



CIVILIAN CASUALTIES IN AFGHANISTAN **RISE BY 22 PER CENT IN 2014**

Increased ground fighting drives up civilian casualties

KABUL, 18 February 2015 - Increased ground engagements between parties to the armed conflict in Afghanistan are behind a 22 per cent rise in conflict-related deaths and injuries of Afghan civilians in 2014, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) said today on the release of its 2014 Annual Report on Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, prepared in coordination with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.

UNAMA documented 10,548 civilian casualties in 2014, the highest number of civilian deaths and injuries recorded in a single year since 2009. Included in the toll were 3,699 civilian deaths (up 25 per cent) and 6,849 civilian injuries (up 21 per cent) for a 22 per cent rise in total civilian casualties over 2013. Since 2009, the armed conflict in Afghanistan has caused 47,745 civilian casualties with 17,774 Afghan civilians killed and 29,971 injured.

For the first time since 2009, more Afghan civilians were killed and injured in ground engagements than by improvised explosive devices (IEDs) or any other tactic. The report found that civilian deaths and injuries from ground operations surged by 54 per cent making them the leading cause of civilian casualties and the biggest killers of Afghan women and children in 2014.

The rise in civilian casualties in 2014 resulted mainly from increased ground engagements across Afghanistan in which parties to the conflict increasingly used explosive weapons systems such as mortars, rockets and grenades, sometimes indiscriminately, in civilian-populated areas with devastating consequences for civilians. The increased indiscriminate use of IEDs and increased number of suicide attacks by Anti-Government Elements added to the rising civilian casualties in 2014.

“In communities across Afghanistan, increased ground fighting among parties to the conflict and more IED attacks exacted a heavy toll on Afghan civilians,” said the United Nations Secretary-General’s Special Representative for Afghanistan and head of UNAMA, Nicholas Haysom. “Rising civilian deaths and injuries in 2014 attests to a failure to fulfil commitments to protect Afghan civilians from harm. Parties to the conflict should understand the impact of their actions and take responsibility for them, uphold the values they claim to defend, and make protecting civilians their first priority. We need to see concrete steps and a real drop in civilian casualties in 2015.”

The UNAMA report highlighted that Anti-Government Elements remained responsible for the vast majority of Afghan civilian deaths and injuries. The report attributed 72 per cent of all civilian casualties to Anti-Government Elements, 14 per cent to Pro-Government Forces (12 per cent to Afghan national security forces, two per cent to international military forces) and 10 per cent to ground engagements between Anti-Government Elements and Afghan national security forces in which a civilian casualty could not be attributed to a specific party. Three per cent of all civilian casualties were caused by unattributed explosive remnants of war with one per cent from cross-border shelling.

As the withdrawal of international military forces and combat air support continued in 2014, UNAMA observed more frequent and larger ground operations by both Afghan national security forces and Anti-Government Elements in several regions with fighting often occurring in and near district centres. Increased ground fighting in civilian populated areas with all parties using mortars, other explosive weapons and small arms fire frequently resulted in deaths and injuries to civilians caught in the crossfire.

UNAMA documented 3,605 civilian casualties (1,092 killed and 2,513 injured) from ground engagements, accounting for 34 per cent of all civilian casualties in 2014. Of these, UNAMA attributed 43 per cent to Anti-Government Elements and 26 per cent to Pro-Government Forces. UNAMA could not attribute civilian casualties solely to either party in 29 per cent of ground operations with two per cent of civilian casualties from ground operations attributed to cross-border shelling.

The UNAMA report found that half of all civilian casualties from ground engagements were from the use of indirect weapons with a wide-area impact, mainly mortars, along with rockets and grenades by all parties. UNAMA recorded 1,788 civilian casualties (447 killed and 1,341 injured) from mortars, rockets and grenades, a 73 per cent increase from 2013.

Civilian deaths and injuries from ground engagements, operations and attacks by Pro-Government Forces rose significantly with 921 civilian casualties (336 killed and 585 injured) attributed to Pro-Government Forces, a 141 per cent increase from 2013. An increase in civilian casualties by Anti-Government Elements during their ground operations and attacks was also documented with 1,551 civilian casualties (438 deaths and 1,113 injured), up 51 per cent from 2013.

The report found that women and children were particularly hard hit by the armed conflict and increased ground engagements in 2014. UNAMA documented a 40 per cent increase in children casualties with 2,474 children casualties (714 killed and 1,760 injured) compared to 2013. Women casualties increased by 21 per cent with 298 women killed and 611 injured.

To highlight the broader social and economic impact of the conflict on the lives of Afghan women, UNAMA interviewed 60 women from all regions in Afghanistan whose husbands, all civilians, were killed or seriously injured from conflict-related violence in 2014. UNAMA found that women who were left as sole income-providers for their households after the death or injury of their husbands often experienced long-term negative social and economic consequences, with poverty forcing many women to give their daughters in marriage in exchange for debts or to take their children out of school often to work. Widowed women were often particularly vulnerable to other forms of violence and abuse from family and community members. These findings call for urgent action by the Government of Afghanistan to address the basic needs of this group of very vulnerable and often marginalized women and their children.

“For Afghan women and children, the anguish of losing a husband and father in the conflict is often only the beginning of their suffering and hardship,” said the UNAMA Director of Human Rights, Georgette Gagnon. “The long-term social and economic consequences are devastating affecting the most vulnerable the hardest. After a year in which conflict-related violence led by ground engagements killed and injured record numbers of women and children, the destruction and damage to Afghan lives must be met with a new commitment by all parties to avoid harm to Afghan civilians.”

The UNAMA report documented 2,978 civilian casualties (925 killed and 2,053 injured) from IEDs used by Anti-Government Elements, up three per cent from 2013 and the highest civilian casualties from IEDs recorded in a single year since 2009. Civilian victims of suicide and complex attacks by Anti-Government Elements increased by 28 per cent with UNAMA recording 1,582 casualties (371 killed and 1,211 injured), the third leading cause of civilian casualties after ground engagements and IEDs.

Targeted killings of civilians by Anti-Government Elements accounted for 11 per cent of all civilian casualties, with UNAMA recording 1,114 casualties (753 killed and 361 injured), down five per cent from 2013. These included killings of tribal elders, civilian Government officials, mullahs and civilian justice officials.

The report found that four per cent of all civilian casualties in 2014 were caused by explosive remnants of war and two per cent from aerial operations by international military forces.

Pro-Government Forces continued to implement measures aimed at reducing civilian casualties in 2014. Despite these measures, UNAMA documented an increase in civilian casualties by Pro-Government Forces mainly Afghan national security forces. UNAMA recorded 1,478 civilian casualties (622 deaths and 856 injured) caused by Pro-Government Forces, a 51 per cent increase from 2013. The majority of these civilian casualties occurred during ground operations.

Of the total 1,478 civilian casualties caused by Pro-Government Forces, UNAMA attributed 1,225 civilian casualties (468 deaths and 757 injured) to Afghan national security forces (up 85 per cent from 2013), 102 civilian casualties (53 deaths and 49 injured) to Pro-Government armed groups (up 85 per cent from 2013), and 151 civilian casualties (101 deaths and 50 injured) solely to international military forces (down 43 per cent from 2013).

UNAMA's report noted a significant increase in human rights abuses committed against civilians by Pro-Government armed groups in the north, northeast and southeast regions of Afghanistan, together with a widespread failure by the Government of Afghanistan to hold these armed groups accountable, and to protect affected civilians and communities. UNAMA called on the Government of Afghanistan to promptly disband and disarm these armed groups in line with its stated commitments.

In 2014, UNAMA documented increased incidents of Anti-Government Elements, including the Taliban, punishing civilians for alleged infractions of sharia law, perceived offences and allegations of spying. Incidents recorded included Anti-Government Elements' carrying out summary executions, beheadings, amputations of body parts, beatings, lashings and illegal detention. UNAMA highlights that such parallel judicial structures are illegal and have no legitimacy or basis under the laws of Afghanistan. Punishments meted out by these structures amount to human rights abuses, criminal acts under the laws of Afghanistan, and, in some circumstances, war crimes.

“The appalling levels of violence in Afghanistan in 2014 should not be repeated in 2015,” said Special Representative Haysom. “Parties to the conflict, in particular the Anti-Government Elements, should do everything in their power to prevent civilian casualties in line with their obligations under international humanitarian law. This means that Anti-Government Elements should now abide by their public commitments to avoid civilian casualties by preventing or ceasing the use of IEDs and mortars in civilian-populated areas, and stop deliberately attacking civilians.”

SELECTED ACCOUNTS OF AFGHAN CIVILIANS FROM UNAMA’S 2014 ANNUAL REPORT

“It was midnight and we were all asleep. A mortar round landed in our bedroom and injured my two small daughters and I. Everybody in the house ran to our bedroom and saw that we were buried in rubble. They started to take us out of the debris when a second mortar round landed, injuring my third small daughter and my son. My wife and my nephew, who were not hurt, continued trying to help us, when a third mortar round landed in the compound, this time killing my wife and injuring my nephew and my fourth daughter. I do not know who fired all the rockets since both Taliban and Afghan national security forces use mortar rounds and rockets against each other. I have no life anymore, since I have no money to take care of my injured children’s health and no money left to feed them.”

-- Man whose wife was killed and whose four daughters, son and nephew were injured when multiple mortar rounds landed on their house in Sangin district, Helmand province, during a ground engagement between Afghan national security forces and the Taliban on 16 June 2014.

“It was in the afternoon. I was doing construction work in a building. My wife called me crying and told me to return home immediately because an explosion had killed our children. I was shocked and collapsed. Other workers helped me and took me to my home. My wife told me that all the injured and the killed were taken to hospitals. I went to a nearby hospital and saw my nine-year-old son lying dead on a bed. I was told that my other son was also dead. Then I saw my little daughter who was seriously injured, and my other son who was also severely injured, covered in blood. My daughter died the following day. It was such grief for me. Oh Allah Almighty, I lost three children! What was the crime committed by my children? They were playing, as usual, outside our house. I was told that it was a remote-controlled bomb and that the target was an Afghan National Army officer. Why don’t the Taliban care about civilians, women and children? Which civilization, which law are the Taliban following? It is very simple: killing children and civilians is completely against Islamic law.”

-- Father of three children killed and another child injured by a remote-controlled Improvised explosive device targeting an Afghan National Army convoy, Kabul city, 21 September 2014. Five civilians were killed and two injured.

“The wedding ceremony was transformed into a funeral when our house was hit by mortar rounds fired by the Afghan National Army. We do not know why we were targeted or why we have suffered casualties for nothing. Who can we approach to listen to us? I am sure that no-one but Allah can hear us and understand what is happening in our area.”

-- Relative of a groom whose wedding party was hit by mortars fired by the Afghan National Army in Sangin district, Helmand province on 31 December 2014.

"I am an illiterate woman and cultural sensitivity means that women are not allowed to work outside and support their families, so I am not able to provide economically. My three children who were at school before my husband was killed have now dropped out and work as shepherds to support our family."

-- 35-year-old woman and mother of six children from Badakshan province, widowed in 2014 after an improvised explosive device killed her husband.

UNAMA shared a draft of its 2014 Annual Report on Protection of Civilians with the Government of Afghanistan, the Taliban and NATO's Resolute Support Mission. Comments were carefully reviewed and addressed as appropriate in the report. UNAMA continues to work with all parties to the conflict to support their efforts to protect civilians from harm.

UNAMA makes the following recommendations in its 2014 Annual Report to improve the protection of civilians:

Anti-Government Elements

In compliance with obligations under international humanitarian law:

- Cease carrying out indiscriminate and disproportionate attacks, and firing mortars, rockets and grenades into civilian-populated areas.
- Cease the deliberate targeting of civilians and civilian objects including places of worship and culture, and civilian Government offices.
- Cease the use of IEDs, particularly suicide attacks in all areas frequented by civilians, and stop using illegal pressure-plate IEDs.
- Apply a definition of 'civilian(s)' that is consistent with international humanitarian law and comply with the principles of distinction, proportionality and precautions in all military operations.
- Enforce statements made by the Taliban leadership that prohibit attacks against civilians and attacks in civilian-populated areas. Implement directives ordering Taliban members to prevent and avoid civilian casualties and hold accountable those members who target, kill and injure civilians.

Government of Afghanistan

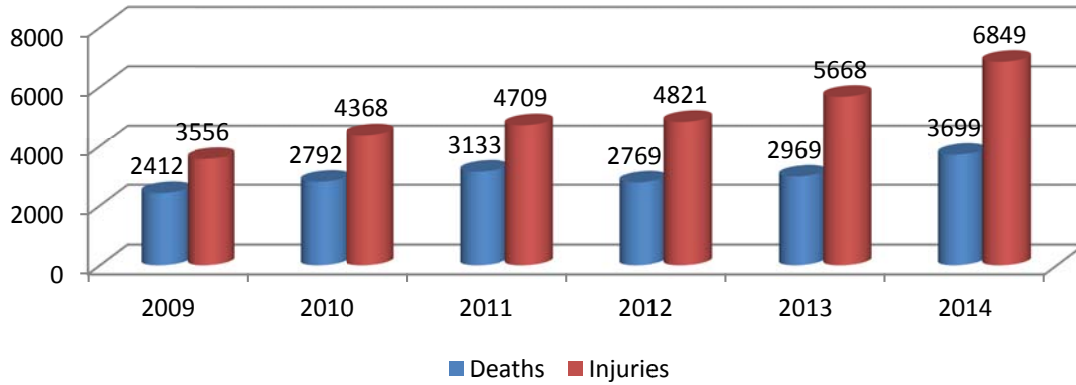
- Cease firing mortars, rockets and grenades into civilian-populated areas.
- Enhance efforts to protect civilians from conflict-related harm by developing and implementing clear tactical directives, rules of engagement and other procedures, and by training and resourcing all Afghan national security forces on civilian protection measures, mitigation, accountability, and compensation for victims.
- Disband and disarm all armed groups and ensure accountability for those members of armed groups who carry out human rights abuses.

- Prioritize the further development of Afghan national security forces' capacity to command, control and effectively conduct counter-IED operations and IED-disposal, including exploitation. Dedicate all necessary resources to ensure the full implementation of the national counter-IED strategy.
- Develop policies and procedures to ensure the marking and clearance of unexploded ordnance from the battlefield following ground engagements.
- Investigate all allegations of violations of international humanitarian and human rights law and human rights abuses by Afghan national security forces and Pro-Government armed groups and allied forces. Prosecute and punish those found responsible as required under Afghan and international law.
- Review and revise current procedures in place for compensation to women and families of civilians killed and injured in conflict-related violence and raise public awareness of procedures to obtain compensation and access to basic services.

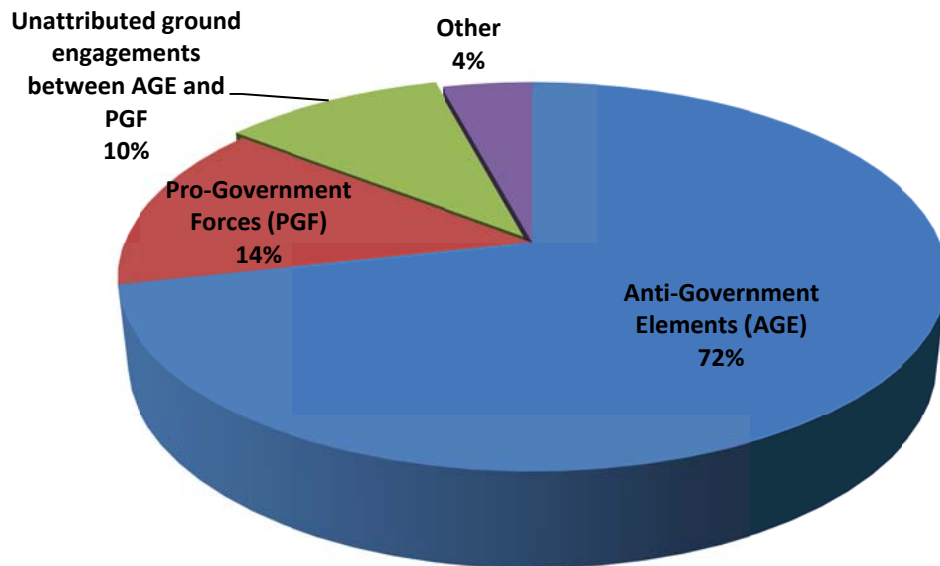
International Military Forces

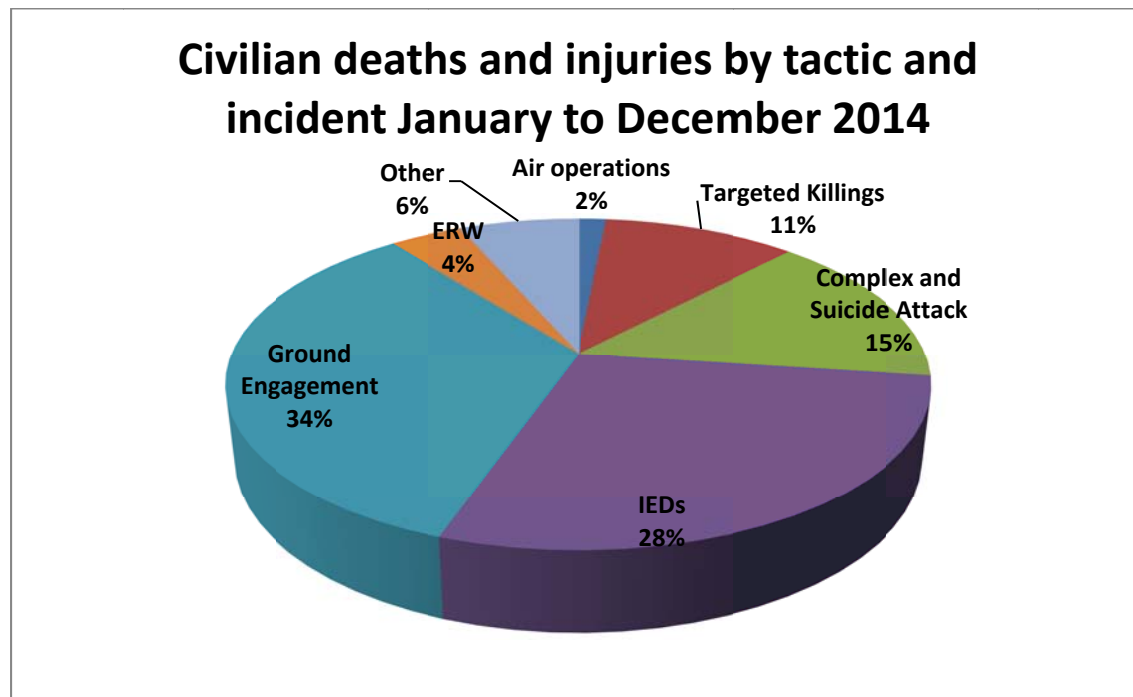
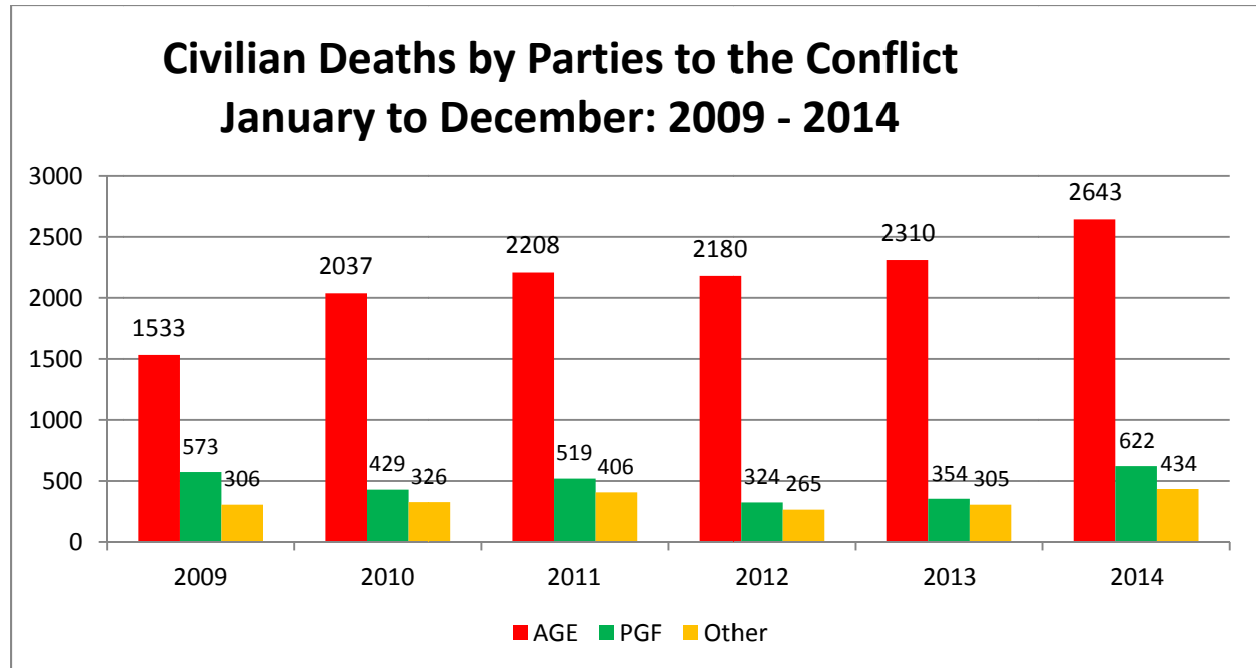
- Provide support from the NATO Resolute Support Mission to Afghan national security forces beyond 2015 to ensure Afghan forces are sufficiently resourced, trained and equipped in the current operational context. Continue support to Afghan security forces to command, control and effectively conduct counter-IED operations and IED-disposal, including exploitation in 2015-17.
- Continue efforts to map, mark and ensure full clearance of unexploded ordnance from all international military bases and firing ranges that have closed since the onset of ISAF operations.
- Ensure that all international military or foreign intelligence and security forces operating in Afghanistan, either independently or in support to Afghan security forces, take all necessary measures to protect civilians during ground and aerial operations.
- Continue to ensure transparent post-operation reviews and investigations following operations where civilian casualties have occurred from operations involving international security or intelligence forces. Continue to take appropriate steps to ensure accountability, compensation and better operational practice.

Civilian Deaths and Injuries January to December 2009 - 2014



Civilian Deaths and Injuries by Parties to the Conflict January to December 2014





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