

# **AFGHANISTAN**

## **MIDYEAR REPORT 2015**

### **PROTECTION OF CIVILIANS IN ARMED CONFLICT**

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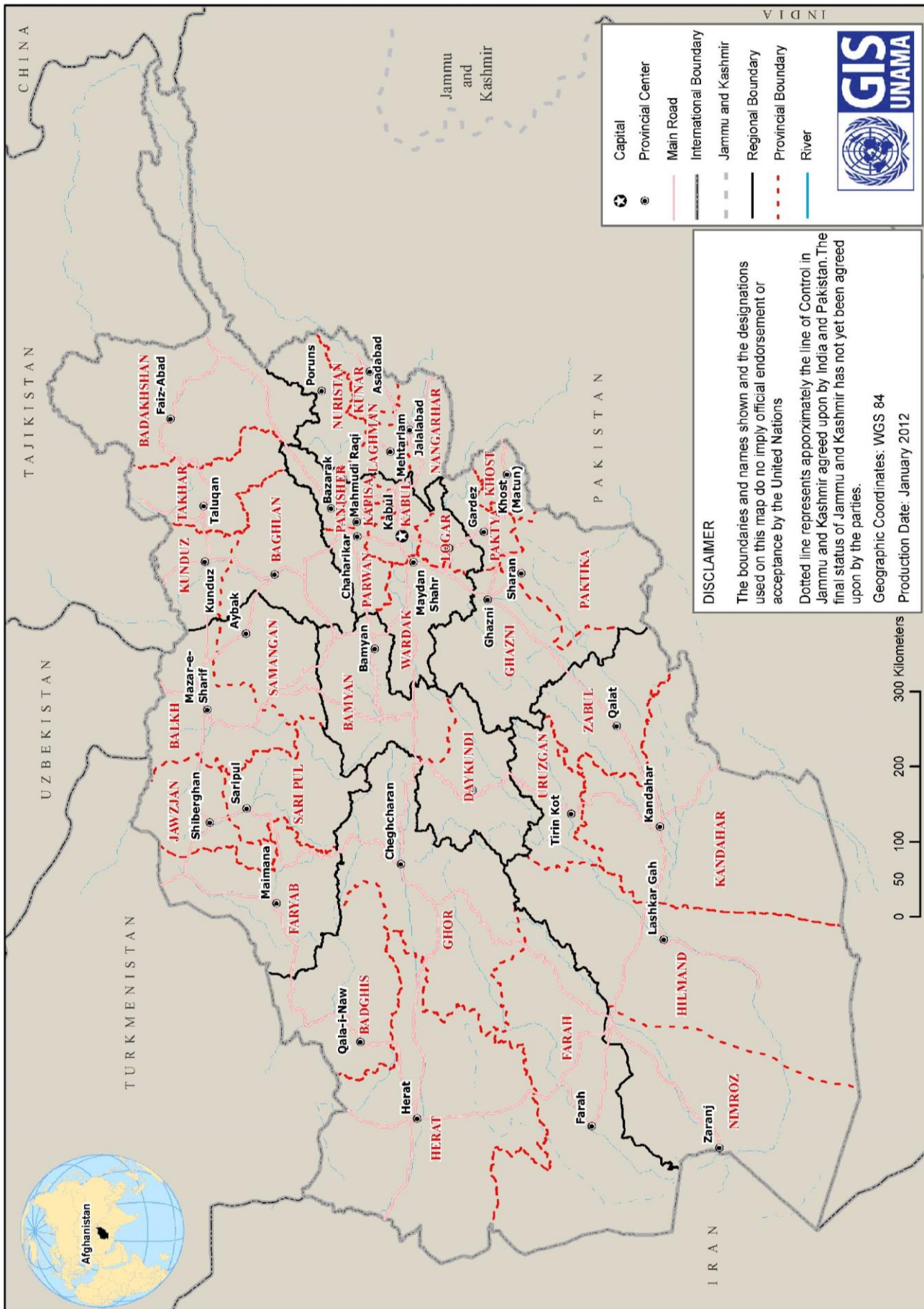
**United Nations Assistance Mission  
in Afghanistan**



**United Nations Office of the High  
Commissioner for Human Rights**

**Kabul, Afghanistan  
August 2015**

# AFGHANISTAN ADMINISTRATIVE DIVISION



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Photo on Front Cover © 2015/Reuters. A man assists an injured child following a suicide attack launched by Anti-Government Elements on 18 April 2015, in Jalalabad city, Nangarhar province, which caused 158 civilian casualties (32 deaths and 126 injured, including five children).

Photo taken on 18 April 2015.

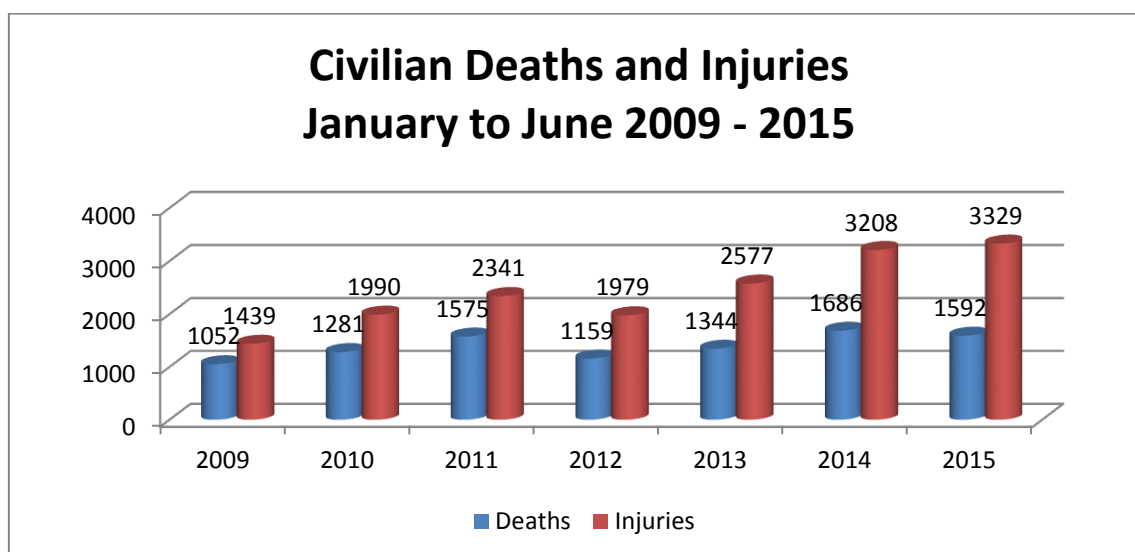
UNAMA documented a 78 per cent increase in civilian casualties attributed to Anti-Government Elements from complex and suicide attacks in the first half of 2015.

## Executive Summary

*“I was walking down the street when a suicide bomber attacked customers in lined up to enter the New Kabul Bank. I remember seeing the blast and the fire, and was knocked to the ground. I had wounds on my face and stomach and my legs were bleeding. When I tried to stand, I could not get up. That is when I noticed all the blood, the human limbs, the corpses, and the other wounded people all over the street. It was terrible. I have seven daughters and a son. Death does not frighten me, but if I die, what will happen to my children?”<sup>1</sup>*

-- A school teacher wounded in a suicide attack on 18 April 2015 in Jalalabad city, Nangarhar province, that caused 158 civilian casualties (32 deaths and 126 injured, including five children).

In the first six months of 2015, civilians increasingly suffered the consequences of the armed conflict in Afghanistan. Between 1 January and 30 June 2015,<sup>2</sup> UNAMA documented 4,921 civilian casualties (1,592 civilians deaths and 3,329 injured), marking a six per cent decrease in civilian deaths and four per cent increase in civilians injured. These figures amount to an overall one per cent increase in civilian casualties compared to the first six months of 2014,<sup>3</sup> and the highest number of total civilian casualties compared to the same period in previous years. Between 1 January 2009 and 30 June 2015, UNAMA recorded 52,653 civilian casualties (19,368 deaths and 33,285 injured).



The thousands of civilians killed and injured from conflict-related violence in the first six month of 2015 demonstrate the continued failure of parties to the conflict to protect

<sup>1</sup> UNAMA interview with a victim in the Jalalabad Public Health Hospital on 26 April 2015, Jalalabad city, Nangarhar province.

<sup>2</sup> This 2015 Mid-Year Report on Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict compares data from the first six months of 2015 with data from the first six months of 2014. The same six-month period in a given year is used to enable a more accurate comparative analysis of fighting seasons year on year.

<sup>3</sup> Between 1 January and 30 June 2014, UNAMA documented 4,894 civilian casualties (1,686 deaths and 3,208 injured).

civilians from harm. UNAMA reiterates that international humanitarian law requires all parties to the conflict to take robust and meaningful measures to protect the civilian population. Ground engagements between parties to the conflict continued to cause the highest number of civilian casualties, followed by improvised explosive devices (IEDs), although UNAMA documented overall decreases in civilian casualties resulting from both incident types.

The rise in overall civilian casualties in the first six months of 2015 mainly stemmed from an increase in complex<sup>4</sup> and suicide attacks and a rise in targeted and deliberate killings by Anti-Government Elements. Complex and suicide attacks – often in civilian-populated areas – nearly overtook IEDs as the second leading cause of civilian casualties. Despite being the fourth leading cause of total civilian casualties – deaths and injuries combined – targeted killings became the leading cause of civilian deaths in the first six months of 2015.

### **Attribution of Responsibility for Civilian Casualties**

UNAMA attributed 70 per cent of all civilian casualties to Anti-Government Elements<sup>5</sup> and 16 per cent to Pro-Government Forces<sup>6</sup> (15 per cent to Afghan national security forces and pro-Government armed groups and one per cent to international military forces). Ten per cent of all civilian casualties resulted from ground engagements between Anti-Government Elements and Afghan national security forces in which the civilian casualties could not be attributed to a specific party. UNAMA attributed four per cent<sup>7</sup> of civilian casualties to unattributed explosive remnants of war<sup>8</sup>.

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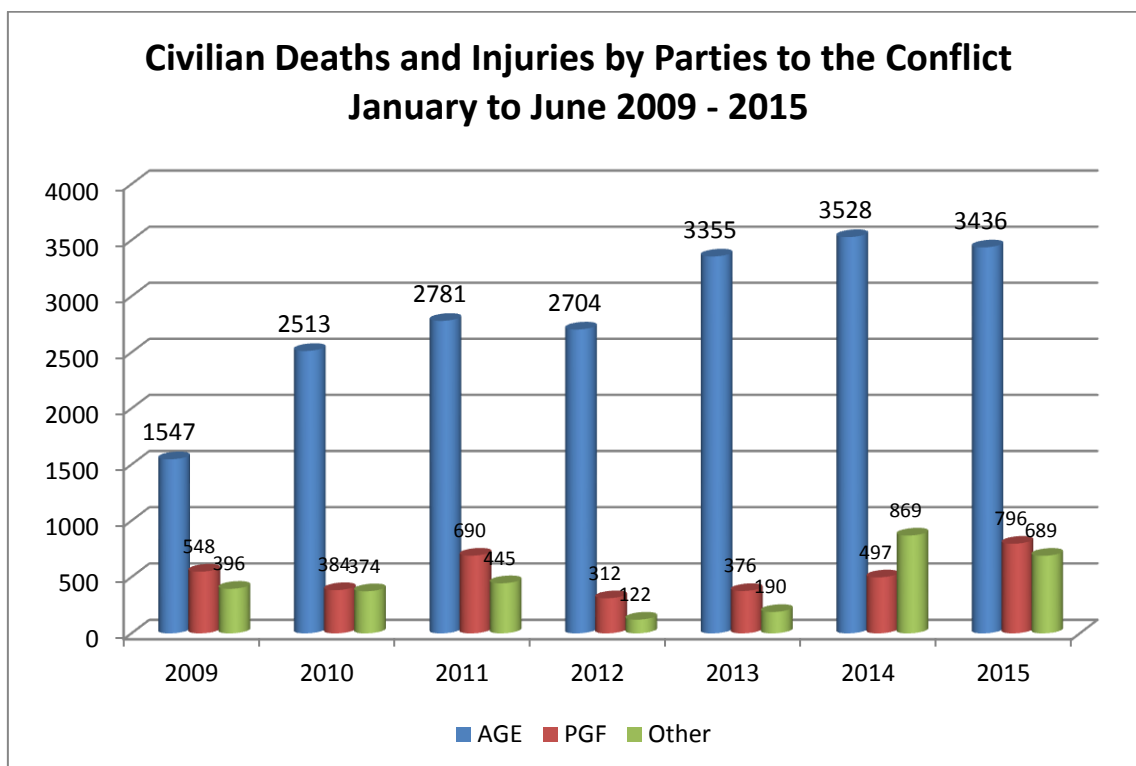
<sup>4</sup> UNAMA definition of ‘complex attack’ refers to a deliberate and coordinated attack which includes a suicide device (i.e., BBIED, VBIED), more than one attacker and more than one type of device (i.e., BBIED AND mortars). All three elements must be present for an attack to be considered complex.

<sup>5</sup> Anti-Government Elements encompass all individuals and armed groups involved in armed conflict with or armed opposition against the Government of Afghanistan and/or international military forces. They include those who identify as ‘Taliban’ as well as individuals and non-State organised armed groups taking a direct part in hostilities and assuming a variety of labels including the Haqqani Network, Hezb-e-Islami, Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, Islamic Jihad Union, Lashkari Tayyiba, Jaysh Muhammed, groups identified as ‘Daesh’ and other militia and armed groups pursuing political, ideological or economic objectives including armed criminal groups directly engaged in hostile acts on behalf of a party to the conflict.

<sup>6</sup> The term “pro-government forces” includes Afghan Government’s national security forces and other forces and groups that act in military or paramilitary counter-insurgency operations and are directly or indirectly under the control of the Government of Afghanistan. These forces include, but are not limited to, the Afghan National Army, Afghan National Police, Afghan Border Police, National Directorate of Security and Afghan Local Police which operate under Government legal structures, and Pro-Government local defense forces and militias which have no basis in Afghan law and do not operate under formal Government structures. This term also includes international military forces and other foreign intelligence and security forces. See the glossary section for further details.

<sup>7</sup> UNAMA attributed less than half of one per cent to cross-border shelling from Pakistan into Afghanistan

<sup>8</sup> Unattributed explosive remnants of war where the responsible party could not be determined or the UXO resulted from a previous conflict.



Between 1 January and 30 June, UNAMA documented 3,436 civilian casualties (1,213 deaths and 2,223 injured) from operations and attacks carried out by all Anti-Government Elements a three per cent decrease from the same period in 2014<sup>9</sup>. UNAMA documented a 78 per cent increase in civilian casualties attributed to Anti-Government Elements from complex and suicide attacks and a 57 per cent increase in civilian casualties from targeted killings. Targeted killings became the leading cause of civilian deaths in the first six months of 2015. UNAMA documented a 46 per cent reduction in civilian casualties attributed to Anti-Government Elements resulting from ground engagements and a 21 per cent decrease in civilian casualties from improvised explosive devices (IEDs). The decrease during this period may stem from the absence of attacks targeting the electoral process; during the same period in 2014, UNAMA documented high numbers of civilian casualties around the presidential and run-off elections carried out in April and June 2014.

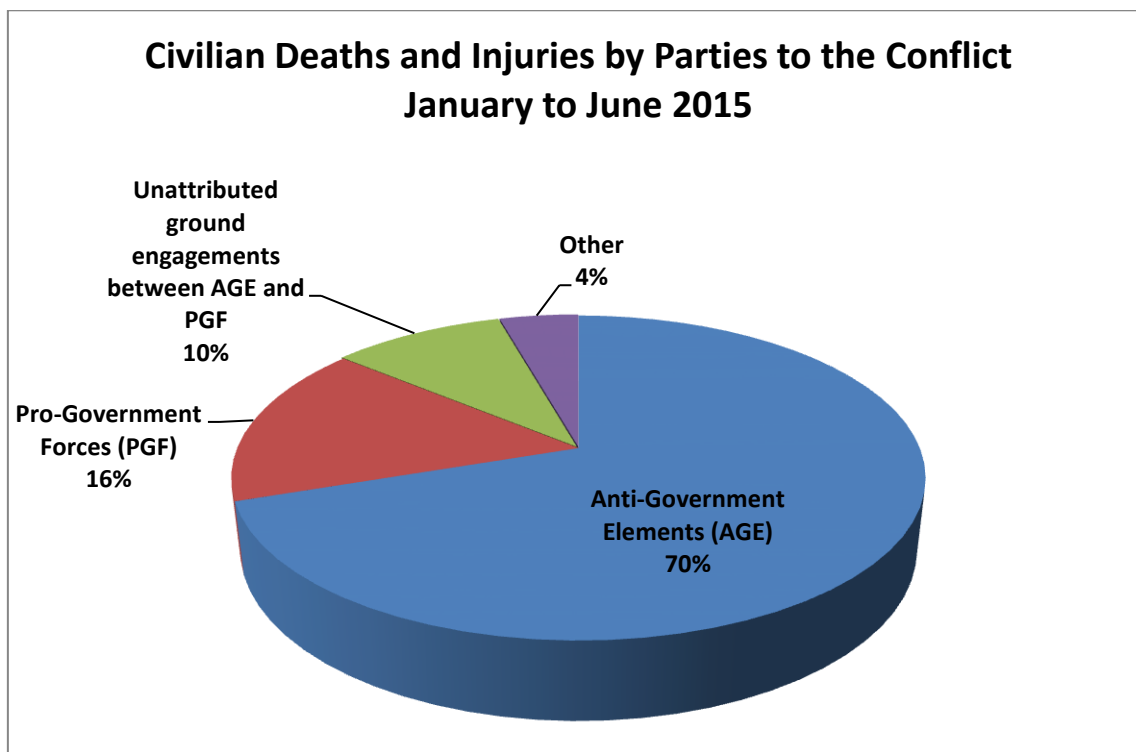
Pro-Government Forces – in particular Afghan national security forces – continued to cause increasing numbers of civilian casualties in the first six months of 2015. UNAMA documented 796 civilian casualties (234 deaths and 562 injured) caused by Pro-Government Forces, a 60 per cent increase compared to the same period in 2014.<sup>10</sup> The majority of civilian casualties caused by Pro-Government Forces occurred during ground

<sup>9</sup> In the first six months of 2014, UNAMA attributed 3,528 civilian casualties (1,242 deaths and 2,286 injured) to all Anti-Government Elements groups.

<sup>10</sup> Between 1 January and 30 June 2014, UNAMA documented 497 civilian casualties (206 deaths and 291 injured) caused by Pro-Government Forces.



engagements, primarily from the use of explosive weapons such as mortars, rockets, and grenades. In the first six months of 2015, Pro-Government Forces caused more civilian casualties than Anti-Government Elements during ground engagements.



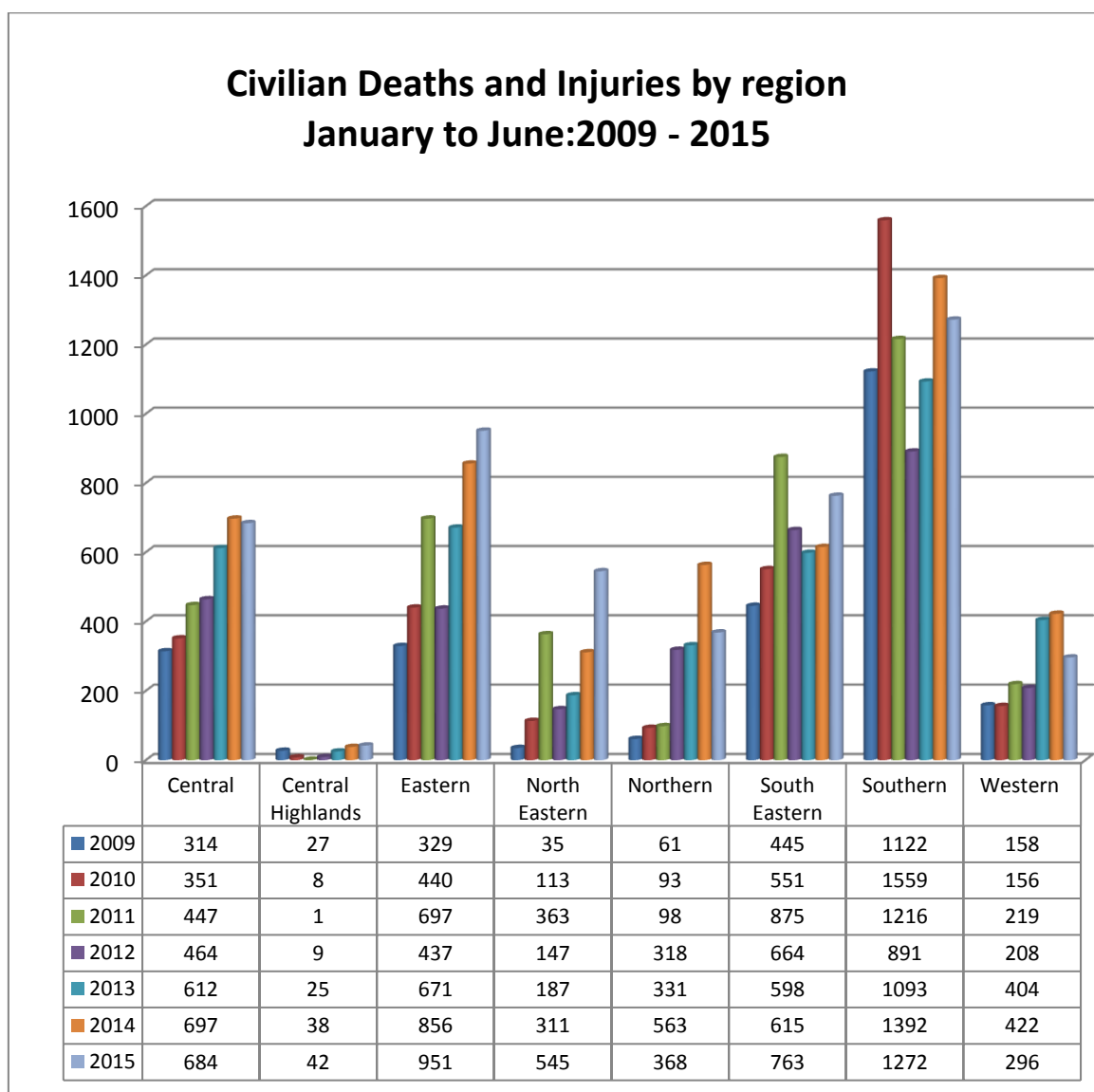
### Civilian casualties resulting from attacks claimed by the Taliban

Of the 3,436 civilian casualties attributed to Anti-Government Elements, the Taliban claimed responsibility for 239 incidents that caused 1,002 civilian casualties (259 killed deaths and 743 injured). These casualties include only those civilian deaths and injuries resulting from attacks publicly claimed by the Taliban on their website or Twitter.<sup>11</sup> The 1,002 civilian casualties amount to a 105 per cent increase in civilian deaths and injuries from Taliban-claimed incidents compared to the same period in 2014.<sup>12</sup> Civilian casualties from incidents claimed by the Taliban accounted for 20 per cent of all civilian casualties. Of the 70 per cent of civilian casualties attributed to Anti-Government Elements, the civilian deaths and injuries resulting from incidents claimed by the Taliban accounted for 29 per cent of total civilian casualties.

<sup>11</sup> Those civilian casualties attributed by UNAMA to the Taliban, for which the Taliban made no claim of responsibility, are included under the umbrella term Anti-Government Elements.

<sup>12</sup> The 105 per cent increase in civilian casualties from incidents publicly claimed by the Taliban does not necessarily mean that civilian deaths and injuries caused by Taliban have more than doubled. The statistic reflects that more attacks causing civilian casualties were claimed by the Taliban. In the first six months of 2015, the Taliban publicly claimed responsibility for 239 attacks which resulted in civilian casualties; in the same period 2014, the Taliban publicly claimed 136 attacks with civilian casualties.

More than half of the civilian casualties in Taliban-claimed attacks resulted from complex and suicide attacks targeting civilian objects or military targets in civilian-populated areas. Taliban-claimed attacks also included the deliberate targeting of individual civilians, indiscriminate IED attacks, and civilians injured or killed during Taliban-launched attacks on Afghan security forces.



### Women and Children

The conflict also took an increasingly abhorrent toll on women and children in the first six months of 2015. Although UNAMA recorded a one per cent increase in overall civilian casualties, the mission documented a 23 per cent increase in women casualties (559 women casualties, comprising 164 deaths and 395 injuries) and a 13 per cent increase in child casualties (1,270, comprising 320 deaths and 950 injuries).

Following trends documented in the UNAMA 2014 Midyear and Annual Reports on Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, women and child casualties continued to increase at a higher rate than the general population in the first half of 2015. Women casualties accounted for 11 per cent of all civilian casualties in the first half of the year, up from nine per cent in the same period of 2014, while children accounted for 26 per cent of all civilian casualties, up from 23 per cent in the first half of 2014.

### **Ground Engagements Leading Cause of Civilian Casualties in 2015**

Between 1 January and 30 June 2015, UNAMA documented 1,577 civilian casualties (379 deaths and 1,198 injured) from ground engagements, a 19 per cent decrease compared to the same period in 2014. UNAMA notes with concern that in the first six months of 2015, Pro-Government Forces and Anti-Government Elements have caused an approximately equal number of civilian casualties during ground engagements.

The decrease during this period may stem from the absence of attacks targeting the electoral process; during the same period in 2014, UNAMA documented high numbers of civilian casualties around the presidential and run-off elections carried out in April and June 2014. UNAMA notes that during the first six months of 2014, ground engagements initiated by Anti-Government Elements targeting Independent Election Commission convoys, polling centres, and electoral candidates and their supporters during the election period resulted in 380 civilian casualties (74 deaths and 306 injured).<sup>13</sup>

Despite the decrease, ground engagements remained the leading cause of civilian casualties in the first half of the year, accounting for 32 per cent of all civilians killed and injured during this period.

In 2015, Afghan national security forces significantly increased the number of ground operations conducted in order to support the process of government formation and counter attacks launched by Anti-Government Elements. This resulted in a rise in civilian deaths and injuries attributed to Pro-Government Forces during ground engagements. In the first six months of 2015, Pro-Government Forces caused more civilian casualties than Anti-Government Elements in ground engagements: UNAMA documented 580 civilian casualties (143 deaths and 437 injured) from ground engagements attributed to Pro-Government Forces, an 85 per cent increase compared to the first six months of 2014 and accounting for 37 per cent of all civilian casualties resulting from ground engagements.

The increase in civilian casualties attributed to Pro-Government Forces resulted largely from their use of mortar, rockets, and grenades in civilian populated areas - UNAMA observed that 88 per cent of all civilian casualties caused by Pro-Government Forces

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<sup>13</sup> In the first six months of 2014, UNAMA documented 674 civilian casualties (173 deaths and 501 injured) resulting from attacks against the electoral process, from all incident types, the vast majority of which UNAMA attributed to Anti-Government Elements.

during ground engagements resulted from the use of indirect weapons<sup>14</sup> during fighting, in particular, mortars which have a wide impact area. UNAMA documented instances where the use of indirect weapons in populated environments had an indiscriminate and severe humanitarian impact on civilians. The United Nations' Secretary-General has urged parties to conflict to refrain from using explosive weapons with a wide-area impact in densely populated areas.<sup>15</sup>

Anti-Government Elements caused 512 civilian casualties (137 deaths and 375 injured) during ground engagements, a decrease of 46 per cent, accounting for 32 per cent of all civilian casualties from ground engagements. As noted above, this decrease occurred following the completion of the electoral process in 2014.

In 30 per cent of civilian deaths and injuries from ground engagements – mainly cross fire incidents - UNAMA attributed casualties to both Anti-Government Elements and Pro-Government Forces.

The remaining one per cent of civilian casualties from ground engagements was attributed to cross-border shelling.

### **Decreased Civilian Casualties from Improvised Explosive Devices**

For the first time since its 2012 Midyear Report on Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, UNAMA recorded a decrease in civilian casualties caused by IEDs. Between 1 January and 30 June 2015, the mission documented 1,108 civilian casualties (385 deaths and 723 injured) from IEDs, a 21 per cent decrease<sup>16</sup> in total civilian casualties caused from IEDs compared to the same period in 2014.<sup>17</sup> Despite the decrease, IEDs still caused the second highest number of civilian casualties (22 per cent) in the first six months of 2015.

UNAMA notes with concern that civilian deaths and injuries continued to increase from the use of illegal pressure plate IEDs<sup>18</sup> during the first half of 2015.<sup>19</sup> UNAMA

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<sup>14</sup> Indirect fire weapons, such as mortars, rockets and grenades are high explosive weapons systems which fire projectiles to a location without a direct line of visibility to the target. Mortars cannot be guided to hit a specific target and have a wide-area of impact; when used in civilian-populated areas the risk of civilian casualties is very high.

<sup>15</sup> See United Nations Secretary-General Report on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, S/2012/376.

<sup>16</sup> UNAMA notes that these figures do not include civilian casualties from IEDs used in complex and suicide attacks, which are recorded separately due to the distinct nature of complex and suicide attacks. Counted together, combined IED tactics accounted for 43 per cent of all civilian casualties in the first half of 2015: 2,130 civilian casualties (568 deaths and 1,562 injured) – an eight per cent increase compared to the same period in 2014.

<sup>17</sup> Between 1 January and 30 June 2014, UNAMA documented 1,407 civilian casualties (477 deaths and 930 injured) from IEDs.

<sup>18</sup> Afghanistan has ratified the 1997 *Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on their Destruction* ('Ottawa Convention' or the Mine Ban Treaty). This treaty prohibits the use of factory-made anti-personnel mines and victim-activated IEDs, such as PP-IEDs. The definition of 'mine' in the Convention encompasses IEDs to the extent that they are designed to be placed under, or near the ground or other surface area and to be exploded by the presence, proximity or contact of a person or vehicle.

documented 506 civilian casualties (251 deaths and 255 injured) from the use of such devices by Anti-Government Elements, a 38 per cent increase compared to the same period in 2014. Pressure plate IEDs caused nearly half (46 per cent) of all civilian casualties from IEDs in the first half of 2015.

UNAMA notes that the reduction in civilian casualties from IEDs does not necessarily reflect that Anti-Government Elements are using less IEDs. Some of the reduction in casualties from IEDs may be attributed to the increasing ability of Afghan security forces to detect and make safe IEDs. Over 5,000 IEDs, with the potential to cause enormous harm to civilians, were cleared in the first six months of 2015.<sup>20</sup>

### **Increased Civilian Casualties from Suicide and Complex Attacks**

In the first six months of 2015, complex and suicide attacks nearly overtook IEDs as the second leading cause of civilian casualties, causing 21 per cent of all civilian casualties. Complex and suicide attacks launched by Anti-Government Elements caused 1,022 civilian casualties (183 deaths and 839 injured), a 78 per cent increase compared to the same period in 2014. The Taliban claimed responsibility for 27 of the 44 documented complex and suicide attacks, resulting in 542 civilian casualties (87 deaths and 455 injured), a 167 per cent increase in civilian casualties from Taliban-claimed complex and suicide attacks.<sup>21</sup>

### **Targeted Killings Cause more Afghan Civilian Deaths than any other Tactic**

Civilian casualties from targeted killings increased by 57 per cent in the first six months of 2015, causing 699 civilian casualties (440 deaths and 259 injured) and accounting for 14 per cent of all civilian casualties in the first half of the year. Although ground engagements, IEDs, and complex and suicide attacks caused more overall civilian casualties (combined death and injuries) in the first half of 2015, targeted killings caused more deaths than any other tactic – 440 deaths, representing 28 per cent of all 1,592 documented civilian deaths. UNAMA attributed 94 per cent of all civilian casualties from targeted killings to Anti-Government Elements.

### **Increase in Civilian Abductions and Rising Killed and Injured Civilian Hostages**

From 1 January to 30 June 2015, UNAMA documented 196 abduction incidents, almost all carried out by Anti-Government Elements, which resulted in 76 civilian casualties (62 deaths and 14 injured) marking a 37 per cent increase in the number of such incidents and a 117 per cent increase in casualties related to abductions compared to the same

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<sup>19</sup> Between 1 January and 31 December 2014, UNAMA documented 775 civilian casualties (417 deaths and 358 injured), a 39 per cent increase in civilian casualties from pressure plate IEDs compared to 2013. See, UNAMA 2014 Annual Report on Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, page 48.

<sup>20</sup> Email from NATO/ RS UNCLASSIFIED Re: UNAMA, Resolute Support Mission Response to UNAMA – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, received 29 July 2015.

<sup>21</sup> Between 1 January and 30 June 2014, the Taliban claimed responsibility for 20 suicide and complex attacks that caused 203 civilian casualties (76 deaths and 127 injured).

period in 2014.<sup>22</sup> Anti-Government Elements perpetrated 190 of the 196 incidents of civilian abductions documented by UNAMA, causing 75 out of 76 civilian casualties. UNAMA attributed six incidents to Pro-Government Forces.

UNAMA documented abductions of civilians by Anti-Government Elements for financial gain, to intimidate the population or to extract concessions from other parties to the conflict, including exchange of hostages. Moreover, UNAMA documented a growing number of abductees killed by their captors because of failure to comply with demands, to maintain authority over other abductees, or because the aim of the abduction was to kill the victim.

Both the number of abductions and the number of resulting civilian casualties are the highest recorded by UNAMA since it started documenting such incidents systematically in 2009 and accounted for two per cent of all civilian casualties in the first six months of 2015.

### **Rising Civilian Casualties from Aerial Operations**

From 1 January to 30 June 2015, UNAMA documented 77 civilian casualties (32 deaths and 45 injured) from aerial operations by both international military forces and Afghan national security forces, an 88 per cent increase compared to the same period in 2014. This reverses the trend of decrease consistently documented in previous years. Civilian casualties caused by aerial operations accounted for two per cent of all civilian casualties.

Of the 77 civilian casualties, UNAMA attributed 49 (27 deaths and 22 injured) to international military forces. While recognizing the ongoing measures taken by international security to reduce civilian casualties resulting from aerial operations, this represents a 23 per cent increase in civilian casualties caused by international military forces aerial operations,<sup>23</sup> most of them UAV strikes, reversing the downward trend previously documented by UNAMA.<sup>24</sup>

Between 1 January and 30 June 2015, UNAMA documented 28 civilian casualties (five deaths and 23 injured) in 10 separate incidents of aerial operations carried out by the Afghan Air Force (AAF). The AAF, a branch of the ANA, took on primary responsibility for close air support and offensive aerial operations in support of Afghan national security forces in Afghanistan at the beginning of 2015.

### **Other Tactics Causing Harm to Civilians**

Explosive remnants of war (ERW) which could not be attributed to a specific party to the conflict caused four per cent of total civilian casualties. ERW were disproportionately

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<sup>22</sup> Between 1 January and 30 June 2014, UNAMA documented 143 incidents of abduction resulting in 35 civilian casualties (27 deaths and eight injured).

<sup>23</sup> Between 1 January and 30 June 2014, UNAMA documented 40 civilian casualties (27 deaths and 13 injured) from international military forces aerial operations.

<sup>24</sup> See, UNAMA 2014 Midyear Report on Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, pages 59-60.

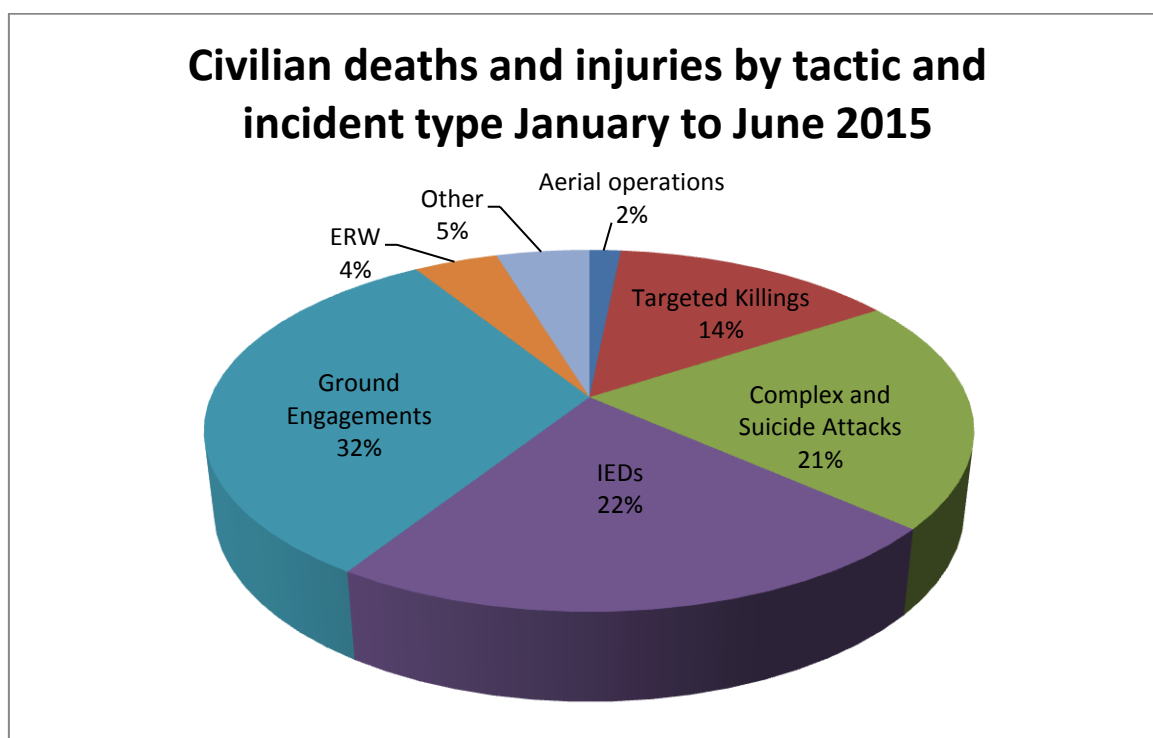
harmful to children - 83 per cent of ERW victims were Afghan children. The remaining three per cent of civilian casualties resulted from parallel justice structure summary executions by Anti-Government Elements, force protection incidents, and other killings and ill-treatment of civilians by parties to the conflict.

### Human Rights Abuses by Pro-Government Armed Groups

Between 1 January and 30 June 2015, UNAMA continued to document increasing civilian casualties caused by pro-Government armed groups. UNAMA recorded 87 civilian casualties (31 deaths and 56 injured) from 69 separate incidents involving pro-Government armed groups, up 118 per cent from the same period in 2014. As a result of ground engagements, targeted killings, and beatings and ill-treatment, pro-Government armed groups caused two per cent of all civilian casualties in the first half of 2015.

### Conflict-Related Displacement

Afghanistan's Task Force on Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs)<sup>25</sup> recorded approximately 103,000 civilians displaced by the armed conflict in the first six months of 2015 – a 44 per cent increase compared to the same period in 2014. As of 16 July 2015, the total number of IDPs in Afghanistan was estimated to exceed 945,600.<sup>26</sup>



<sup>25</sup> The IDP Task Force is co-chaired by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the Afghan Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation. It constitutes the primary mechanism through which conflict-related IDPs are profiled and provided with assistance. The most recent figures available at the time of this report cover the period from 1 January to 30 June 2015.

<sup>26</sup> Figures provided by UNHCR. Information received by email on 21 July 2015.

## Observations

The first half of 2015 saw multiple trends converge, resulting in increasing harm to the civilian population. While civilian casualties from the two leading causes of civilian casualties – ground engagements and IEDs – decreased in the first half of the year, targeted killings became the leading cause of civilian deaths and civilian increasingly suffered from complex and suicide attacks launched by Anti-Government Elements. Despite the overall decrease in civilian casualties from ground engagements, Pro-Government Forces caused increasing numbers of civilian deaths and injuries during ground engagements and aerial operations. In addition, increased fighting between rival Anti-Government Elements groups and the emergence of new groups posed additional threats to the civilian population of Afghanistan.

The Taliban and other Anti-Government Elements continued to push for territorial gains and increasingly advanced toward major population centres, including district centres and one major city (Kunduz). While peace negotiations between the Government of Afghanistan and the Taliban gained some momentum, this bore little or no impact on Taliban efforts for increased control of territory: the Taliban and other Anti-Government Elements conducted an aggressive campaign during the first half of 2015. While UNAMA notes some precautions by Anti-Government Elements in the conduct of hostilities – UNAMA documented a reduction in civilian casualties from Anti-Government Elements during ground engagement - the Taliban and other groups continued to launch complex and suicide attacks and carry out targeted killings of civilians. These acts, presumably aimed at undermining Government authority ahead of any final settlement, caused extreme harm to the civilian population.

Although civilian casualties from IEDs decreased overall, Anti-Government Elements increasingly used illegal pressure-plate IEDs as a defensive weapon to slow or prevent the advancement of Afghan national security forces before, during, and after ground engagements, driving an increase in civilian casualties from this type of IED.

Between 1 January and 30 June, Afghan national security forces conducted most operations independently of international military forces and increasingly used close air support from the Afghan Air Force (AAF). Afghan national security forces continued to use indirect weapons (mortars, rockets, grenades, artillery) resulting in significant harm to civilians. The counter-offensives launched by Afghan national security forces relied on the use of mortars, rockets, grenades, artillery, and armed helicopters, often resulting in significant numbers of civilian casualties. UNAMA also observed the continued use of Pro-Government armed groups to support regular Afghan national security forces, particularly in the northeastern region. UNAMA observed that the Afghan national security forces caused fewer civilian casualties than Anti-Government Elements when they initiated pre-planned operations, such as *Operation Zulfikar* centred in Sangin district, Helmand province. By contrast, Afghan national security forces caused the majority of civilian casualties during operations to counter Taliban and Anti-Government Elements advances in Kunduz province.



Apparent dissention within and between Anti-Government Element groups, including over the peace process, contributed to the emergence of groups pledging allegiance to the terrorist organization known as 'Daesh'<sup>27</sup> (self-identified as Islamic State (IS)) and infighting between Anti-Government Element groups, notably in Nangarhar province. UNAMA also observed that the emergence of groups claiming to be affiliated with Daesh raises serious concerns for the civilian population. UNAMA documented instances of beheading and other executions of civilians by groups associated with Daesh in Nangarhar province. Fighting between rival Anti-Government Element groups, principally between Taliban fighters and those claiming allegiance to Daesh, also resulted in civilian casualties and population displacement. UNAMA is concerned that civilians in those areas are caught between multiple fighting parties and may suffer further as these groups attempt to emulate more extreme tactics employed by Daesh-affiliated groups in other countries.

In this context, UNAMA reinforces its call on all parties to the conflict to take concrete actions to prevent civilian casualties, in compliance with their obligations under international humanitarian law. Anti-Government Elements in particular must stop conducting complex and suicide attacks against civilian targets and conducting attacks in civilian-populated areas. Anti-Government Elements must immediately cease the targeted killing of civilians and stop using illegal, indiscriminate pressure plate IEDs.

All parties, including Afghan national security forces, must take all feasible precautions to prevent civilian casualties in their military operations, and cease the use of heavy and indirect fire weapons in civilian-populated areas. UNAMA once again calls upon all parties to the conflict to ensure accountability for those armed forces and individuals deliberately and indiscriminately killing and injuring civilians.

UNAMA offers the following recommendations to the parties to the conflict to support their efforts to protect civilians and civilian communities, prevent civilian casualties, and uphold their obligations under international humanitarian law and international human rights law.

## **Recommendations**

### **Anti-Government Elements**

In compliance with obligations under international humanitarian law:

- Cease the deliberate targeting of civilians and civilian locations, including places of worship and culture, civilian Government offices and aid workers.
- Cease carrying out indiscriminate and disproportionate attacks.
- Cease firing mortars, rockets and grenades from and into civilian-populated

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<sup>27</sup> Groups affiliated with the Islamic State are referred to by the Arabic acronym "Daesh" in Afghanistan, although in some parts of the country the term is used to refer to any foreign fighter regardless of their allegiance.

areas.

- Cease the use of IEDs, particularly in complex and suicide attacks, in all areas frequented by civilians, and stop using illegal pressure-plate IEDs.
- Apply a definition of ‘civilian(s)’ that is consistent with international humanitarian law, and comply with the principles of distinction, proportionality and precautions in all military operations.
- Enforce statements by the Taliban leadership that prohibit attacks against civilians and attacks in civilian-populated areas; implement directives ordering Taliban members to prevent and avoid civilian casualties and hold accountable those members who target, kill and injure civilians.
- Uphold statements by the Taliban leadership regarding the human rights of women and girls in areas under Taliban influence; cease attacks and threats against girls’ education, teachers, and the education sector in general.
- Ensure that fighters do not use schools, hospitals, clinics, and other protected sites for military purposes.
- Cease attacks, threats, and disruption to polio vaccinators and polio vaccination campaigns.

### **Government of Afghanistan**

- Cease firing mortars, rockets and grenades into civilian-populated areas.
- Develop and approve a national policy on civilian casualty mitigation backed by an action plan with concrete objectives to prevent civilian casualties in the conduct of hostilities; enhance efforts to protect civilians from conflict-related harm by developing and implementing clear tactical directives, rules of engagement and other procedures, in particular in relation to the use of mortars, rockets, grenades, artillery, and armed aircraft, and by training and resourcing all Afghan national security forces on civilian protection measures, mitigation, accountability, and compensation for victims.
- Disband and disarm all armed groups and militias, and ensure accountability for those members of armed groups who are found to be responsible for human rights abuses.
- Prioritize the further capacity development of Afghan national security forces to command, control and effectively conduct counter-IED operations and IED-disposal, including exploitation. Dedicate all necessary resources to ensure the full implementation of the national counter-IED strategy.
- Develop policies and procedures to ensure the marking and clearance of unexploded ordnance from the battlefield following ground engagements.

- Investigate all allegations of violations of international humanitarian and human rights law and human rights abuses by Afghan national security forces and pro-Government armed groups; prosecute and punish those found responsible as required under Afghan and international law; ensure that victims of violations have effective remedy.
- Review and revise procedures in place for compensation to women and families of civilians killed and injured in conflict-related violence and raise public awareness of procedures to obtain compensation and access to basic services.
- Cease the use of schools, hospitals and clinics for military purposes, and ensure respect for medical facilities in particular as neutral facilities.
- Ensure that all parties respect the right of civilians to access to health services, and in particular ensure that all parties do not impair children's access to polio vaccination and other healthcare.

### **International Military Forces**

- Support the Government of Afghanistan in the development of a national policy on civilian casualty mitigation and support the implementation of an action plan to prevent civilian casualties in the conduct of hostilities.
- Continue support from the NATO-led Resolute Support Mission to Afghan national security forces beyond 2015 at the policy, operational and tactical level, to ensure Afghan forces are sufficiently resourced, trained and equipped in the current operational context, noting in particular the need for appropriate protocols, training, and civilian casualty mitigation measures in relation to use of indirect fire weapons and armed aircraft by Afghan national security forces.
- Continue support to Afghan national security forces to command, control and effectively conduct counter-IED operations and IED-disposal, including exploitation, in 2015-17.
- Continue to take steps to ensure that all international military or foreign intelligence and security forces operating in Afghanistan, either independently or in support to Afghan national security forces, take all necessary measures to protect civilians during ground and aerial operations.
- Continue to ensure transparent post-operation reviews and investigations following allegations of civilian casualties on operations involving international security or intelligence forces, especially regarding UAV strikes; continue to take appropriate steps to ensure accountability, compensation and better operational practice.

