

The banner features the UNAMA logo in large blue letters, followed by the full name 'United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan' in a smaller blue font. Below this, it says 'Strategic Communication and Spokespersons Unit, Kabul, Afghanistan'. The background of the banner is light blue with a faint globe pattern. A dark blue curved bar at the bottom of the banner contains the text 'Press Statement' in white. To the right of this bar, the website URL 'http://unama.unmissions.org' is displayed in white.

UNAMA
United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan
Strategic Communication and Spokespersons Unit, Kabul, Afghanistan

Press Statement

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CIVILIAN CASUALTIES IN AFGHAN CONFLICT DECREASE IN 2012

KABUL, 19 February 2013 – Civilian casualties in Afghanistan’s armed conflict decreased for the first time in six years, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) said today in releasing its 2012 Annual Report on Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict prepared in coordination with the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.

UNAMA documented a 12 per cent drop in civilian deaths and a marginal increase in civilian injuries compared with 2011. UNAMA recorded 7,559 civilian casualties - 2,754 civilian deaths and 4,805 civilian injuries - in 2012. Over the past six years, 14,728 Afghan civilians have lost their lives in the conflict.

The report attributed the reduction in civilian casualties in 2012 to fewer deaths and injuries of civilians from ground engagement among parties to the conflict, a decline in suicide attacks by Anti-Government Elements, reduced numbers of aerial operations, and other measures taken by Pro-Government Forces to minimize harm to civilians.

At the same time, however, UNAMA observed increasing threats to civilians in 2012 associated with the presence and re-emergence of armed groups, particularly in the north and northeast regions of Afghanistan. Civilians also faced an increase in threats, intimidation and interference with their rights to education, health, justice and freedom of movement from Anti-Government Elements.

“The decrease in civilian casualties UNAMA documented in 2012 is very much welcome.” said Ján Kubiš, United Nations Special Representative for the Secretary-General in Afghanistan. “Yet, the human cost of the conflict remains unacceptable. Indiscriminate and unlawful use of improvised explosive devices by Anti-Government Elements remains the single biggest killer of civilians. Steep increases in the deliberate targeting of civilians perceived to be supporting the Government demonstrates another grave violation of international humanitarian law. Particularly appalling is the use of suicide attacks including those carried out by brainwashed children to murder civilians which is also a clear breach of the norms of Islam.”

While the overall incidence of civilian casualties decreased in 2012, Anti-Government Elements increasingly targeted civilians throughout the country and carried out attacks without regard for human life. In total, 81 per cent of civilian casualties in 2012 were attributed to Anti-Government Elements.

Eight per cent of civilian casualties resulted from the operations of Pro-Government Forces. Eleven per cent of total civilian casualties could not be attributed to any party to the conflict.

The report found that women and girls continued to suffer enormously from the effects of armed conflict. UNAMA documented 864 female casualties (301 deaths and 563 injuries) in 2012.

“The number of Afghan women and girls killed and injured in the conflict increased by 20 per cent in 2012.” said Georgette Gagnon, Director of Human Rights for UNAMA. “It is the tragic reality that most Afghan women and girls were killed or injured while engaging in their everyday activities.”

UNAMA documented 6,131 civilian casualties (2,179 civilian deaths and 3,952 injuries) caused by Anti-Government Elements, an increase of nine per cent over 2011. UNAMA’s report notes that improvised explosive devices (IEDs) used by Anti-Government Elements were the greatest threat to civilians in 2012, causing 2,531 civilian casualties with 868 civilians killed and 1,663 injured in 782 separate incidents.

Illegal pressure-plate IEDs – victim-activated devices detonated by any person, including children, stepping on them or any vehicle such as civilian minibuses driving over them – were planted in public places used by civilians such as bazaars, markets and roads with devastating consequences for civilians. The report also found that legacy IEDs – planted but undetonated IEDs – in community spaces created an environment of insecurity with civilians living under the constant threat of death, maiming, serious injury, destruction of property and hindering access to schools and clinics.

Civilian casualties from targeted killings by Anti-Government Elements increased by 108 per cent compared with 2011, to 1,077 comprising 698 civilian deaths and 379 injuries. Civilians perceived to be supporting the Government, civilian Government employees, religious leaders, tribal elders and persons involved in peace and reconciliation efforts were targeted. Of these, killings and injuries to civilian Government employees increased by a staggering 700 per cent. Particularly disturbing were targeted killings of women by Anti-Government Elements demonstrated by the killings of the head and deputy head of the Laghman Department of Women’s Affairs in July and December 2012.

UNAMA notes numerous Taliban statements in 2012 protect civilians. Yet, the situation on the ground has not improved. The Taliban increased their direct attacks on civilians through targeted killings and continued to indiscriminately use IEDs including illegal pressure-plate victim-activated IEDs.

“I welcome strong statements by the Taliban leadership urging its fighters to protect civilians. But without enforcing these directives on the ground all that remains are only words.” said Special Representative Kubiš. “In 2013, UNAMA renews its call for the Taliban not to attack civilians, enforce their public pledges among all Taliban fighters to protect civilians, revise their definition of civilian and lawful targets in compliance with international humanitarian law, and stop using suicide bombers, and illegal victim-activated and other IEDs indiscriminately.”

In 2012, Pro-Government Forces (Afghan National Security Forces and international military forces) implemented measures to reduce civilian casualties. UNAMA recorded 587 civilian casualties (316 civilian deaths and 271 civilian injuries) attributed to Pro-Government Forces in 2012, a 46 per cent decrease from 2011. Civilian casualties from aerial operations by

international military forces also decreased significantly by 42 per cent causing 204 civilian casualties (126 deaths and 78 injuries) compared to 2011.

Civilian casualties from actions of Afghan National Security Forces in 2012 were consistent with numbers recorded in 2011, with 96 civilian casualties (33 deaths and 63 injuries), the majority occurring during ground engagements.

UNAMA highlights efforts by the Government of Afghanistan and ISAF to build the capacity Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) to track and mitigate civilian casualties. In May 2012, the Government established the Civilian Casualties Tracking Team in the Presidential Information Coordination Center and appointed an advisor to President Karzai on protection of civilians. UNAMA observed concerted commitment by ANSF leadership (Ministries of Defence and Interior and National Directorate of Security) to coordinate security bodies to track and mitigate civilian casualties with further efforts needed on investigation of such incidents.

Throughout 2012, UNAMA received mixed reports about the impact of the Afghan Local Police (ALP) on civilian protection. The majority of communities from 94 districts with ALP presence reported improvement in the security environment; however, UNAMA documented inconsistent compliance with policies guiding the ALP recruitment and vetting process, and serious human rights violations committed by ALP in some districts. UNAMA noted an improvement in the Government's efforts to hold ALP members accountable but ALP continued to commit human rights violations with impunity in several areas. With the ALP expanding in the future to 45,000 members, it is imperative that the Ministry of Interior strengthen local oversight and accountability of the ALP.

In 2012, UNAMA documented increasing human rights abuses against civilians by armed groups, with 28 incidents resulting in 62 civilian casualties. These incidents involved targeted killings, abductions, threats, intimidation and harassment, extortion of taxes, occupation of schools, threats against educators and rape. The majority of abuses documented took place in Faryab and Kunduz provinces.

The presence and re-emergence of these armed groups, some aligned with the local Government and others operating independently, particularly in the north and northeast regions, may be linked to an increased presence of Anti-Government Elements in remote districts with local armed groups emerging to fight against or protect communities from insurgents, security gaps relating to transition of military forces, political instability and general insecurity. Many of these armed groups operated with impunity, were unaccountable to any authority and posed a serious threat to civilians.

UNAMA highlights that the armed conflict in Afghanistan continued to affect ordinary Afghans in ways not revealed by the statistics on deaths and injuries. Pervasive conflict-related violence continued to threaten, disrupt and damage the lives of Afghan civilians. Proliferation of armed groups coupled with minimal Government presence and intensified insurgent control in some areas often meant that civilians had nowhere to turn in the face of increasing threats.

"While fewer Afghan civilians were killed in the armed conflict in 2012, conflict-related violence continued to seriously threaten the lives and well-being of thousands of Afghan children, women and men." said Georgette Gagnon, Director of Human Rights for UNAMA. "This situation demands even greater commitment and redoubled efforts to protect Afghan civilians in 2013 and beyond."

Selected accounts of Afghan civilians from UNAMA's 2012 Annual Report on Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict:

The life of civilians in this district is extremely difficult. On the one hand, when the Taliban plant IEDs, civilians cannot defuse them for fear of Taliban reactions. If they defuse them, the Taliban will kill them. On the other hand, the Government pressures people to tell them where and why the Taliban plant IEDs in their villages. The people cannot answer the Taliban or the Government. Civilians are stuck in between, and are always in trouble. There is no third source to listen to the people and solve these problems.

Government Official from a district in Kandahar province with a high prevalence of IEDs, 12 December 2012

My brother was caught in the middle of a clash between two sides. Insurgents first shot him with two bullets to his stomach and he was injured. He then kept moving towards the Pro-Government Forces for help but he suddenly was hit by other bullets to his legs, this time by international military forces, who assumed he was an insurgent. The fire fight continued for an hour and my brother was soon transferred by locals to Balkh Hospital.

Brother of a civilian wounded during ground engagement, Balkh province, 8 May 2012

My mother, father, brother, and two sisters were shopping and had parked the family's private vehicle outside the Department of Women's Affairs' compound due to security concerns. After buying sandals for my small sister they returned to the car. A bomb detonated against the vehicle killing my mother and wounding my father and my two sisters. My mother used to receive warnings from the Taliban, and family members of the victims she assisted.

Daughter of the Head of the Department of Women's Affairs who was killed in Laghman province, 13 July 2012

UNAMA makes the following recommendations to all parties to the conflict – Anti Government Elements and Afghan national and international military forces – to comply with their legal obligations to minimize civilian loss of life and injury of civilians and improve the protection of civilians:

Anti-Government Elements

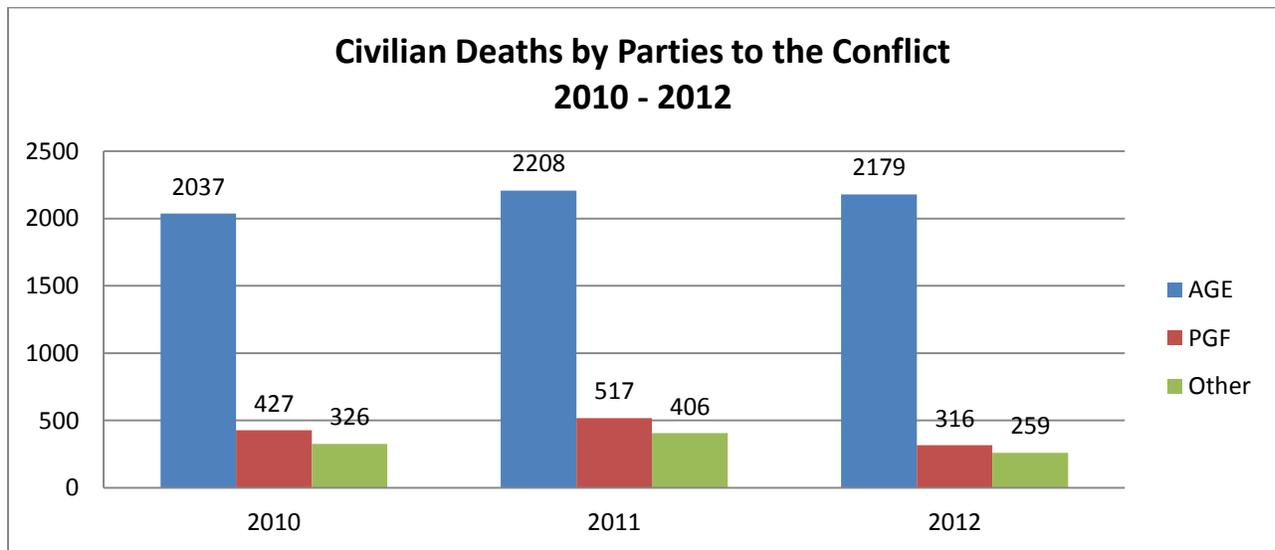
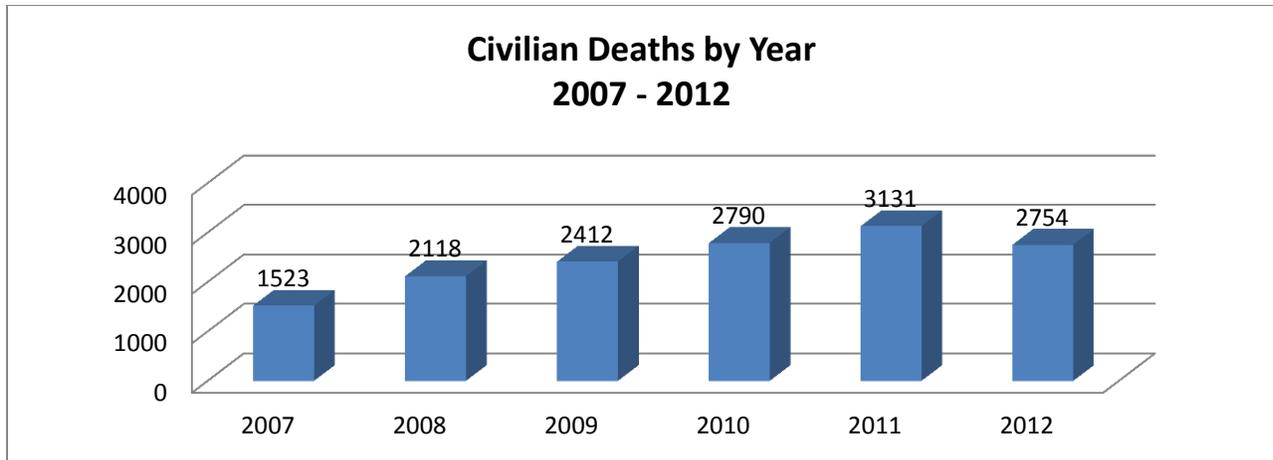
- Comply with international humanitarian law, including by respecting the principles of distinction, proportionality and precautionary measures, and apply a definition of 'civilian' that is consistent with international humanitarian law.
- Enforce codes of conduct and directives that instruct members to prevent civilian casualties and hold accountable those members responsible for violations, including killing or injuring civilians.
- In accordance with international law, immediately cease the deliberate targeting and killings of civilians, and withdraw orders that permit attacks on, and killings of civilians.
- Cease the use of all forms of victim-activated IEDs and prohibit the indiscriminate use of IEDs, in particular, through suicide attacks and placement of IEDs in public places and other civilian locations. Issue directives banning the use of indiscriminate and illegal weapons such as pressure plate IEDs.
- Cease all killings, torture and ill-treatment, and other human rights violations, in particular, passing and carrying out death sentences through parallel judicial procedures.

Government of Afghanistan

- Increase efforts to train, resource and provide all necessary support to Afghan National Security Forces to enable them to effectively protect civilians.
- Promote and support accountability through establishment of a permanent Government body representing relevant security bodies with powers to investigate and respond to incidents of civilian casualties.
- Prioritize implementation of the Government Counter-IED strategy with efforts aimed at further developing and resourcing ANSF capacity to command, control and effectively conduct counter-IED operations, IED-disposal and exploitation.
- As the ALP program expands, strengthen vetting, recruitment, oversight and accountability mechanisms including through prosecutions and in cooperation with local communities, particularly at the district level, to prevent human rights violations, ensure accountability and better protect communities with the support of international military forces and donors.
- Disarm and demobilize all non-State armed groups and take measures to provide accountability for human rights abuses carried out by these groups.

International Military Forces

- Continue reviewing tactical directives and operational procedures relating to offensive aerial operations, in particular, review of criteria required to establish positive identification and determination of status prior to targeting. Continue to conduct post-operation reviews and investigations in cooperation with the Afghan Government in cases where civilian casualties have occurred.
- Continue support to ANSF to ensure they are sufficiently resourced, trained and equipped to command, control and effectively conduct counter-IED operations and IED-disposal, including IED exploitation.
- Increase support to efforts of the Government of Afghanistan to mitigate, track, investigate and ensure accountability for civilian casualties.
- Continue to 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 other forms of reparation as appropriate.



AGE – Anti-Government Elements
PGF – Pro-Government Forces

United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), Kabul, Afghanistan

All media contact details are online at: <http://unama.unmissions.org>