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Press Release

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Number of civilian casualties in Afghanistan rises in first half of 2013

KABUL, 31 July 2013 – The number of Afghan civilians killed or injured in the first six months of 2013 rose by 23 per cent compared to the same period last year, according to the latest Mid-Year Report on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict in Afghanistan, produced by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA).

In the report, UNAMA documented 1,319 civilian deaths and 2,533 injuries – a total of 3,852 civilian casualties – in the first half of 2013, marking increases of 14 per cent in deaths and 28 per cent in injuries over the same period in 2012.

The rise in civilian casualties in the first six months of 2013 reverses the decline recorded in 2012, and marks a return to the high numbers of civilian deaths and injuries documented in 2011.

The report observed that the main factors driving the increase in the number of deaths and injuries to Afghan civilians in the first half of 2013 were the increased use of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) by Anti-Government Elements particularly in areas populated or frequented by civilians, and an increase in civilian casualties from ground engagements between Afghan security forces and Anti-Government Elements. The report also documented increased civilian casualties attributed to Anti-Government Elements, including targeted killings and attacks against civilian Government workers in addition to high levels of threats and intimidation.

“The violent impact of the conflict on Afghan civilians marked by the return of rising civilian casualties in 2013 demands even greater commitment and further efforts by parties to the conflict to protect civilians who are increasingly being killed and injured in the cross-fire,” said the UN Secretary-General’s Special Representative for Afghanistan and head of UNAMA, Ján Kubiš. “The increase in the indiscriminate use of IEDs and the deliberate targeting of civilians by Anti-Government Elements is particularly alarming and must stop.”

While IEDs used by Anti-Government Elements remained the leading cause of civilian casualties, ground engagement between Afghan security forces and Anti-Government Elements emerged as the second biggest cause of civilian deaths and injuries – a new trend that poses an increasing threat to Afghan children, women and men.

“The growing loss of life and injuries to Afghan women and children in 2013 is particularly disturbing,” said UNAMA’s Director of Human Rights, Georgette Gagnon. “Deaths and injuries to women and children increased by 38 per cent in the first half of 2013 reflecting a grim reality of the conflict today in Afghanistan.”

Between 1 January and 30 June 2013, UNAMA documented the deaths of 337 women and children and injuries to 770 others.

In the same time period, the report found that Anti-Government Elements caused 74 per cent of all civilian casualties, Pro-Government Forces caused nine per cent, 12 per cent were unattributed and resulted from ground engagements between Pro-Government Forces and Anti-Government Elements and the remaining five per cent were unattributed, resulting mostly from unexploded ordnance.

The report noted that 1,038 civilian deaths and 1,825 civilian injuries (2,863 civilian casualties) were attributed to Anti-Government Elements in the first half of 2013, a 16 per cent increase compared to the same period in 2012.

UNAMA documented 146 civilian deaths and 216 civilian injuries (362 casualties) caused by Pro-Government Forces (Afghan National Security Forces and international military forces), representing a 16 per cent drop in deaths but a 58 per cent increase in injuries, for a 16 per cent rise in total civilian casualties caused by Pro-Government Forces compared to the same time period in 2012. The leading cause of civilian casualties was ground engagements directly attributed to the military operations of Pro-Government Forces.

“Rising civilian casualties in the first half of 2013 paints a frightening picture for Afghan people – and drives home the need for parties engaged in military operations to fully comply with their legal obligations to protect civilians and prevent civilian casualties,” added Ms. Gagnon.

UNAMA has repeatedly condemned attacks which have led to civilian casualties and called for their halt, in addition to emphasizing that indiscriminate and deliberate targeting of civilians are violations of international humanitarian law and may amount to war crimes.

Other key findings from the 1 January – 30 June 2013 reporting period include:

Women

- Conflict-related violence killed 106 women and injured another 241 (a total of 347 casualties), up 61 per cent from 2012, with ground engagements involving parties to the conflict the leading cause of the casualties.

Children

- 231 children were killed and 529 injured (a total of 760 casualties), up 30 per cent from the previous year, with IEDs the leading cause of the casualties, followed by ground engagements and unexploded ordnance/abandoned explosive ordnance.
- UNAMA documented a 72 per cent increase in the killing and maiming of children from IED attacks with 70 children killed and 179 others injured (249 child casualties).

Use of IEDs by Anti-Government Elements

- The indiscriminate and unlawful use of IEDs by Anti-Government Elements remained the biggest conflict-related threat to civilians, responsible for 35 per cent of deaths and injuries. The 443 civilians killed and 917 injured by IEDs (a total of 1,360 casualties) was a 34 per cent increase over 2012.
- Tactics involving IEDs, including suicide and complex attacks, accounted for 52 per cent of all civilian casualties documented by UNAMA.

Targeting of Civilians by Anti-Government Elements

- Incidents of Anti-Government Elements deliberately targeting and killing civilians perceived to be supporting the Government of Afghanistan rose sharply with 312 killed and 131 injured resulting from 262 incidents of targeted and deliberate killings, up 29 per cent from 2012.
- Government staff and facilities were also especially targeted. UNAMA identified a 76 per cent increase in civilian casualties from Anti-Government Elements targeting civilian Government employees, Government offices, district headquarters and other civilian Government structures, with 114 civilians killed and 324 injured (a total of 438 casualties) in 103 such attacks. Four attacks alone, against courthouses and judicial and prosecution staff, killed 57 and injured 145 (a total of 202 casualties), including judges, prosecutors, legal and clerical staff. These attacks followed the Taliban's public announcement of their intent to target and kill judges and prosecutors; the Taliban claimed responsibility on their website.
- A new pattern of threats and attacks by Anti-Government Elements against mullahs (religious leaders). The UN Mission documented 14 incidents in which persons or places of worship (mosques) were directly threatened or attacked, resulting in seven civilian deaths. The attacks targeted mullahs performing funeral ceremonies for deceased members of the Afghan National Security Forces and those showing public support for the Government.

Ground Engagements

- Ground engagement between Pro-Government Forces and Anti-Government Elements caused 25 per cent of all civilian casualties, an increase of 42 per cent over 2012, with 207 civilian deaths and 764 injuries (a total of 971 casualties).

Air Strikes/UAVs by Pro-Government Forces

- UNAMA documented 49 civilian deaths and 41 injuries (a total of 90 casualties) from air strikes by Pro Government Forces, a 30 per cent decline compared to 2012. Women and children accounted for 54 per cent of the total civilian casualties from air operations.
- UNAMA notes the reduction in civilian casualties from air operations, but emphasizes concern with the disproportionate loss of civilian life and injury from air strikes in two incidents that took place in the Sheigal district of Kunar province – one on 6 February and the other on 13 April – which resulted in 22 civilian deaths and 10 injuries, mostly women and children.
- UNAMA documented 15 civilian deaths and seven injuries in seven separate incidents where Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) or drones that appeared to target Anti-Government Elements. UNAMA notes the lack of transparency and accountability in the use of drones to carry out targeted killings and/or that resulted in civilian casualties.

Escalation of Force and Search Operations by Pro-Government Forces

- UNAMA documented 20 civilian deaths and 22 injuries (42 civilian casualties) from 23 separate escalation of force incidents, a 56 per cent increase from 2012.
- Consistent with the downward trend recorded in the same periods from 2009 through 2012, civilian casualties from search operations by Pro-Government Forces decreased with 17 deaths and 15 injuries (a total of 32 casualties) in 24 separate search operations.
- UNAMA documented 14 civilian deaths and 23 injuries in 32 separate incidents attributed to Afghan Local Police (ALP), an increase of 61 per cent compared to 2012.

Human Rights Abuses by Armed Groups

- UNAMA documented 19 incidents of human rights abuses carried out by armed groups. These resulted in seven civilian deaths and two injuries. Most of these incidents were

documented in areas where armed groups held considerable power and influence, notably in the north, northeast and central highlands regions of the country.

Explosive Remnants of War

- The increasing threat of Explosive Remnants of War (ERW) to civilian life and livelihoods continues to pose significant risks to the safety of Afghans, particularly children. UNAMA documented 43 civilian deaths and 102 injuries (a total of 145 casualties) from ERW, a 53 per cent increase from 2012. Seventy-nine per cent of the victims were children.
- The sharp increase in ERW civilian casualties coincides with an increase in ground engagement between parties to the conflict causing civilian casualties and with the escalated pace of the closure of bases and firing ranges operated by the International Security Assistance Force, with concerns that these facilities have not been sufficiently cleared of unexploded ordnance prior to closure.

Selected accounts of Afghan civilians from UNAMA's 2013 Midyear Report of Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict:

"My sister called me to inform that a suicide attack had killed our mother and injured our sister. On that day, my mother and sister were going to a dentist's appointment. As the taxi drove past the Ministry of Defence, the suicide attack took place. My mother died on the spot and my sister was critically injured and spent four days in a hospital. She still has pieces of glass in her head and requires medical treatment. My sister was a teacher and my mother worked in a tailoring shop to support our family. My father is very old and sick. My sister is shocked, scared of similar incidents and she doesn't want to leave home anymore. I don't know how we can overcome the grief and solve the family crisis."

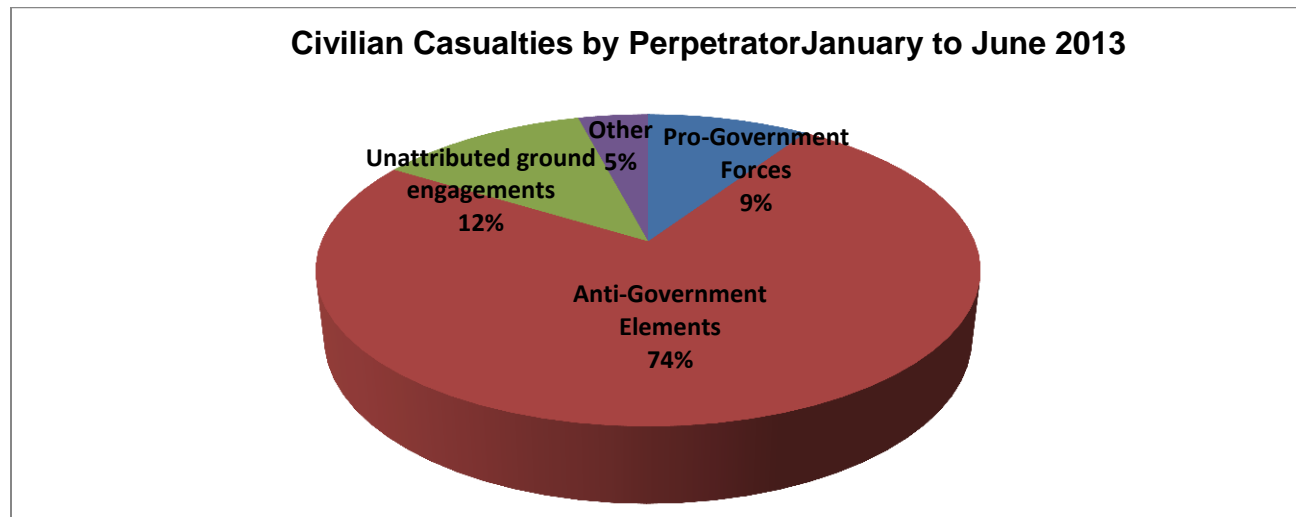
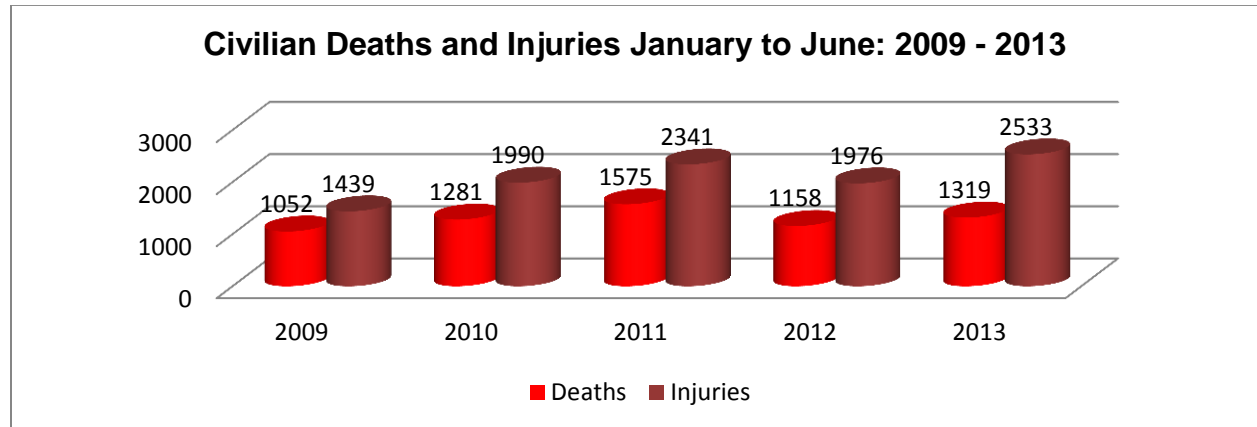
- Son of a woman killed in a suicide attack in the capital, Kabul; 9 March 2013.

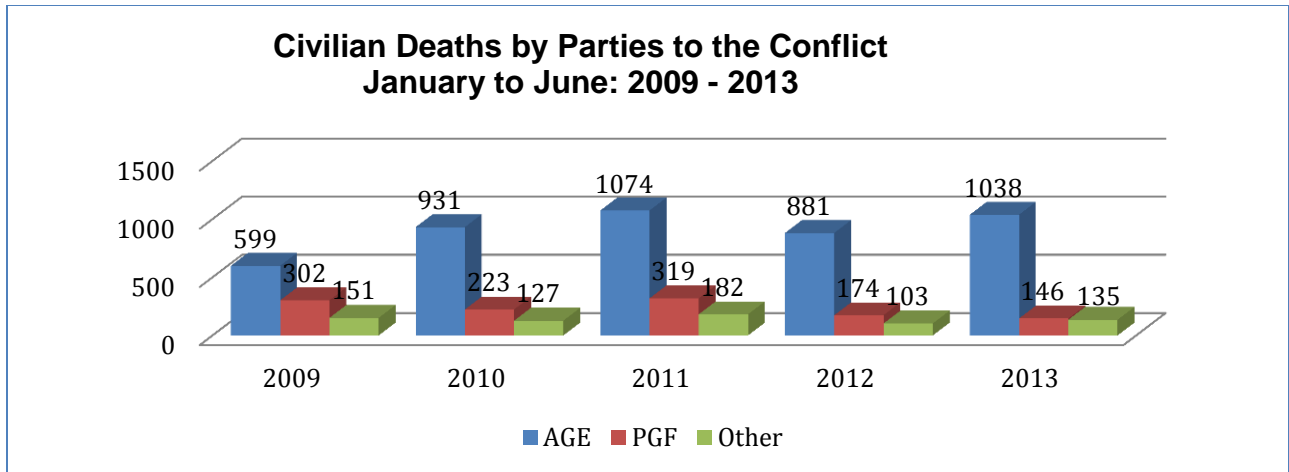
"Fighting erupted between insurgents and Afghan forces in the early morning. My 13-year-old son was killed after an ANA [Afghan National Army] mortar hit my house. Before he died, I carried him somewhere safer, even though I was also bleeding heavily. On the way, I saw a Taliban fighter. I lay my wounded son on the ground and slapped the Taliban on the face. The Taliban let me go when he saw that me and my sons were wounded and our clothes were stained with blood. When I returned to my son, he succumbed to his injuries and died. It was the most painful and tragic moment of my life. My son is no more among us. I do not know why we Afghans are being punished and I do not know how long this armed conflict will continue. My other 16-year-old son was wounded. My wife's face was burned and was wounded due to the mortar. Another mortar hit the house of a farmer at Nasar village and his seven-year old daughter was wounded. Another mortar hit a civilian's house in Essakhail village and wounded a three-year-old child who went into a coma. I want the prosecution of the ANA commander who gave the order to target civilian houses."

- A father whose son was killed and another son injured from the Afghan National Army's firing of mortars in the Chahardara district of Kunduz province; 4 June 2013.

Further information on UNAMA's Mid-Year Report on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict in Afghanistan – including breakdowns on various statistical findings and

recommendations to improve the protection of civilians – are available at <http://unama.unmissions.org/Default.aspx?tabid=12254&language=en-US>





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