Civilian casualties are a sensitive issue in Afghanistan and a particular concern of Karzai, who in recent days has exhorted international forces to take all care to avoid them.

The latest incident in Uruzgan comes as 15,000 troops, led by US Marines, press a huge operation in southern Helmand province to clear an agricultural valley of Taliban militants.

Afghan and NATO authorities have said at least 15 civilians have been killed in Operation Mushtarak, while rights group put the figure at 21.

Last Thursday, another NATO air strike mistakenly killed seven Afghan police and wounded two others in northern Afghanistan.(AFP/IP)

