



United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan

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**UNAMA CALLS FOR CIVILIAN SAFETY FIRST
AS AFGHAN CASUALTIES INCREASE 14%**

Kabul, 13 January 2010 – The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), in conjunction with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), today called on all sides of Afghanistan’s conflict to uphold their obligations under international law and minimize the impact of fighting on civilians. New statistics released by the UN mission showed that 2009 proved to be the deadliest year yet for civilians since the fall of the Taliban regime in 2001.

The UN mission recorded 2,412 civilian casualties during 2009, up by 14 per cent from 2008 when the mission recorded 2,118 civilian deaths. Of the 2,412 deaths reported last year, 1,630 (67%) were attributed to anti-Government elements while 596 (25%) were attributed to pro-Government forces. The remaining 186 deaths (8%) could not be attributed to any of the conflicting parties as they died as a result of cross fire or by unexploded ordinance.

Ms Norah Niland, Chief Human Rights Officer said: "Anti-Government elements remain responsible for the largest proportion of civilian deaths, killing three times as many civilians as pro-Government forces. It is vital that determined efforts are now made by the insurgency to put into effect the Taliban "Code of Conduct" that calls on them to protect the lives of civilians.

"Civilian deaths caused by the armed opposition increased by 41 per cent between 2008 and 2009 from 1,160 to 1,630. Suicide attacks and improvised explosive devices caused more civilian casualties than any other tactic killing 1,054 civilians last year. Civilians are also being deliberately assassinated, abducted and executed if they are perceived as being supportive of, or associated with, the Government or the international community.

"At the same time during 2009 we saw a reduction in the number of civilian casualties caused by pro-Government forces by 28 per cent between 2008 and 2009. This decrease reflects measures taken by international military forces to reduce the risk posed by military operations on the civilian population.

"However despite positive trends, actions by pro-Government forces continued to take an adverse toll on civilians; we recorded 359 civilians killed during aerial attacks, which constitute 61 per cent of the number of civilian deaths attributed to pro-Government forces. International and Afghan security forces also conducted a large

number of search and seizure operations. These often involved excessive use of force, destruction of property and cultural insensitivity, particularly towards women.”

The UN mission also expressed concern on the location of military bases that are situated within, or close to, areas where civilians are concentrated saying that such bases increased the risks faced by civilians. Ms Niland underlined that all parties to the conflict have an obligation to avoid locating military assets, including personnel, in areas that put civilians at risk.

Ms Niland continued to say: “2009 has proven to be the worst year since the fall of the Taliban regime for civilians caught up in the armed conflict. The conflict has intensified and spread into areas that were previously considered safe.

“Ensuring the safety and welfare of the civilian population must come first. Anti-Government elements must realize that they too have obligations under international law while pro-Government forces must step up efforts to ensure that every measure is taken to protect civilians during the conduct of military operations. The United Nations calls for international law to be respected to minimise the impact of the conflict on civilians as we begin 2010.”

Notes to Editors

- The report on the protection of civilians in armed conflict in Afghanistan in 2009 is compiled in pursuance of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) mandate under United Nations Security Council Resolution 1868 (2009). Full copies of the report are available at <http://unama.unmissions.org>
- UNAMA Human Rights undertakes a range of activities aimed at minimizing the impact of the conflict on civilians; this includes independent and impartial monitoring of incidents involving loss of life or injury to civilians and analysis of trends to identify the circumstances in which loss of life occurs.
- UNAMA Human Rights officers, deployed across Afghanistan, utilize a broad range of techniques to gather information on specific cases irrespective of location or who may be responsible. Such information is cross-checked and analyzed, with a range of diverse sources, for credibility and reliability to the satisfaction of the Human Rights officer conducting the investigation, before details are recorded in a dedicated database.
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