

UNAMA

United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan

Strategic Communication and Spokespersons Unit, Kabul, Afghanistan

Press Statement

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CONFLICT CONTINUES TO TAKE A DEVASTATING TOLL ON CIVILIANS DESPITE DECREASE IN CIVILIAN CASUALTIES DURING FIRST SIX MONTHS OF 2012 – UN REPORT

Kabul/Geneva, 8 August 2012 – In the first six months of 2012, conflict-related violence in Afghanistan continued to take a devastating toll on civilians, the United Nations Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) said today, releasing its 2012 Midyear Report on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict.

Between 1 January and 30 June 2012, conflict-related violence resulted in 3,099 civilian casualties -- 1,145 civilians killed and 1,954 injured -- a 15 per cent decrease in overall civilian casualties compared with the same period in 2011 [when UNAMA documented 3,654 civilian casualties (1,510 killed and 2,144 injured).] Of the 3,099 civilians killed or wounded, 925 were women or children representing 30 per cent of all civilian casualties.

“The United Nations welcomes the reduction in civilian casualties, but we must remember that Afghan children, women and men continue to be killed and injured at alarmingly high levels.” said Nicholas Haysom, Deputy UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General in Afghanistan. “The 3,099 civilian casualties documented in this report were ordinary Afghans struggling to go about their daily lives in the midst of an armed conflict.”

“I call on all parties to the conflict to increase their efforts to protect civilians from harm and to respect the sanctity of human life,” Haysom stated.

Anti-Government Elements were responsible for 80 per cent of civilian casualties, killing 882 civilians and injuring 1,593 others during the first six months of 2012, down 15 per cent from the first six months of 2011.

In the first half of this year, UNAMA documented 165 civilian deaths and 131 others injured from the operations of Pro-Government Forces –10 per cent of the total number of civilian casualties -- reflecting a 25 per cent reduction compared with the same period of 2011. A further 98 civilian deaths and 230 injured, or 10 per cent of the total casualties, could not be attributed to any party to the conflict.

Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) continued to cause the greatest number of civilian casualties. Between 1 January and 30 June 2012, IEDs alone accounted for 33 per cent of all civilian casualties – killing 327 civilians and injuring 689 others. When taking suicide and complex attacks which used IEDs into account, the overall use of IEDs by Anti-Government Elements caused 53 per cent of all civilian deaths and injuries documented in the report.

“Victim-activated improvised explosive devices are illegal, as they fail to distinguish between civilians and combatants,” said Mr. Haysom “This heinous weapon has killed or maimed the greatest number of Afghan civilians during the conflict and I call on the Taliban to cease their use.”

Civilian casualties, resulting from targeted killings by Anti-Government Elements, increased by 53 per cent in 2012 with UNAMA documenting the death of 255 civilians and injuries to 101 others in 237 separate incidents.

Aerial operations by international military forces have continued to cause more civilian deaths and injuries than any other tactic used by Pro-Government Forces since UNAMA began documenting civilian casualties. Between 1 January and 30 June, UNAMA documented 83 civilian deaths and 46 injured as a result of aerial attacks by international military forces. Although this is a 23 per cent reduction in civilian casualties from aerial operations compared with the same period in 2011, the report notes that nearly two-thirds of all civilian deaths and injuries resulting from air operations in the first half of this year were women and children.

ISAF has taken steps intended to prevent civilian casualties during air operations, including its response to the 6 June 2012 air operation in Logar which resulted in a disproportionate loss of civilian life, including the death of 18 civilians, most of whom were women and children.

Afghan National Security Forces and ISAF night search operations continued to decrease with 32 civilian casualties (20 killed and 12 injured) occurring during the first six months of the 2012, a 27 per cent decrease compared with the same period in 2011.

While many communities reported improvements in the security environment in locations where Afghan Local Police were deployed, local residents raised concerns including on the recruitment of human rights abusers into the Afghan Local Police in some districts and weaknesses in vetting processes, training, command and control and accountability and oversight mechanisms. UNAMA documented human rights abuses against civilians in seven provinces across the country along with failures to investigate and prosecute Afghan Local Police suspected of abuses (past and present).

UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay stressed the importance of holding accountable the perpetrators of human rights violations in efforts to bring down the number of civilian casualties.

“Impunity for human rights abuses only emboldens the perpetrators,” she said. “Violations must be duly investigated, perpetrators brought to justice and the victims granted remedies. Holding violators accountable is a crucial step towards improving security for Afghan women, men and children.”

As documented in the report, attacks against schools have increased and the Taliban’s interference in the running of local schools has impacted the access of children, especially girls, to education. In the first six months of 2012, UNAMA verified 34 attacks against schools, including cases of burnings of school buildings, targeted killings and intimidation of teachers and school officials, armed attacks against and occupation of schools, and closures, particularly of girls’ schools. “It is extremely worrying that attacks against schools have increased so dramatically,” said James Rodehaver, acting-Chief of the UNAMA Human Rights Unit. “These attacks not only put children at risk of harm, but also seriously impede their access to education, which is a fundamental human right.”

UNAMA interviewed residents from communities in 99 districts, where Anti-Government Elements have increasingly exerted influence or control, to assess human rights protection in those locations. Local communities provided consistent accounts of Anti-Government Elements introducing parallel judicial mechanisms that carried out serious human rights abuses with impunity, including executions, amputations, mutilations and severe beatings. Taliban officials threatened, intimidated and abducted residents they considered to be supporters of the Government and imposed illegal taxes on many communities. Anti-Government Elements also restricted access to health care in some communities, including the disruption of polio awareness and vaccination campaigns.

“Effective measures to increase civilian protection require more than reductions in civilian casualties; there must also be an end to impunity,” said Rodehaver. “Accountability for serious human rights abuses should be a key indicator of the success of transition and the willingness of all parties to the conflict to place the lives, security, and human rights of Afghan women, children and men as their primary concern moving forward.”

Selected accounts of Afghan civilians from UNAMA’s 2012 midyear report on Protection of Civilians in Conflict:

My wife, our four children, my brother’s wife and her two children were waiting at the district administration centre to receive our Tazkeera (national ID). I asked my family to remain near the gate and so that I could go inside to check if the Statistic Department staff had arrived to work. I heard a loud explosion and I ran back to the gate. I saw people lying in blood on the ground. I saw one of my daughters dead on the ground and my other three daughters and their mother wounded. The police helped me put my daughters and wife in a vehicle and transferred them to the hospital.

■ **Father of two girls killed in an IED attack, Herat province, 10 April 2012**

I was with my uncle in the yard of the Spozhmai hotel. It was around 11pm. He asked me to get the camera from the vehicle to record our social activities. I went to the car; it was then when I heard the shooting. I saw a gunman firing randomly at people and saw him firing at a group of young men – they were singing, enjoying their music. Some of them were not killed instantly; the wounded were crying for help and the gunman came back and shot them, targeting their heads. He killed them all. I also saw how they killed my uncle; they shot him in his head. His brain had come out. You know, he had just arrived from Iran to visit his elderly mum. They killed him. They just went around the hotel yard and inside the building to search for people to kill.

■ **Survivor of 15 June complex attack at Spozhmai Hotel, Qargha Lake, Kabul.**

One day, one of the guards communicated with his partner through a radio. From the cave they brought me to a farm and decided to play a game with me. I saw 50/60 armed people. They blindfolded me again. They wanted to behead me and someone put a knife on my throat. Then another person intervened and told them that I was old and ordered them not to behead me but just to cut my hand. Then they took me by force and asked a person to tie my right arm. He tied my biceps and my forearm with two tourniquets. Then, with a knife they amputated my hand by first cutting above the wrist and then below. The hand was then forcibly detached from the wrist bone. When they cut the part below it was very painful but I did not cry and I did not scream because I am a man.

■ **A victim whose arm was amputated by the Taliban in April 2012**

At around 1.00 am, I heard the noises of warplanes and helicopters and then numerous explosions within the village. After the planes and helicopters left the area, I came out of the

house and saw that my cousin's house was completely destroyed. I ran screaming and shouting towards the house and searched for survivors. In the second room I saw blood on the bricks and found Zarghona in the rubble, the four year old daughter of my cousin. She was dead. All the villagers came to help search for survivors. In the rubble of the third room we found the nine year old son of my cousin. The explosion severed his head from his body. All people were shouting and screaming. We then found the dead body of his mother next to him, her face was completely destroyed. I could not continue.

■ **Relative of 18 civilians killed in 6 June airstrike, Baraki Barak district, Logar province**

UNAMA's 2012 midyear report makes the following recommendations to improve the protection of civilians:

Anti-Government Elements

- Comply with international humanitarian law, uphold the principles of distinction, proportionality and precautionary measures, and apply a definition of 'civilian' that is consistent with international humanitarian law.
- In accordance with international law, stop targeting civilians and withdraw orders that permit attacks and killings of civilians, i.e. by using suicide bombing.
- Immediately cease the use of pressure-plate IEDs, and publicly commit to banning the use of these indiscriminate and illegal weapons.
- Prohibit judicial structures which impose unlawful punishments such as killing, amputation, mutilation and beatings. Enforce codes of conduct, instructions and directives instructing members to prevent and avoid civilian casualties and hold accountable those members who target, kill and injure civilians.
- Allow humanitarian organizations full access to communities, particularly those providing health care services, clinics and doctors. Make public commitments to support vaccination campaigns and allow vaccination teams to carry out safe vaccination campaigns throughout Afghanistan.

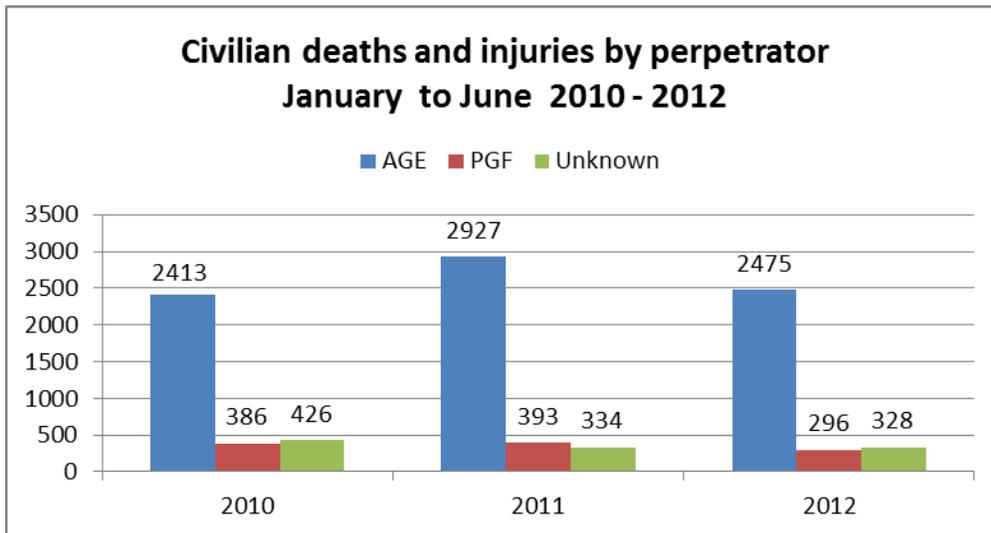
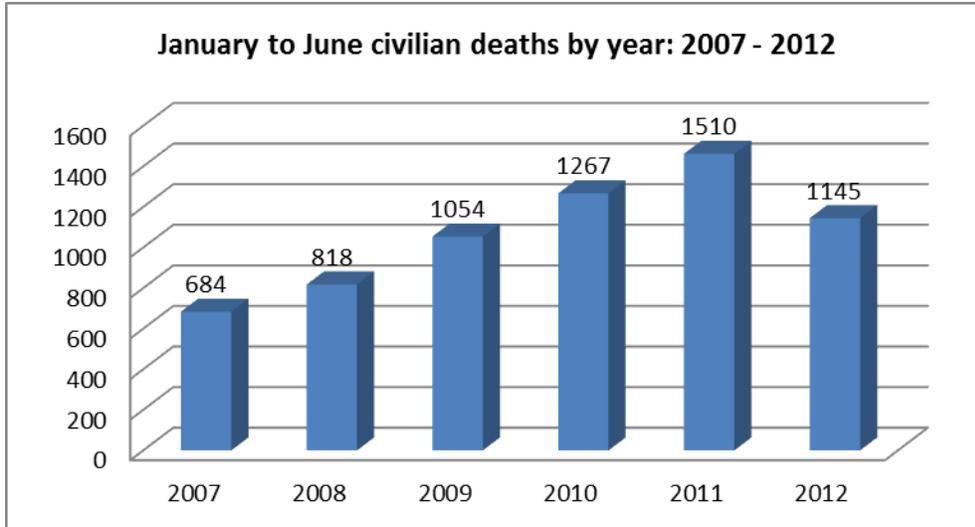
Government of Afghanistan

- Take further concrete steps to strengthen rule of law institutions, particularly police and judiciary, in order to ensure that criminal activity is increasingly dealt with in a lawful manner by government agencies. This includes investigation, prosecution and punishment of individuals carrying out unlawful punishments in parallel justice structures, particularly killings, as well as human rights abuses and other criminal acts carried out by Anti-Government Elements.
- Create a civilian casualty mitigation team in the Afghan National Army similar to the ISAF Civilian Casualty Mitigation Team to ensure transparent and timely investigations and accurate tracking of all incidents of civilian casualties caused by ANSF to improve civilian protection, compensation and accountability.
- Protect fully the right of all children, especially girls, to access education. Efforts should be made to ensure all schools remain open and safe, by protecting the civilian nature of schools and not involving education facilities in military activities. School curriculums must reflect the human rights standards protected by the laws of the Afghanistan and the content approved by the Ministry of Education.
- Ensure effective vetting, recruitment, oversight and accountability mechanisms of ALP members inter alia in order to prevent human rights abuses. Ensure lawful response to reported criminality by ALP and with the support of international military forces, ensure all other local defense forces are disbanded at the earliest opportunity.

International Military Forces

- Continue reviewing tactical directives and operational procedures, particularly those regulating the conduct of aerial attacks, with a view to further preventing incidental loss of civilian life and injury and damage to civilian objects and providing reparations to civilian victims of attacks. Continue to conduct post-operation reviews and investigations in cooperation with the Afghan Government in cases where civilian casualties have occurred.
- Promote transparency, accountability and better relations with affected Afghan civilians and communities through the prompt and public release of all ISAF findings on incidents involving civilian casualties, follow-up accountability and disciplinary measures and systematic provision of compensation and redress.
- Continue working with ANSF to enhance their civilian casualty mitigation, reporting and analysis capacity by supporting the establishment of a Civilian Casualty Mitigation Team within ANSF.
- Ensure that ANSF are sufficiently resourced, trained and equipped to command, control and effectively conduct counter-IED operations and IED-disposal, including exploitation¹.
- Ensure full handover and training of ANSF on tactical directives, procedures and best practices that have been found to increase civilian protection successfully.

¹ IED Exploitation is the identification, collection, processing and dissemination of information gathered at an IED incident site in order to gain actionable intelligence, to improve counter-IED procedures and methods, to decrease the resources of insurgents and to support prosecutions. It includes preservation, identification and recovery of IED components for technical, forensic and biometric examination and analysis and is carried out by authorized specialist facilities. IED exploitation is a critical component of effective and sustainable counter-IED measures.



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