

CIVILIAN CASUALTIES RISE FOR FIFTH CONSECUTIVE YEAR IN AFGHAN CONFLICT

KABUL, 4 FEBRUARY 2012 – 2011 marked the fifth year in a row that civilian casualties have increased in the armed conflict in Afghanistan, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) said today releasing its 2011 Annual Report on Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, prepared in coordination with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. Changes in the tactics of the parties to the conflict were responsible for an eight per cent increase in Afghan civilian deaths in 2011 compared to 2010.

UNAMA documented 3,021 civilian deaths in 2011 compared with 2,790 in 2010 and 2,412 in 2009. Over the past five years, the number of Afghan civilians killed in the armed conflict has increased each year, with a total of 11,864 civilian lives claimed by the conflict since 2007.

“Afghan children, women and men continue to be killed in this war in ever-increasing numbers,” said Ján Kubiš, United Nations Special Representative for the Secretary-General. “For much too long Afghan civilians have paid the highest price of war. Parties to the conflict must greatly increase their efforts to protect civilians to prevent yet another increase in civilian deaths and injuries in 2012.”

Anti-Government Elements caused the most Afghan civilian deaths in 2011 – 2,332 or 77 percent of all civilians who died in the conflict, up 14 percent from 2010. In addition, 410 civilian deaths (14 percent of the total) resulted from the operations of Pro-Government Forces, a decrease of four percent from 2010. A further 279 civilian deaths, or nine percent of the total, could not be attributed to a particular party to the conflict.

The record loss of Afghan civilian lives resulted mainly from changes in the tactics of Anti-Government Elements that used improvised explosive devices more frequently and more widely across the country, conducted deadlier suicide attacks yielding greater numbers of victims, and increased the unlawful and targeted killing of civilians. The effects of tactics of other parties to the conflict also influenced the number of civilians killed and injured. Civilian deaths from aerial attacks by Pro-Government Forces rose in 2011, in spite of a decrease in the number of aerial attacks and an overall decline in civilian deaths attributed to Pro-Government Forces.

The report notes “The tactics of choice of Anti-Government Elements subjected Afghan civilians to death and injury with increasingly lethal results in 2011. Improvised explosive devices (IEDs) were the single largest killer of Afghan children, women and men in 2011, taking the lives of 967 civilians, or nearly one in three (32 percent) of all civilians killed in the conflict.” Anti-Government Elements increased their use of illegal, indiscriminate victim-activated pressure plate IEDs that function as anti-personnel landmines detonated by any person including children stepping on, or any vehicle driving over them.

The civilian death toll from suicide attacks in Afghanistan rose dramatically in 2011 to 450 (15 percent of the total), an increase of 80 percent over 2010. While the number of suicide attacks did not increase over 2010, the nature of these attacks changed, becoming more complex, sometimes involving multiple bombers, and designed to yield greater numbers of dead and injured civilians.

Targeted killings of civilians by Anti-Government Elements also increased in 2011, with UNAMA documenting 495 such killings across the country. Provincial and district governors, local government workers, provincial and peace council members, local community and tribal elders were singled out.

“Among the tactics of Pro-Government Forces, aerial attacks caused the greatest number of Afghan civilian deaths in 2011 attributed to these forces,” the report says, noting that in total, 187 civilian deaths were attributed to aerial attacks, an increase of nine percent over 2010. The number of civilian deaths during night search operations by Pro-Government Forces dropped to 63 in 2011, down 22 percent from the previous year.

Throughout 2011, UNAMA received mixed reports on the performance of the Afghan Local Police (ALP) and their impact on civilian protection. By year’s end, most interlocutors reported improved security in areas where the ALP operated. Concerns remained regarding recruitment of human rights abusers into the ALP in some districts and weaknesses in vetting, training, command and control, accountability and oversight. UNAMA documented human rights abuses against civilians by ALP in several districts across the country. The UNAMA report welcomed recent measures by the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) and the Ministry of Interior to improve oversight and accountability of the ALP and recommended their prompt and full implementation before further expansion of the ALP programme.

The UNAMA report found that the geographic distribution of civilian casualties shifted significantly, particularly in the second half of 2011. As the armed conflict lessened in severity in the south, it intensified in the south-eastern, eastern and northern regions, with the result that an increasing proportion of Afghan civilians were killed and injured in these areas.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Navi Pillay who will report to the Human Rights Council in March on human rights developments in Afghanistan said “It is extremely worrying to see civilian casualties continuing to rise year after year. Behind these numbers is real suffering and loss for families in Afghanistan. It is incumbent on parties to halt this trend and prevent such loss of life.”

As 2011 unfolded, ordinary Afghan people experienced growing intrusion into, and disruption of, their day-to-day lives by the armed conflict. According to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, conflict and insecurity displaced 185,632 Afghans in 2011, an increase of 45 percent from 2010. Thousands more Afghans lost their livelihoods and property, had their freedom of movement restricted or taken away, and had their access to food, health care and education compromised. The report found “Unremitting civilian casualties coupled with pervasive intimidation by parties to the conflict and an expanding number of pro and anti-Government armed groups affected many Afghan civilians directly, and many more indirectly, by fuelling uncertainty, tension and fear.”

Since the beginning of 2012, new proposals and ideas have been put forward that could contribute toward peace negotiations. UNAMA urged that any such negotiations place the highest priority on protection of civilians in the ongoing armed conflict and in any outcome that leads to its resolution with an emphasis on concrete and effective measures to reduce civilian deaths and injuries.

Georgette Gagnon, Director of Human Rights for UNAMA said "To the Afghan people, the credibility and value of a negotiation process and progress toward peace will be measured by reduced civilian casualties and real improvements in security, particularly in conflict-affected areas. Only through increased actions to protect civilians will the relentless toll of death and injury to Afghan children, women and men be ended during and following a peace process."

Selected Accounts of Afghan Civilians from UNAMA's 2011 Annual Report on Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict:

I heard the explosion at around 11.45 in the morning. A few minutes later my wife called my mobile phone. She was very upset and difficult to understand. She told me that my 14-year old son had been buying ice at the scene when the detonation occurred. She told me she could see his blood on the road but did not know where he was. I went to the hospital. After some time searching among the injured and the dead I found his body. A piece of shrapnel had gone through his head. I passed out and was taken home by friends. My son is dead and his loss is killing me and my wife. He was the only son I had.

Father of a victim of an IED attack in Mazar-i-Sharif, Balkh province, 20 July 2011

I am a teacher and I left the village to go to the district headquarters to get my salary. When I returned, there was a fight between the Taliban, and the Afghan National Army (ANA) and the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). A jet arrived and bombarded the Taliban's position but they also hit two houses. I was wounded badly while I was close to a house and I saw 13 people wounded inside that house.

Civilian victim of an aerial attack, Kunar province, Ghaziabad district, 20 October 2011

The explosion threw me and some of the passengers out of my taxi. I was bleeding, but not unconscious. Doctors say there is injury in my head, but I am out of danger. I have several cuts throughout my body from pieces of metal. My taxi, the only means of my livelihood, is completely damaged. I do not know what to do. Could anyone help me to repair it? I have eight children, all below 14 years, and a wife to feed. I don't know what I should do now. At the same time I have already spent 20,000 Afghani (\$444) on my medical treatment. I want to say to the insurgents that they must stop killing innocent people. It is against Islamic principles.

Victim of a suicide attack Kunduz city, Kunduz province 19 June 2011

My brother told me that the Afghan National Army (ANA) soldiers were firing at his vehicle and must have shot more than 200 bullets. Before my brother could drive behind a nearby wall to take cover, a bullet penetrated the car and killed my daughter. She was only five years old. There was only my brother and six children in the car and all the children were below seven years of age. I do not understand why the ANA were shooting at the car, as they just searched it beforehand. There was no reason for that. We are furious. If these people do not get punished, then something must happen.

Father of a five-year old girl shot dead by Afghan National Army soldiers at a checkpoint, Gardez city, Paktya province, 7 November 2011

UNAMA's 2011 Annual Report on Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict makes the following recommendations to improve civilian protection:

Anti-Government Elements

- Comply with international humanitarian law, uphold the principles of distinction, proportionality and precautionary measures, and protect the right to life.

- Stop using victim-activated pressure-plate IEDs, prohibit members from using them and publicly commit to banning the use of these indiscriminate and illegal weapons.
- Stop targeting civilians and carrying out indiscriminate and deliberate suicide attacks that harm civilians including women and children, withdraw orders that permit attacks and killings of civilians and use the definition of 'civilian' consistent with obligations under international humanitarian law.
- Stop attacking places of worship such as mosques which are protected places under international humanitarian law.
- Enforce codes of conduct and directives that instruct members to prevent civilian casualties and hold accountable those members who kill and injure civilians.

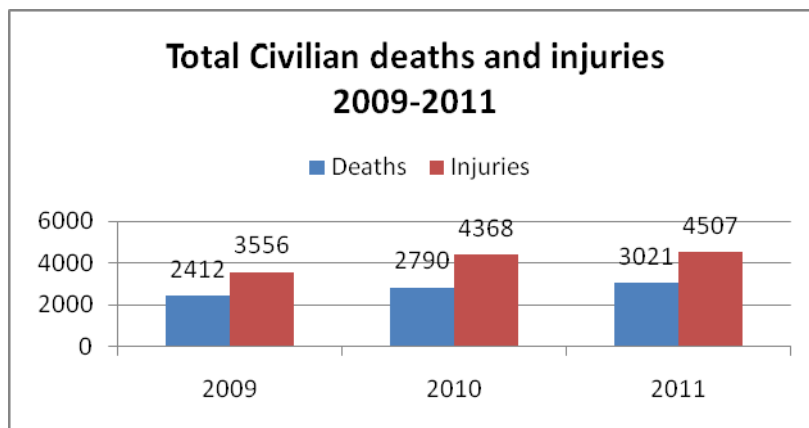
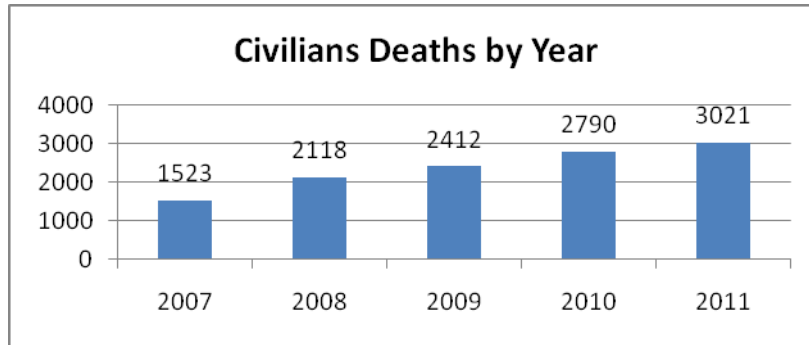
Government of Afghanistan

- Create a civilian casualty team in the Afghan National Army similar to the ISAF Civilian Casualty Mitigation Team to ensure accurate, professional and timely investigation and documentation of all incidents of civilian casualties caused by ANSF to improve civilian protection, accountability, remedial measures and compensation.
- Ensure all troops are trained adequately in escalation of force tactics, techniques, and procedures in particular on alternatives to lethal force. Implement public service announcements to increase awareness by Afghan civilians of proper checkpoint and convoy procedures.
- Train all Afghan security forces (ANA, ANP, ANBP, ALP, ANCOP and others) in all elements of international humanitarian and human rights law and ensure such training is mandatory and integrated into all Afghan National Security Forces' training programmes.
- Improve recruitment, vetting, oversight and accountability mechanisms for the Afghan Local Police to prevent and respond to reported human rights abuses and criminality by the Afghan Local Police and other local defence forces under the Government's control.

International Military Forces

- Further review procedures and directives aimed at preventing incidental loss of civilian life and injury and damage to civilian objects in the planning and implementation of all military operations, in particular aerial attacks.
- Implement fully the "Night Operations Tactical Directive" of 1 December 2011 to operationalize Commander ISAF's intent to prevent civilian casualties, minimize disruption to Afghan civilians and protect their property, share the maximum information possible with local leadership and civilians before, during and after night operations, and encourage Afghan National Security Forces to lead such operations.
- Promote transparency, accountability, improved compensation procedures and better relations with affected Afghan civilians and communities through the prompt and public release of all Joint Incident Assessment Team (JIAT) findings on incidents involving civilian casualties.
- With the Government of Afghanistan, promptly implement measures to improve the conduct, oversight, accountability and field-level monitoring and mentoring of the Afghan Local Police, and disband all local defence forces operating outside the Government of Afghanistan's control.

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