

# UNAMA

## United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan

Strategic Communication and Spokespersons Unit, Kabul, Afghanistan

### Press Release

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#### **Spring offensive: all parties must prevent civilian casualties**

**KABUL – 30 April 2011** – With announcements of a planned increase in fighting and hostilities in Afghanistan in the coming months, we call, as the United Nations and on behalf of all Afghans, on all parties to take all necessary measures to protect civilians.

“Parties to the conflict must not deliberately attack, target or kill civilians, or indiscriminately harm them,” said Staffan de Mistura, the UN chief in Afghanistan. “We call on all parties to take all possible measures to protect civilians, especially in the forthcoming months when we expect, unfortunately, intensified conflict.”

Under international humanitarian law, a civilian is any person who is not taking a direct part in hostilities. A statement issued today by the Taliban includes as targets for attack government officials, members of Cabinet, Parliament and the High Peace Council, and heads of foreign and Afghan companies working for the Government. The United Nations calls on the Taliban to refrain in particular from attacking all such persons who are not taking a direct part in hostilities.

Warring parties are obliged not to launch attacks on civilian locations or in areas where civilians gather such as government buildings, bazaars and parks.

The indiscriminate use of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) by the Taliban, in cities, and the use of IEDs with pressure plates that cannot distinguish between military objects such as tanks and civilian objects such as cars and minibuses cause huge numbers of civilian casualties. The United Nations urges the Taliban to at all times distinguish between military and civilian objects.

At the same time pro-Government forces must take all precautions to protect civilians and to prevent civilian casualties especially in this Spring offensive period.

Air attacks by international military forces have resulted in the most civilian casualties caused by these forces. The United Nations calls on international military forces to strictly enforce international laws and tactical directives that regulate air strikes.

Night raids by pro-Government forces generate fear, anger and resentment among many Afghan communities. The UN calls on all pro-Government forces to ensure that all night raids fully respect Afghan cultural and religious practices and minimize harm to civilians.

“In view of their specific threat, I call on the Taliban to carry out their previously stated decision to avoid civilian casualties,” said Staffan de Mistura. “Afghan civilians have paid the price of war for too long – it is more urgent than ever that all parties act to prevent this suffering and that in the forthcoming Spring we also see a surge in protection of civilians.”

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