

Over 37,000 have died in Syria's civil war, opposition group says
By Saad Abedine and Ben Brumfield ,
CNN
15 November 2012

(CNN) -- As the total death toll in Syria marches towards 40,000, the Russian Foreign Ministry on Thursday lambasted the recent U.S. backing of Syria's opposition in its quest to overthrow President Bashar al-Assad.

Homs and Damascus are the deadliest places in Syria, according to an opposition group that keeps a running total of those whose lives came to a bloody end in 20-month armed conflict.

Of the 37,387 who have perished since fighting began, 6,992 were killed in Homs and 6,750 in the suburbs of Damascus, said the Violations Documentation Center.

The total number includes 3,061 government soldiers, which the group only recently started to include in its count.

Russia's Foreign Ministry published harsh criticism in its active Twitter feed of the recent show of support by the United States, France and Arab states around the Persian Gulf for fighters trying to topple Assad.

"The Syrian opposition has been given a false signal, strengthening the positions of extremists, including terrorists," a tweet reads. The ministry said the decision went against international principles on Syria established in Geneva.

Quoting Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, the ministry tweeted: "If the priority is Assad's fate, it will be paid for with new casualties in #Syria. Our key priority is to prevent such sacrifices."

Lavrov met with the Gulf Cooperation Council in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, Wednesday. Russia has shown support for its long-standing ally Assad, while the GCC openly backs the opposition. Both sides have been accused of supplying weapons to the conflict parties.

The conflict raged on Thursday in Syria's perpetual flashpoints with no sign of losing intensity. The killing continues to drive civilians to flee over the country's borders.

The U.N. refugee office says 414,838 Syrians are in neighboring countries registered as refugees or waiting to register. Turkey has single highest number with 114,944, it says.

The Violations Documentation Center regularly publishes a meticulous tally of those who have been killed during Syria's armed conflict, claiming to include in its count only those whose deaths are documented on video or with an ID card. It works closely with the Local Coordination Committees of Syria, a source commonly cited in reports on Syria.

Both organizations support the overthrow of the Syrian government.

Their statistics will continue to rise. Sixteen have died already on Thursday, according to early death toll reports by the LCC.

Copyright CNN