

AFGHAN CIVILIAN CASUALTIES RISE THIRTY-ONE PER CENT IN FIRST SIX MONTHS OF 2010

10 August 2010, Kabul – Tactics of the Taliban and other Anti-Government Elements (AGEs) are behind a 31 per cent increase in conflict-related Afghan civilian casualties in the first six months of 2010 compared with the same period in 2009, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) said today in releasing its *2010 Mid-Year Report on Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict*.

Among those killed or injured by the Taliban and other AGEs were 55 per cent more children than in 2009, along with six per cent more women. Casualties attributed to Pro-Government Forces (PGF) fell 30 per cent during the same period, driven by a 64 per cent decline in deaths and injuries caused by aerial attacks.

“Afghan children and women are increasingly bearing the brunt of this conflict. They are being killed and injured in their homes and communities in greater numbers than ever before,” **said Staffan de Mistura, Special Representative of the Secretary-General.**

From 1 January to 30 June 2010, UNAMA Human Rights Unit documented 3,268 civilian casualties including 1,271 deaths and 1,997 injuries. AGEs were responsible for 2,477 casualties (76 per cent of all casualties, up 53 per cent from 2009) while 386 were attributed to PGF activities (12 per cent of all casualties, down from 30 per cent in 2009).

Analysis by UNAMA Human Rights Unit identified two critical developments that increased harm to civilians in the first six months of 2010 compared to 2009: AGEs used a greater number of larger and more sophisticated improvised explosive devices (IEDs) throughout the country; and, the number of civilians assassinated and executed by AGEs rose by more than 95 per cent and included public executions of children.

“The devastating human impact of these events underscores that, nine years into the conflict, measures to protect Afghan civilians effectively and to minimize the impact of the conflict on basic human rights are more urgent than ever. All those concerned must do more to protect civilians and comply with their legal obligations not to attack civilians,” **said Georgette Gagnon, Director of Human Rights for UNAMA.**

IEDs and suicide attacks killed 557 Afghans and injured 1,137 in the first six months of 2010. IEDs alone accounted for 29 per cent of all civilian deaths in the period, including 74 children, a 155 per cent increase in IED-related deaths of children in the same span in 2009.

Aerial attacks by the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) remained the most harmful PGF tactic, causing 69 of the 223 civilian deaths attributed to PGF in the first six months of 2010

(31 per cent) and injuring 45 Afghan civilians. However, civilian deaths caused by PGF aerial attacks decreased 64 per cent from the same period in 2009, reflecting growing implementation of ISAF's July 2009 Tactical Directive regulating the use of air strikes and other measures to reduce civilian casualties.

On a regional basis, civilian casualties grew the most in southern Afghanistan in the first six months of 2010. More than half of assassinations and executions occurred in the southern region, where more than one hundred Afghan civilians were killed in such incidents. Overall, conflict-related civilian deaths in the south increased by 43 per cent. Civilians assassinated and executed included teachers, nurses, doctors, tribal elders, community leaders, provincial and district officials, other civilians including children, and civilians working for international military forces and international organizations.

“This intensified pattern of assassinations and executions reinforced the widespread perception of Afghan civilians that they are becoming more and more the primary target in this period of conflict,” **said Staffan de Mistura, Special Representative of the Secretary-General.**

Releasing the 2010 Mid-Year Report, UNAMA underscored the 7 July 2010 statement of the United Nations Secretary-General that stressed ensuring greater compliance with international law by all concerned remains a “huge common challenge” in Afghanistan. Basic human rights and international humanitarian law principles of distinction, proportionality and precaution that apply to all parties to an armed conflict, requiring them to minimize civilian loss of life and injury must be reinforced at this critical period.

UNAMA Human Rights Unit issued recommendations in the report including:

- The Taliban should withdraw all orders and statements calling for the killing of civilians; and, the Taliban and other AGEs should end the use of IEDs and suicide attacks, comply with international humanitarian law, cease acts of intimidation and killing including assassination, execution and abduction, fully respect citizens' freedom of movement and stop using civilians as human shields.
- International military forces should make more transparent their investigation and reporting on civilian casualties including on accountability; maintain and strengthen directives restricting aerial attacks and the use of night raids; coordinate investigation and reporting of civilian casualties with the Afghan Government to improve protection and accountability; improve compensation processes; and, improve transparency around any harm to civilians caused by Special Forces operations.
- The Afghan Government should create a public body to lead its response to major civilian casualty incidents and its interaction with international military forces and other key actors, ensure investigations include forensic components, ensure transparent and timely compensation to victims; and, improve accountability including discipline or prosecution for any Afghan National Security Forces personnel who unlawfully cause death or injury to civilians or otherwise violate the rights of Afghan citizens.
