

UNAMA

United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan

Strategic Communication and Spokespersons Unit, Kabul, Afghanistan

Press Statement

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MAY DEADLIEST MONTH FOR AFGHAN CIVILIANS

KABUL – 11 June 2011 – May 2011 was the deadliest month for Afghan civilians since at least 2007, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) said today. UNAMA documented 368 conflict-related civilian deaths in May and 593 civilian injuries.

“More civilians were killed in May than in any other month since 2007 when UNAMA began documenting civilian casualties,” said Georgette Gagnon, Director of Human Rights for UNAMA.

“We are very concerned that civilian suffering will increase even more over the summer fighting season which historically brings the highest numbers of civilian casualties. Parties to the conflict must increase their efforts to protect civilians now.”

Anti-government elements were responsible for 301 civilian deaths (82 per cent of all civilian deaths in May).

Forty-five civilian deaths (12 per cent of all civilian deaths in May 2011) were attributed to pro government forces.

Twenty-two deaths or six per cent of civilian deaths in May 2011 could not be attributed to any party to the conflict as most of these deaths were caused by crossfire.

Improvised explosive devices (IEDs) continued to kill and injure the most Afghan civilians in May taking 119 lives and causing 274 injuries (40 per cent of civilian deaths attributed to anti-government elements). These devices caused 41 per cent of all civilian casualties in May. The large majority of IEDs in Afghanistan are pressure-plate devices which are indiscriminate in nature. They are often placed alongside roads and in busy commercial areas thus leading to civilian casualties. The widespread use by anti-government elements of these weapons is a violation of international humanitarian law.

Ground combat by pro-government forces caused six percent of all civilian deaths in May. Civilian casualties attributed to ground combat have been increasing since the beginning of the Taliban’s spring offensive. Air strikes caused three per cent of the total civilian deaths in May.

UNAMA is preparing its mid-year report on protection of civilians for release in early July which documents in detail the extent of and responsibility for civilian casualties for the first six months of 2011. However, as May was the deadliest month for Afghan civilians since 2007, UNAMA is releasing this interim statement calling for protection of civilians now.

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