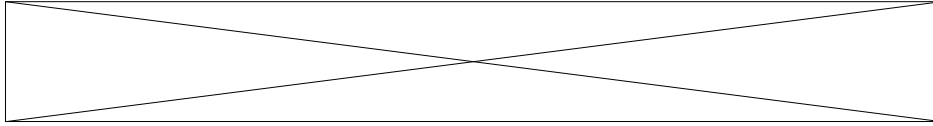


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'Al-Qaida doesn't kill innocents'

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DUBAI: Al-Qaida's second-in-command Ayman al-Zawahri on Wednesday responded to criticism about the organisation's notoriously brutal tactics, maintaining that it does not kill innocents, in an hour and a half long audio response to questions submitted to the movement on extremist Websites linked to the group.

"We haven't killed the innocents, not in Baghdad nor in Morocco, nor in Algeria, nor anywhere else," he said according to the English transcript.

The answer was in response to the question "excuse me, Mr Zawahri, but who is it who is killing with Your Excellency's blessing the innocents in Baghdad, Morocco and Algeria?"

"If there is any innocent who was killed in the Mujahideen's operations, then it was either an unintentional error or out of necessity," Zawahri added.

He went on to say that it was their opponents who killed innocents and also noted that "the enemy intentionally takes up positions in the midst of the Muslims for them to be human shields for him."

Al-Qaida has taken credit for the destruction of the World Trade Centre which killed nearly 3,000 people in New York City in 2001, while its affiliates in Iraq, Afghanistan and Algeria regularly set off explosives in crowded urban areas that have taken thousands of lives.

'UN is enemy of Muslims'

The Al-Qaida's no. 2 described the United Nations as an enemy to Muslims and vowed attacks on Jews both inside and outside Israel in a statement posted on the Internet on Wednesday.

"The United Nations is an enemy of Islam and Muslims," he said in remarks made in

response to questions posted on the Internet. He defended attacks on UN offices in an apparent reference to twin bomb attacks on UN buildings in Algiers which killed 41 people in December and the bombing of a UN building in Baghdad in 2003 which killed 22.

Zawahri also called for attacks on Jews. "We promise our Muslim brothers that we will do our utmost to strike Jews in Israel and abroad with help and guidance from God."

'Osama is in good health'

Al-Zawahri also said on Wednesday Osama bin Laden was well and reports he was sick were false.

"Sheikh Osama bin Laden is in good health," the militant leader said in response to questions compiled by Islamist Web sites.

"The ill-intentioned always try to circulate false reports about him being sick."