

UNAMA**United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan**

Strategic Communication and Spokespersons Unit, Kabul, Afghanistan

Transcript<http://unama.unmissions.org>**PRESS CONFERENCE (near verbatim transcript)****Launch of Annual Report 2011: Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict****Ján Kubiš, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan and
Georgette Gagnon, Director of UNAMA Human Rights****Kabul – 4 February 2012**

Ján Kubiš, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan: First of all let me greet you all and welcome you all here today. And we are very much honoured by your presence and by your interest. I would like to first of all greet you during this day that is the public holiday and commemorating the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad peace be upon him. Thank you. And I very much appreciate that despite the holiday we are gathering here and I take this as a strong sign of interest confirming the importance of the topic we will be discussing together today.

This is the tenth time that we are getting together, UNAMA and you the journalists and the civil society to discuss the issue that is crucial for every human being here is Afghanistan – protection of civilians – notably in armed conflict and unfortunately there is an armed conflict going on here in Afghanistan. This is the tenth time that we are bringing to you credible assessments, credible figures about how much the civilians suffer here in Afghanistan from this armed conflict despite all the efforts and despite many proclamations. And I would like to say that we are more and unhappy to see that the suffering persists and that there is no decrease in civilian casualties.

And my message to everyone is do everything possible to reduce civilian casualties in this war – to every side, every party to the conflict. Because every human life is precious and we will remain concerned about this situation. We appreciate certain efforts, we appreciate certain statements and proclamations but it is not enough. Much more should be done.

I would like also to use this opportunity to express my gratitude to my colleague Georgette Gagnon and her partners, both within the UN system but notably from civil society, from the people of Afghanistan that are coming to us with their grievances, with their problems and I am very grateful to her that we are bringing these grievances both to the attention of the parties in the conflict, the authorities, but also to all of you. We are sharing the suffering with you. The aim is once again is to send a strong message – it is not enough what is being done. It is necessary that the parties to the conflict do more, they do better, they honour their statements and proclamations. So Georgette thank you and now the floor is now yours.

Georgette Gagnon, Director of UNAMA Human Rights: Thank you. A decade after the war began the human cost of it is still rising. This is a tragic and sad thing. UNAMA documented 3,021 civilian deaths in 2011 – an increase of eight per cent over 2010. 2011 marked the fifth year in a row in which we have documented an increase in civilian deaths and injuries. 11,864 civilians in total have died in this conflict in the last five years since 2007.

As was the case last year, in 2011 Anti-Government Elements caused the most civilian deaths. This year they caused 2,332 civilians deaths – up 14 per cent from last year and responsible for 77 per cent of all civilian deaths.

410 civilian deaths resulted from the operations of Pro-Government Forces – these are the Afghan National Security Forces and the International Military Forces. This is a decrease of four per cent from 2010 and represents 14 per cent of all civilian deaths attributed to these forces.

A further 279 civilian deaths, or nine per cent of the total deaths, could not be attributed to any party to the conflict.

IEDs [Improvised Explosive Devices] were the single largest killer of Afghan children, women, and men in 2011 taking the lives of 967 civilians, nearly one in three people who died in the conflict were killed by an IED. And the Anti-Government Elements increased their use of these victim-activated pressure-plate IEDs which are indiscriminate and illegal weapons. And we are urging them again this year to stop using these types of weapons which kill children, women and men in great numbers.

450 civilians died in suicide attacks. This is an 80 per cent increase over last year – so a dramatic rise in deaths from suicide attacks. Targeted killings of civilians by Anti-Government Elements exceeded the high rate of last year. 495 targeted killings we documented across the country. This is local government officials and workers, provincial and peace council members, teachers, doctors – various people were singled out and deliberately killed.

Air attacks by Pro-Government Forces caused 187 civilian deaths in 2011. This is an increase of nine per cent over last year. And this occurred in spite of a decrease in the overall level of air attacks in the country and an overall decline in civilian deaths attributed to Pro-Government Forces.

Civilian deaths during night search operations by Pro-Government Forces dropped to 63 in 2011, down 22 per cent from 2010.

Forty-one civilians were killed by Afghan National Security Forces in the last half of 2011. This is an increase of 192 per cent in civilian deaths by these forces compared to the last half of 2010 and most of these deaths occurred at checkpoints and roadblocks.

Now the record loss of lives of Afghan civilians resulted from changes in the tactics of the Anti-Government Elements, and the affects of tactics. IEDs were used more frequently and more widely across the country. They conducted deadlier suicide attacks with more victims and they increased their unlawful killings of civilians.

Whilst we saw some improved messaging from the Taliban on a reduction in civilian casualties and protection we did not see improvements on the ground in their efforts to protect civilians. Women and children again bore the brunt of the conflict and there were increases in deaths and injuries of women and children this year.

UNAMA also looked at the acts of the Afghan Local Police (ALP) and their impact on protection of civilians. While at the end of the year we received reports that security had improved in most areas where the Afghan Local Police were, there were still concerns with human rights abusers being in the ALP, with weaknesses in vetting and recruitment. But we have heard from the Ministry of Interior and ISAF [International Security Assistance Force] that they are taking steps to improve oversight, accountability and conduct of the Afghan Local Police and this is welcome.

Many many Afghans were displaced over the course of the year by war and insecurity. A big increase from last year and this is documented in our report. Many people lost their access to schools, to food, to healthcare and they also had their freedom of movement restricted.

At the beginning of this year there has been lots of discussion about movements towards peace negotiations. We in UNAMA urge all concerned to place the highest priority on protection of civilians in these discussions because what Afghans are telling us is the value and credibility of a peace negotiation will be a reduction in civilian casualties and a reduction in deaths of civilians. We have put forward a whole number of recommendations to make this happen in 2012 and to make this a year of almost no, hopefully none civilian deaths and injuries. Thank you.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS:

RFE/RL [translated from Pashto]: For the last five years UNAMA issues reports at this time and always had the same demand from the warring parties to reduce civilian casualties. This has been a repeated demand for the last five years, but there has been no reduction in casualties. The same headline is repeated in the media. My question is can UNAMA not do anything else given their authority and relations with the world, can't they do something practical in order to prevent this happening again?

Ján Kubiš: I would like to draw your attention to some of the facts of the report, perhaps that will give you at least part of the response you would like to get. We don't issue this report just to inform the public about the number of the deaths, we don't just monitor. We come with a number of recommendations every time to the parties of the conflict. And even from the report you can see how different parties react to these recommendations. One part of the response on the side of the Pro-Government Forces is measures to reduce civilian casualties, practices that are being implemented and even as we recorded this year, reduction of the casualties. So apparently our recommendations and the fact that we are reporting – all that bring results – reduction of civilian casualties. On the other hand is the anti-government fighters, elements and what we see is a different picture. Yes, there are statements and proclamations, and even instructions, for example from the leadership of the Taliban to the fighters to take steps to reduce civilian casualties. There is a ban issued by the leader of the Taliban, Mullah Omar in 1998 banning landmines as inhumane and un-Islamic and what is the result in practice – increase and a very major increase of the civilian casualties caused by Anti-Government Elements. On one side the ban on landmines and on the other side a clear increase in the use of pressure plate victim-activated Improvised Explosive Devices. What are these? These are basically landmines. So why are these anti-Islamic and inhumane weapon is being increasingly used. All of us, all Afghan people should ask this question and send a very strong message to the Taliban and to the Anti-Government Forces. Stop using these landmines, you banned them – honour your word. Another example, suicide attacks, are these attacks humane, do they lie in the humanitarian way of waging war, can they be labelled Islamic? Is there honour in killing civilians, using suicide attacks? So this is our response and request – honour your own words. If you issue the ban instruct and make a clear statement and take measures to prevent using

these landmines, it means the pressure plate victim-activated explosive devices and stop using suicide attacks. They are not harming mostly fighters of the other side. They are killing civilians.

Associated Press: My question is for Ms. Gagnon, when you are conducting these interviews, what do the Afghan people say about why the increased security forces and international troops cannot protect them from a rise in civilian deaths?

Georgette Gagnon: The report contains a number of accounts from civilians about what they tell us in their own words and most of them tell us that it is the tactics of these Anti-Government Elements, of the insurgents that are killing them, that do not discriminate. One of the testimonies, one of the accounts in the report says very clearly what they are doing is against the Islamic principles and they feel, that nothing can protect them from that at this point, the way they are using these tactics.

Ján Kubiš: I would add to this, there again, you asked how come when you see the increased presence of international forces and the government forces in certain areas, how come that there is a global increase of civilian casualties? Well because the tactics have changed and the Anti-Government Forces being squeezed in certain areas and in these areas there are very many instances of the reduction of the civilian casualties moved to some other areas and again use this inhumane, indiscriminate weapon like human activated explosive devices and suicide attacks.

BBC Farsi TV: Are there any details in the report on what caused the decrease in the civilian casualties by the government and also NATO forces? Because you said that there is a decrease in the number of casualties.

Georgette Gagnon: The pro-government forces have brought in a number of what they call tactical directives and procedures that put that the highest priority on protecting civilians in operations and these tactical directives appear to be working and being followed by all the troops on the ground and this is why there is a reduction in civilian casualties by them this year.

Channel One TV [*translated from Dari*]: The international community does not have a coordinated, solid and clear strategy for Afghanistan. There are contradictory statements from different members of the international community which give a feeling of uncertainty to Afghans for their future. You mentioned internally displaced people in some areas – maybe that is the reason since they don't have a clear picture of their future?

Ján Kubiš: Yes, sometimes and I am, please, not blaming the press. I will not do it and I can never win blaming the press. But sometimes what is being reported doesn't cover the whole message that was sent and that might create an impression of contradictory messages. So I think that as you are rightly saying, there is a confusion, our partners because I understand you speak not about UNAMA messages, but messages coming from some other part of the international community. Our partners will bring more and more clarity on what are exactly the intentions. I am not their spokesperson but I can confirm one thing – the Lisbon agenda is valid.

If I may just add at the end, once again thank you for coming on this day. I have to leave and I apologise, but madam Georgette will stay here and she will be available to you all for further questions. Thank you again.