

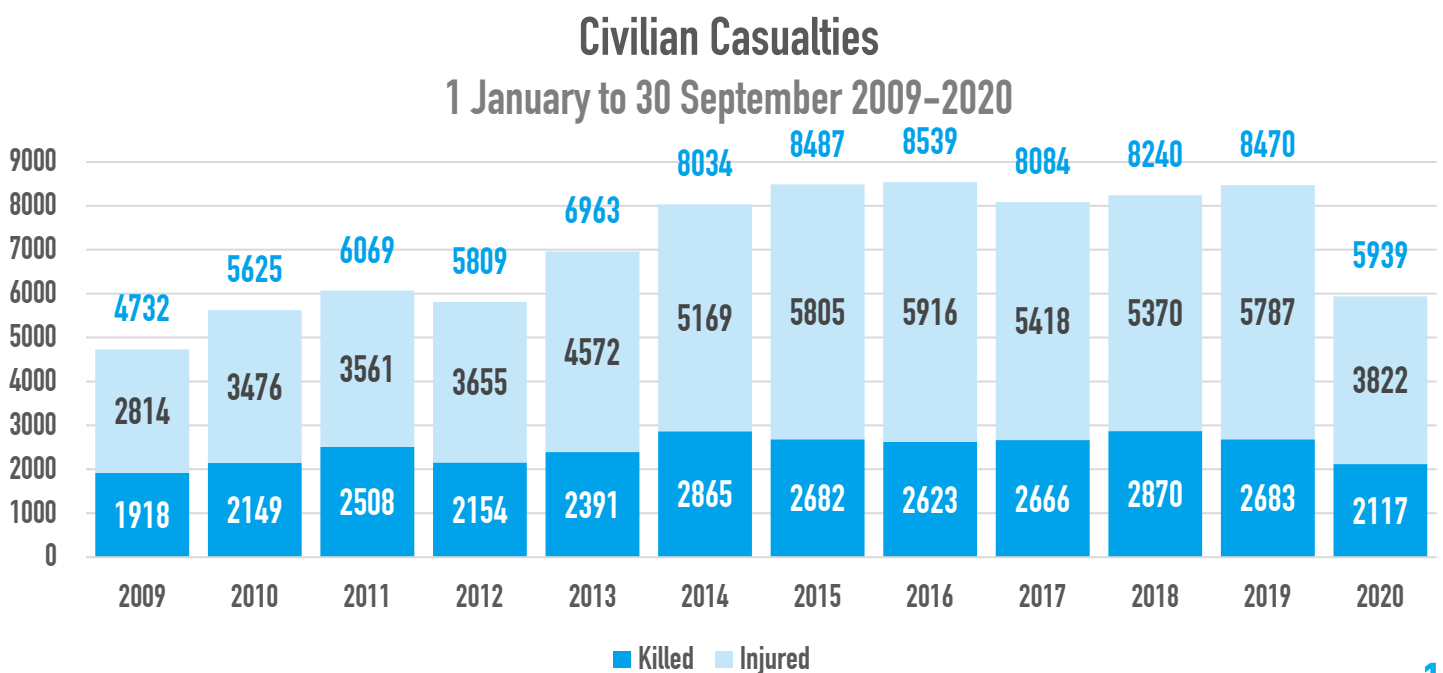
# AFGHANISTAN

## PROTECTION OF CIVILIANS IN ARMED CONFLICT

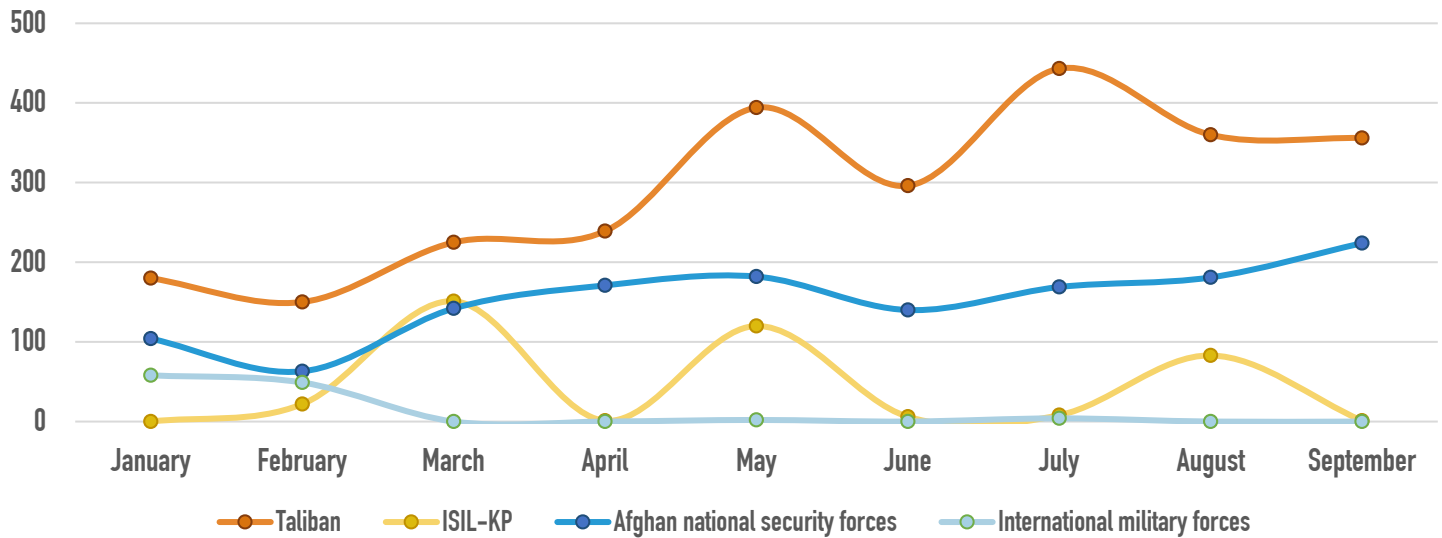
### THIRD QUARTER REPORT: 1 JANUARY TO 30 SEPTEMBER 2020

The UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) documented 5,939 civilian casualties (2,117 killed and 3,822 injured) from 1 January to 30 September 2020. While this represents a 30 per cent reduction in civilian casualties in comparison to the same period in 2019 and the lowest number of civilian casualties in the first nine months of a year since 2012, the conflict in Afghanistan remains one of the deadliest in the world for civilians. The reduction in civilian casualties as compared to the first nine months of 2019 is mainly due to fewer civilian casualties from suicide attacks by Anti-Government Elements and from the steep drop in airstrikes by international military forces since March 2020, resulting in significantly fewer civilian casualties attributed to the Taliban, the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant - Khorasan

Province (ISIL-KP) and international military forces respectively. While the number of civilians injured attributed to Anti-Government Elements dropped significantly, the number of civilians killed remained similar to last year, mainly due to a rise in those attributed to the Taliban. Afghan national security forces caused similar levels of civilian harm in comparison to the first nine months of 2019, mainly during ground engagements, in which the number of civilians killed and injured remained high, and through increased civilian casualties as a result of airstrikes. Of additional concern is the increase in civilians killed and injured attributed to the Afghan National Army during this period. Civilian casualties and the number of incidents attributed to undetermined Anti-Government Elements also



## Civilian Casualty Timeline by Party to the Conflict 1 January to 30 September 2020



increased significantly, indicating that there are more incidents, especially in relation to the use of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and targeted killings, in which UNAMA could not determine which Anti-Government Element group was responsible. This trend corresponds with a decrease in the number of incidents for which the Taliban or ISIL-KP claimed responsibility.

UNAMA welcomes the reduction in civilian casualties, but reiterates that to fully protect civilians from harm, the fighting needs to cease altogether. On 22 September, the United Nations Secretary-General made a renewed push for a global ceasefire by the end of the year in order for the world to focus on the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>1</sup> No related humanitarian ceasefire has materialised thus far in Afghanistan. The Afghan national security forces and the Taliban demonstrated their respective abilities to cease hostilities three times during the first nine months of 2020, protecting many civilians from harm; first observed during the

week leading up to the signing of the 29 February US-Taliban agreement, and subsequently during the three-day ceasefires for both Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha.<sup>2</sup> UNAMA also notes that after the US-Taliban agreement, civilian casualties from airstrikes by international military forces and search operations by National Directorate of Security (NDS) Special Forces and the Khost Protection Force all but ceased, while civilian casualties caused by the Taliban and the Afghan National Army, mainly during ground engagements, continued at high levels.

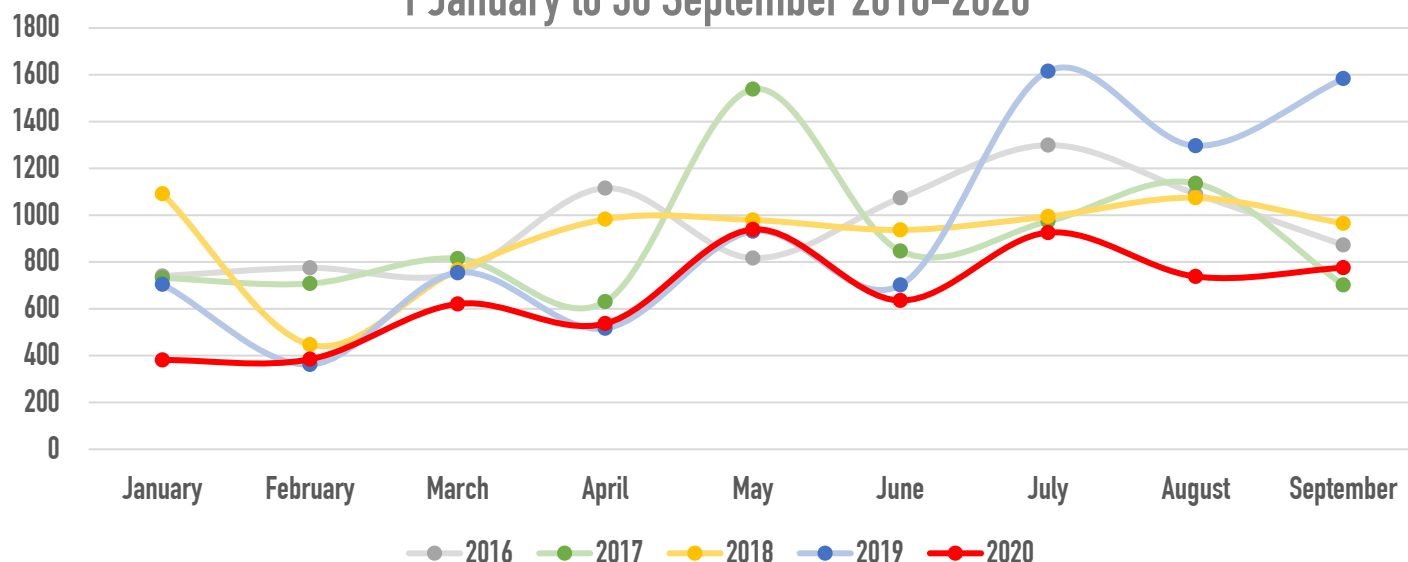
Civilian casualties have slightly increased between the start of the Afghanistan Peace Negotiations and 30 September to what they were in the weeks prior to the start of the talks.

<sup>1</sup> Remarks made on 22 September by the United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres during his address to the General Debate of the 75<sup>th</sup> session of the United Nations General Assembly, see <https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/09/1072972>.

<sup>2</sup> During the Eid al-Fitr ceasefire from 24 to 26 May 2020, UNAMA documented 49 civilian casualties (27 killed and 22 injured). During the Eid al-Adha ceasefire from 31 July to 2 August 2020, UNAMA documented 97 civilian casualties (39 killed and 58 injured) of which 59 civilian casualties (28 killed and 31 injured) were caused by the ISIL-KP claimed attack on the Jalalabad prison on 2 August.

## Civilian Casualty Timeline

1 January to 30 September 2016–2020



On 12 September, the opening ceremony was held to mark the start of Afghanistan Peace Negotiations between the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the Taliban in Doha, Qatar. The Islamic Republic negotiating team and the Government of Afghanistan have publicly called for an immediate, comprehensive ceasefire<sup>3</sup>;

**All parties to the conflict can, and must, do more to protect civilians from harm by urgently reviewing practices and strengthening mitigation measures, as well as working towards an end to the fighting.**

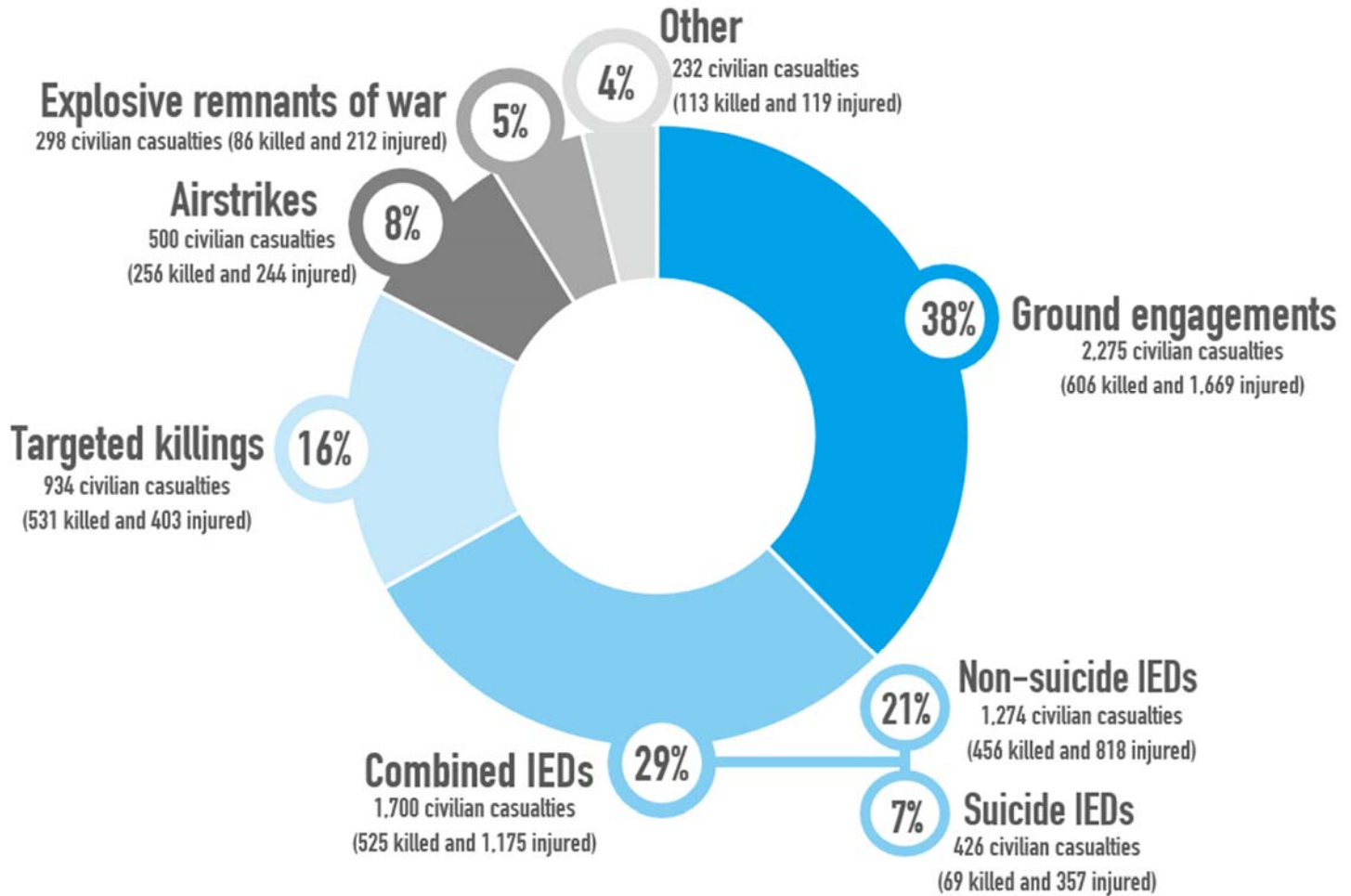
however, the Taliban continue to believe that such a ceasefire should be considered later in the Afghanistan Peace Negotiations. As fighting continued, civilian casualties slightly increased in September 2020 as compared to the prior month.<sup>4</sup> In addition, UNAMA did not document any decrease in civilian casualties attributed to parties at the talks since the negotiations formally started in Qatar on 12 September. On the contrary, civilian casualties have slightly increased between 12 and 30 September to what they were in the weeks prior to the start of the talks.<sup>5</sup> With civilian harm continuing at high levels, UNAMA reiterates that all parties to the conflict can, and must, do more to protect civilians from harm by urgently reviewing practices and strengthening mitigation measures, as well as working towards an end to the fighting – the only way to definitively stop conflict-related civilian casualties.

<sup>3</sup> See for example, the remarks of the Chairman of the High Council for National Reconciliation of the Government of Afghanistan on 12 September, unofficial English translation on <https://www.facebook.com/DrMujibRahimi/posts/5091268550899358>.

<sup>4</sup> In September 2020, UNAMA documented 776 civilian casualties (261 killed and 515 injured) in comparison to 738 civilian casualties (307 killed and 431 injured) in the month of August 2020. Although the period after 30 September is outside the scope of this report, UNAMA is concerned about the intensification of the fighting in several parts of the country in October. At the time of publication of this report, for example, UNAMA was closely monitoring the impact on civilians from fighting in Helmand, where thousands have been displaced and many civilian casualties are being verified; as well as several indiscriminate attacks in Nangarhar, Laghman and Ghor along with an airstrike in Takhar and a suicide attack targeting civilians in Kabul, which in sum, have killed and injured more than 400 civilians.

<sup>5</sup> UNAMA attributed 21 civilian casualties to the Taliban and Pro-Government Forces on average per day from 1 August to 11 September 2020, while between 12 and 30 September, UNAMA attributed 23 civilian casualties on average per day to the Taliban and Pro-Government Forces.

## Civilian Casualties by Incident Type 1 January to 30 September 2020



From 1 January to 30 September 2020, ground engagements continued to be the leading cause of civilian casualties, representing 38 per cent of the overall total.<sup>6</sup> While the number of civilians killed from this incident type increased by four per cent in comparison to last year, the number of injured civilians decreased by 13 per cent.<sup>7</sup> The vast majority of civilian casualties from ground engagements are attributed to Afghan national security forces and the Taliban, particularly from the use of indirect fire (mortars, rockets and grenades) in populated areas. For example, on 17 August, a mortar

round fired during a ground engagement between the Taliban and the Afghan National Army impacted a civilian home in Andar district, Ghazni province. As a result, three women and two boys were killed and seven others, including three boys, two girls, a man and a woman, sustained injuries. UNAMA could not determine which party was responsible for the incident.

From 1 January to 30 September, the use of suicide and non-suicide IEDs by Anti-Government Elements was the second leading cause of civilian casualties,

<sup>6</sup> From 1 January to 30 September 2020, UNAMA documented 2,275 civilian casualties (606 killed and 1,669 injured) from ground engagements. Pro-Government Forces were responsible for 986 civilian casualties (270 killed and 716 injured). Anti-Government Elements were responsible for 704 civilian casualties (177 killed and 527 injured). UNAMA also documented 585 civilian casualties (159 killed and 426 injured) to crossfire and other types of incidents.

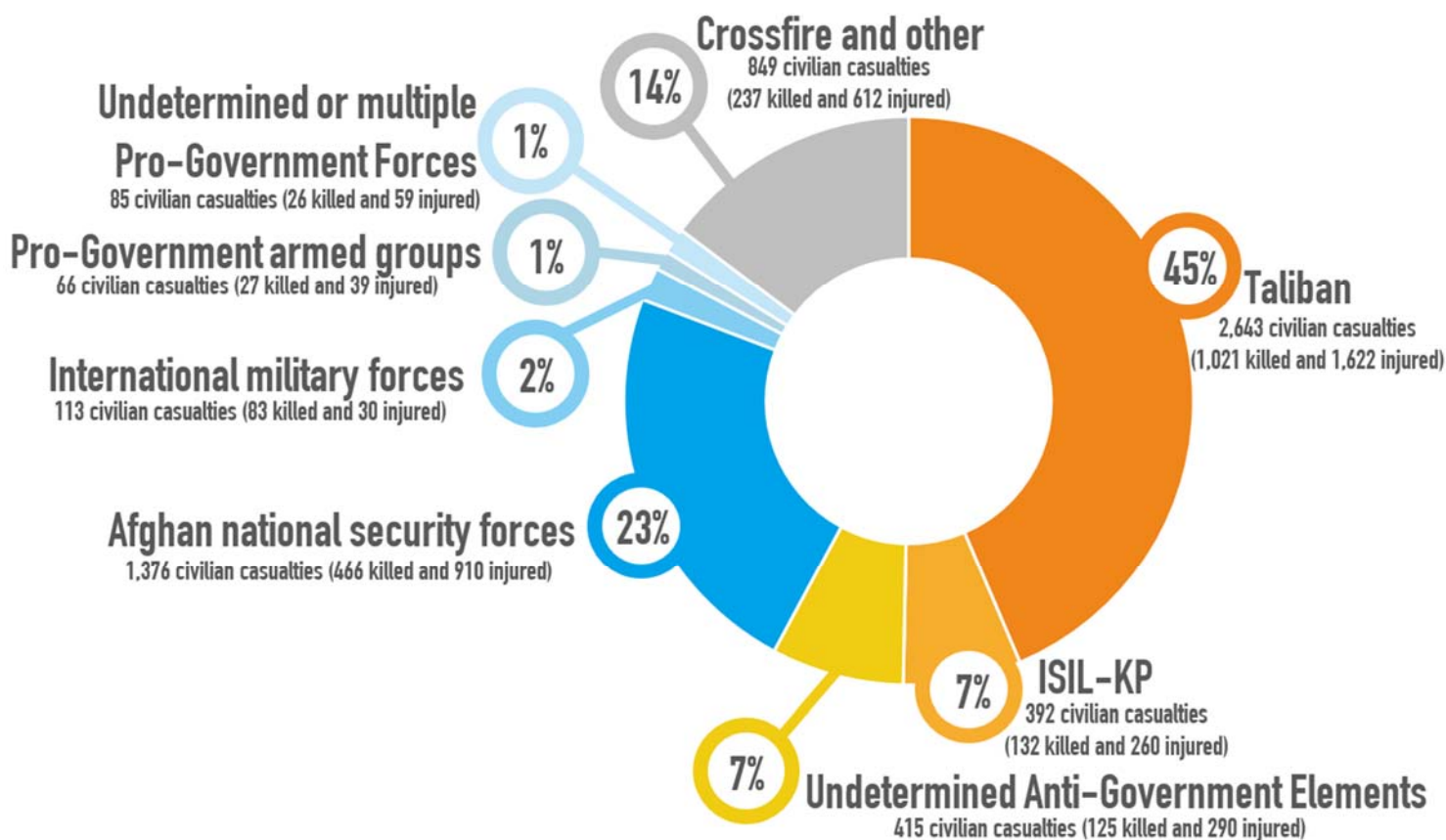
<sup>7</sup> From 1 January to 30 September 2019, UNAMA documented 2,511 civilian casualties (583 killed and 1,928 injured) from ground engagements.

representing 29 per cent of the overall total.<sup>8</sup> Although civilian casualties from suicide and complex attacks, as well as the overall civilian casualties from non-suicide IEDs, decreased in comparison to the first nine months of 2019,<sup>9</sup> UNAMA documented a 43 per cent increase of civilian casualties from pressure-plate IEDs, almost all attributed to the Taliban.

The third leading cause, targeted killings, caused 16 per cent<sup>10</sup> of civilian casualties from 1 January to 30

September 2020, a 39 per cent increase in the number of civilian casualties in comparison to the same period last year.<sup>11</sup> For example, on 19 August a senior employee of the Ministry of Education was killed and his driver was injured in Kabul city by a magnetic IED attached to their vehicle. On 11 September, in Herat city, near a mosque used by the Shi'a Muslim population, two armed men on a motorcycle opened fire on civilians coming out of the mosque after their evening prayers. As a result, three civilians, including two men and

### Civilian Casualties by Party to the Conflict 1 January to 30 September 2020



<sup>8</sup> From 1 January to 30 September 2020, UNAMA documented 1,700 civilian casualties (525 killed and 1,175 injured) from both suicide and non-suicide IEDs.

<sup>9</sup> From 1 January to 30 September 2019, UNAMA documented 3,443 civilian casualties (650 killed and 2,793 injured) from suicide and non-suicide IEDs.

<sup>10</sup> From 1 January to 30 September 2020, UNAMA documented 934 civilian casualties (531 killed and 403 injured) from targeted killings.

<sup>11</sup> From 1 January to 30 September 2019, UNAMA documented 674 civilian casualties (398 killed and 276 injured) from targeted killings.

## Child casualties amounted to 31 per cent of all civilian casualties in the first nine months of 2020, and women casualties to 13 per cent.

one boy, were killed and six others sustained injuries, including three men, two women and a boy. No group claimed responsibility for either attack.

In contrast to the national trend of an overall reduction in civilian casualties, there were nine provinces where civilian casualties increased. From 1 January to 30 September 2020 more civilian casualties occurred in Balkh, Samangan, Jawzjan, Badakhshan, Ghor, Kapisa, Logar, Khost and Bamyan provinces in comparison to the same period last year. UNAMA notes with particular

concern that civilian casualties in Balkh, Samangan and Badakhshan more than doubled in comparison to the first nine months of 2019.<sup>12</sup>

UNAMA also remains concerned about the high levels of harm experienced by women and children in Afghanistan. More than four out of every 10 civilian casualties were children or women. Child casualties amounted to 31 per cent<sup>13</sup> of all civilian casualties in the first nine months of 2020, and women casualties to 13 per cent.<sup>14</sup> The frequent fighting in populated areas had a particular impact on women and children, who made up more than two-thirds of civilian casualties from indirect fire, including mortars, rockets, and grenades during ground engagements between the Taliban and the Afghan national security forces.

## CHILDREN AND ARMED CONFLICT

Between 1 January and 30 September 2020, UNAMA recorded 1,848 child casualties (553 killed and 1,295 injured). This marks an overall decrease of 47 per cent compared to the same period in 2019, and is the first time in five years that UNAMA has verified fewer than 2,000 child casualties during the first nine months of the year. Despite this decrease, however, Afghanistan continued to be one of the deadliest countries in the world for children in 2020.

Pro-Government Forces and Anti-Government Elements caused a similarly high number of child casualties during the reporting period. UNAMA attributed 722 child casualties (246 killed and 476 injured) to Pro-Government Forces<sup>15</sup>, mainly the Afghan National Army<sup>16</sup>, and 711 child casualties (192 killed and 519 injured) to Anti-Government Elements<sup>17</sup>, primarily the Taliban.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>12</sup> From 1 January to 30 September 2020, UNAMA documented 553 civilian casualties (198 killed and 355 injured) in Balkh province; 135 civilian casualties (43 killed and 92 injured) in Badakhshan province; and 123 civilian casualties (11 killed and 112 injured) in Samangan province. In the same period in 2019, UNAMA documented 199 civilian casualties (88 killed and 111 injured) in Balkh province; 64 civilian casualties (31 killed and 33 injured) in Badakhshan province; and 45 civilian casualties (11 killed and 34 injured) in Samangan province.

<sup>13</sup> From 1 January to 30 September 2020, UNAMA documented 1,848 child casualties (553 killed and 1,295 injured).

<sup>14</sup> From 1 January to 30 September 2020, UNAMA documented 746 women casualties (251 killed and 495 injured).

<sup>15</sup> From 1 January to 30 September 2020, UNAMA attributed 621 child casualties (194 killed and 427 injured) to Afghan national security forces; 44 child casualties (35 killed and nine injured) to international military forces; 16 child casualties (six killed and 10 injured) to pro-Government armed groups; and 41 child casualties (11 killed and 30 injured) to undetermined or multiple Pro-Government Forces.

<sup>16</sup> From 1 January to 30 September 2020, UNAMA attributed 520 child casualties (168 killed and 352 injured) to the Afghan National Army.

<sup>17</sup> From 1 January to 30 September 2020, UNAMA attributed 627 child casualties (179 killed and 448 injured) to the Taliban; 33 child casualties (five killed and 28 injured) to ISIL-KP; and 51 child casualties (eight killed and 43 injured) to undetermined Anti-Government Elements.

<sup>18</sup> UNAMA attributed the remaining 415 child casualties (115 killed and 300 injured) to crossfire between parties and others.

Ground engagements remained the leading cause of child casualties<sup>19</sup>, followed by non-suicide IEDs<sup>20</sup>, especially pressure-plate IEDs, explosive remnants<sup>21</sup> of war and airstrikes<sup>22</sup>. In the first nine months of 2020, explosive remnants of war continued to disproportionately harm children, with children comprising 79 per cent from this incident type.

UNAMA continued to verify increased numbers of recruitment and use of children by armed forces in Afghanistan, with 155 children, all boys, recruited and used from 1 January to 30 September 2020 in comparison to 49 children in the same period of 2019. The vast majority of children, 144, were recruited and used for combat roles by the Taliban, with the bulk of these cases documented in the northern and northeastern regions of Afghanistan. The remaining 11 children were recruited by a pro-Government armed group and the Afghan National Army-Territorial Force for combat purposes.

## Children comprise almost eight out of every 10 civilian casualties from explosive remnants of war.

UNAMA verified a total of 45 attacks against schools and education-related personnel between 1 January and 30 September 2020, with more than half of these incidents reported in the third quarter of 2020.<sup>23</sup> UNAMA verified a total of 52 attacks on hospitals and health care personnel in the first nine months of 2020.<sup>24</sup>

UNAMA reminds parties to the conflict that attacks on schools and hospitals constitute one of the six grave violations against children and are particularly egregious during a global pandemic when the entire population is facing a multifaceted crisis from COVID-19. Such acts deprive local populations, especially children, of education at a

“*With my cousins, I was grazing the animals in the desert when we found a piece of big metal. We thought that it was only a piece of metal and we brought it to the village and started playing with [it. Then it] exploded and injured me and my cousins. About six people were injured. I was the worst injured among all of us. My left hand and my thighs were seriously injured. The blood was coming from my hands and feet. I fainted and when I opened my eyes, I saw that I was in a hospital. Because of this incident, I lost my left hand and arm up to my elbow [...] Now I am afraid of every kind of strange object.*”

-Young victim of an explosive remnant of war in the northern region of Afghanistan.

<sup>19</sup> From 1 January to 30 September 2020, UNAMA documented 910 child casualties (227 killed and 683 injured) from ground engagements.

<sup>20</sup> From 1 January to 30 September 2020, UNAMA documented 311 child casualties (104 killed and 207 injured) from non-suicide IEDs and 180 child casualties (83 killed and 97 injured) from pressure-plate IEDs.

<sup>21</sup> From 1 January to 30 September 2020, UNAMA documented 235 child casualties (69 killed and 166 injured) from explosive remnants of war.

<sup>22</sup> From 1 January to 30 September 2020, UNAMA documented 208 child casualties (69 killed and 166 injured) from airstrikes. Additionally, UNAMA documented civilian casualties caused by targeted/deliberate killings (109), suicide IEDs (51), and the remaining child casualties by other incident types.

<sup>23</sup> From 1 July to 30 September, UNAMA documented 25 incidents of attacks against schools, including attacks or threats deliberately targeting schools and education personnel, and attacks causing incidental harm to schools, personnel and students.

time when COVID-19 lockdowns have already limited education opportunities to students throughout the year. These attacks affect delivery of medical services at a time when the pandemic strains an already over-burdened healthcare system. In addition to ceasing deliberate attacks that damage schools and hospitals and harm personnel

and students, parties to the conflict must also take measures to reduce collateral damage to schools and hospitals; as such damage can have a similarly detrimental effect on the access and delivery of education and healthcare services to the population, including children, of Afghanistan.

## ANTI-GOVERNMENT ELEMENTS

Although civilian casualties attributed to Anti-Government Elements dropped by 34 per cent,<sup>25</sup> these groups remained responsible for the majority of civilian casualties, 58 per cent, amounting to 3,450 civilian casualties (1,278 killed and 2,172 injured) between 1 January and 30 September 2020. Despite the reduction in civilians injured, Anti-Government Elements remained responsible for a similar number of civilians killed.

The Taliban caused 45 per cent of all civilian casualties in the first nine months of 2020 (2,643 civilian casualties 1,021 killed and 1,622 injured). This constitutes a reduction of 32 per cent in comparison to the same period last year;<sup>26</sup> mostly due to fewer civilian injuries from suicide attacks and ground engagements<sup>27</sup>, although this was partially offset by an increase in civilian casualties from

pressure-plate IEDs and targeted killings. UNAMA also notes with concern that in contrast to the decrease in the number of civilians injured, the number of civilians killed attributed to the Taliban increased by six per cent in the first nine months of 2020. When viewing the reduction of civilian casualties in comparison to 2019, it is important to recall that UNAMA recorded the highest ever civilian casualty figures in a three-month period between July and September 2019, including an extremely high number of civilian casualties resulting from Taliban election-related violence in September 2019.<sup>28</sup>

UNAMA attributed 392 civilian casualties (132 killed and 260 injured) to ISIL-KP, seven per cent of the total civilian casualties. This represents a drop of 61 per cent in civilian casualties attributed to ISIL-KP in comparison to the first nine months of 2019, mostly due to fewer civilian casualties from ISIL-KP suicide and non-suicide IEDs and ground engagements.<sup>29</sup> In contrast, civilian casualties attributed to undetermined Anti-Government Elements increased by 51 per cent, representing seven per cent of the total civilian casualties recorded (415 civilian casualties; 125 killed and 290 injured).<sup>30</sup>

Although civilian casualties attributed to the Taliban decreased by 32 per cent, the number of civilians killed increased by six per cent.

<sup>25</sup> From 1 January to 30 September 2019, UNAMA attributed 5,190 civilian casualties (1,246 killed and 3,944 injured) to Anti-Government Elements.

<sup>26</sup> From 1 January to 30 September 2019, UNAMA attributed 3,901 civilian casualties (961 killed and 2,940 injured) to the Taliban.

<sup>27</sup> From 1 January to 30 September 2020, UNAMA attributed 678 civilian casualties (173 killed and 505 injured) from ground engagements to the Taliban, in comparison to 893 civilian casualties (184 killed and 709 injured) in the first nine months of 2019.

<sup>28</sup> In the third quarter of 2019, running from 1 July to 30 September, UNAMA documented 4,497 civilian casualties (1,261 killed and 3,236 injured).

<sup>29</sup> From 1 January to 30 September 2019, UNAMA attributed 1,014 civilian casualties (230 killed and 784 injured) to ISIL-KP.

<sup>30</sup> From 1 January to 30 September 2019, UNAMA attributed 275 civilian casualties (55 killed and 220 injured) to undetermined Anti-Government Elements.



UNAMA remains concerned about the deliberate targeting of civilians by Anti-Government Elements. From 1 January to 30 September, Anti-Government Elements caused 1,148 civilian casualties (527 killed and 621 injured) in attacks that deliberately targeted civilians, including education, health and humanitarian workers, members of the judiciary, tribal elders, religious leaders and civilian government employees. The majority of these civilian casualties have been attributed to the Taliban.<sup>31</sup> On the evening of 19 July 2020, in Alishang district, Laghman province, the Taliban fired at an ambulance that was transporting a patient to the provincial hospital. As a result, a 5-year-old female patient inside the ambulance was killed and a woman was injured. On the morning of 5 September, in Tani district, Khost province, the district judge and his clerk were abducted by the Taliban while on their way to the district administrative centre. They were later released, but the judge suffered injuries to his leg as a result of the incident. UNAMA also continued to document attacks by ISIL-KP on the Shi'a Muslim population, most of whom also belong to the Hazara ethnic group.<sup>32</sup>

The use of suicide and non-suicide IEDs by Anti-Government Elements continued to cause significant levels of harm to civilians, resulting in 1,700 civilian casualties (525 killed and 1,175 injured), a reduction of 51 per cent compared with the first nine months of 2019.<sup>33</sup> Suicide and complex attacks caused 426 civilian casualties

## UNAMA remains concerned about the deliberate targeting of civilians, including education, health and humanitarian workers, members of the judiciary, tribal elders, religious leaders and civilian government employees.

(69 killed and 357 injured) between 1 January and 30 September 2020, a drop of 76 per cent in comparison to the same period last year.<sup>34</sup> UNAMA attributed a similar number of civilian casualties from suicide IEDs to the Taliban and ISIL-KP, respectively, during the first nine months of 2020, with the remainder attributed to undetermined Anti-Government Elements.<sup>35</sup> While noting the significant reduction in civilian casualties from suicide IEDs, UNAMA recalls that several such attacks continued to cause high levels of civilian harm. For example, on 13 July, the Taliban conducted a complex attack against the provincial office of the NDS in Aybak city, Samangan province. This resulted in one civilian man killed and 90 civilians injured, including nine women and 18 children. On 30 July, a suicide vehicle-borne IED exploded near NDS and Afghan National Police checkpoints in Pul-e-Alam city, Logar

<sup>31</sup> From 1 January to 30 September 2020, UNAMA attributed 646 civilian casualties (335 killed and 311 injured) from attacks deliberately targeting civilians to the Taliban; 276 civilian casualties (104 killed and 172 injured) to ISIL-KP; and 226 civilian casualties (88 killed and 138 injured) to undetermined Anti-Government Elements.

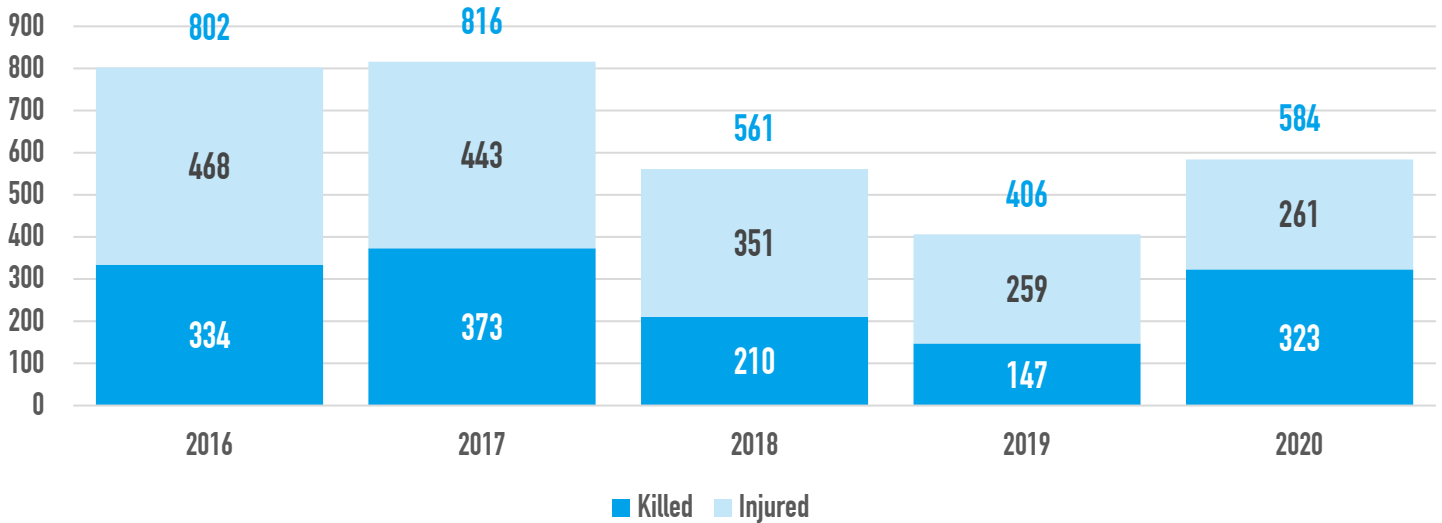
<sup>32</sup> For example, on 29 July, in Herat city, a magnetic IED attached to a public transportation vehicle killed three civilian men and injured five other civilians, including two women, two men and one boy. ISIL-KP claimed responsibility for this incident indicating that they targeted the Shi'a Muslim population.

<sup>33</sup> From 1 January to 30 September 2019, UNAMA documented 3,443 civilian casualties (650 killed and 2,739 injured) from suicide and non-suicide IEDs.

<sup>34</sup> From 1 January to 30 September 2019, UNAMA documented 1,779 civilian casualties (300 killed and 1,479 injured) from the use of suicide IEDs.

<sup>35</sup> From 1 January to 30 September 2020, UNAMA attributed 179 civilian casualties (nine killed and 170 injured) from suicide IEDs to the Taliban; 165 civilian casualties (52 killed and 113 injured) to ISIL-KP, and 92 civilian casualties (eight killed and 74 injured) to undetermined Anti-Government Elements.

## Civilian Casualties from pressure-plate IEDs 1 January to 30 September 2016-2020



province, resulting in eight civilians killed and 73 civilians injured. No group claimed responsibility for this attack. On 2 August, ISIL-KP conducted a complex attack on the Jalalabad prison, resulting in 28 civilians killed and 31 injured, including inmates and prison guards.

The significant reduction in civilian harm from suicide IEDs in 2020 shows that Anti-Government Elements have the ability to reduce the harm to civilians from incident types which have for years been causing much of the harm to the population. Even with the decrease in number of such attacks in 2020, the impact on the civilian population continues to be devastating. UNAMA encourages Anti-Government Elements, particularly the Taliban, to once and for all commit to stop using suicide IEDs.

Non-suicide IEDs caused 1,274 civilian casualties (456 killed and 818 injured), a decrease of 23 per cent in comparison to the first nine months of 2019.<sup>36</sup> Of specific concern is the continued increase in the number of civilian casualties from pressure-plate IEDs, used by the Taliban,

which function in Afghanistan as anti-personnel landmines; are indiscriminate by nature and therefore considered to be unlawful at all times. From 1 January to 30 September, UNAMA documented 584 civilian casualties (323 killed and 261 injured) from pressure-plate IEDs, of which 12 per cent were women and 31 per cent were children. This is a 44 per cent increase in civilian casualties from these devices compared with the first nine months of 2019 and more than double the number of civilians killed. UNAMA attributed 99 per cent of civilian casualties from these devices to the Taliban.<sup>37</sup> On 11 July, in the Qeyagh valley area of Jaghatu district, Ghazni province, a Taliban pressure-plate IED detonated, killing six civilians and injuring eight others, all passengers on a bus. Between 7 and 9 August, UNAMA documented five Taliban pressure-plate IED incidents in Arghistan district, Kandahar province, which killed 26 civilians and injured two others. On 29 September, in Kijran district, Daikundi province, 15 civilian passengers of a vehicle were killed and four others sustained injuries when a Taliban pressure-plate IED detonated.

<sup>36</sup> From 1 January to 30 September 2019, UNAMA documented 1,664 civilian casualties (350 killed and 1,314 injured) from the use of non-suicide IEDs.

<sup>37</sup> From 1 January to 30 September 2020, UNAMA attributed 580 civilian casualties (321 killed and 259 injured) from pressure-plate IEDs to the Taliban.

“ *I heard a loud sound of an explosion; I ran out and I saw my son lying wounded [...] He was so injured that he could not speak. After a few minutes my son died in my arms. I cannot explain how painful that moment was; when your young son dies in front of your eyes [...] I don't know why the Taliban kill people by planting this kind of bomb in public places [...] Why are they killing civilian people who are innocent and have nothing to do with the war?* ”

-Father of a child killed by a Taliban pressure-plate IED in the central highlands region of Afghanistan.

UNAMA reiterates that the deliberate targeting of civilians or civilian objects is prohibited under international law; the killing, by any party to the conflict, of persons taking no active part in hostilities is explicitly prohibited by Common Article 3 of the Geneva Conventions at any time and any place, and may amount to a war crime. UNAMA renews its call on Anti-Government Elements

to immediately cease the use of IEDs and indirect fire (mortars, rockets, and grenades) in all areas with a civilian presence. UNAMA further repeats its call on the Taliban to immediately cease all use of illegal victim-operated pressure-plate IEDs and urges the Taliban to uphold previous commitments it made to ban them.

## PRO-GOVERNMENT FORCES

Between 1 January and 30 September 2020, Pro-Government Forces were responsible for more than a quarter of all civilian casualties – 28 per cent – amounting to 1,640 civilian casualties (602 killed and 1,038 injured). Civilian casualties attributed to Pro-Government forces decreased by 34 per cent in comparison to the same period in 2019.<sup>38</sup> The Afghan national security forces were responsible for 1,376 civilian casualties

(466 killed and 910 injured), 23 per cent of total civilian casualties; similar numbers to those recorded in the first nine months of 2019.<sup>39</sup>

**Civilian casualties attributed to the Afghan National Army increased by 25 per cent due to more civilian casualties from airstrikes and ground engagements.**

When looking at individual branches of the Afghan national security forces, UNAMA notes with concern that civilian casualties attributed to the Afghan National Army increased by 25 per cent due to higher numbers of civilians killed and injured as a result of airstrikes and ground engagements.<sup>40</sup>

UNAMA attributed 113 civilian casualties (83 killed and 30 injured) to international military forces, representing two per cent of all civilian casualties.<sup>41</sup> Since the United States-Taliban Agreement of 29 February, civilian casualties caused by international military forces have all but ceased.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>38</sup> From 1 January to 30 September 2019, UNAMA attributed 2,486 civilian casualties (1,225 killed and 1,261 injured) to Pro-Government Forces.

<sup>39</sup> From 1 January to 30 September 2019, UNAMA attributed 1,374 civilian casualties (543 killed and 831 injured) to Afghan national security forces.

<sup>40</sup> From 1 January to 30 September 2020, UNAMA attributed 1,119 civilian casualties (379 killed and 740 injured) to the Afghan National Army, in comparison to 892 civilian casualties (317 killed and 575 injured) in the same period of 2019.

<sup>41</sup> From 1 January to 30 September 2019, UNAMA attributed 695 civilian casualties (478 killed and 217 injured) to international military forces.

<sup>42</sup> UNAMA attributed 107 civilian casualties (81 killed and 26 injured) to international military forces before the signing of the United States-Taliban agreement in the period running from 1 January to 29 February 2020. From 1 March to 30 September 2020, UNAMA attributed six civilian casualties (two killed and four injured) to international military forces.

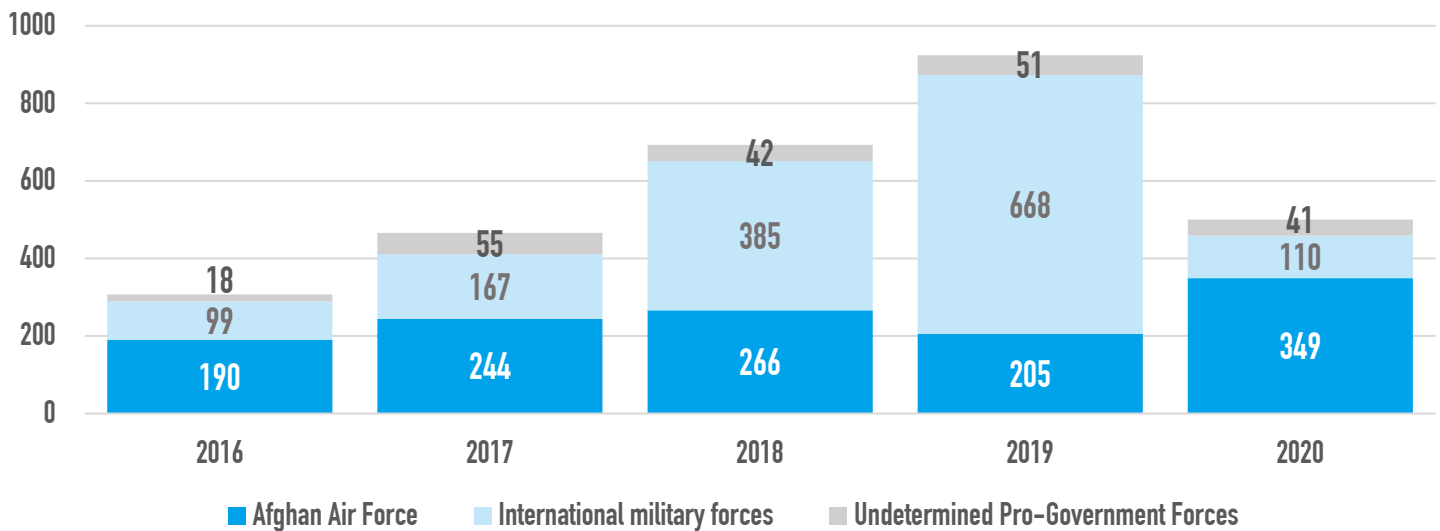
Pro-Government armed groups and undetermined or multiple Pro-Government Forces were responsible for one per cent each of the total civilian casualties.<sup>43</sup>

For Pro-Government Forces, ground engagements remain the incident-type causing the majority of civilian casualties, amounting to 986 civilian casualties (270 killed and 716 injured) in the first nine months of 2020, similar to the same period of the year prior.<sup>44</sup> Of specific concern is the detrimental harm that is caused by the use of indirect fire, including through howitzers<sup>45</sup> and mortars, especially in civilian-populated areas. From 1 January to 30 September, Pro-Government Forces caused 806 civilian casualties (205 killed and 601 injured) with the Afghan National Army responsible for

Of specific concern is the detrimental harm that is caused by the use of indirect fire, including through howitzers and mortars, especially in civilian-populated areas.

more than three-quarters of these civilian casualties.<sup>46</sup> Women and children comprise almost three out of every four civilian casualties from the use of these weapons by Pro-Government Forces, as civilian casualties are often caused when these projectiles land near or on civilian homes.<sup>47</sup> On 10 August 2020, in Dawlatyar district, Ghor province, the Afghan national security forces fired mortars towards the Taliban, impacting

**Civilian Casualties from Airstrikes by Party to the Conflict**  
1 January to 30 September 2016–2020



<sup>43</sup> From 1 January to 30 September 2020, UNAMA attributed 66 civilian casualties (27 killed and 39 injured) to Pro-Government armed groups. In the same time period, UNAMA attributed 85 civilian casualties (26 killed and 59 injured) to undetermined or multiple Pro-Government Forces.

<sup>44</sup> From 1 January to 30 September 2019, UNAMA attributed 1,017 civilian casualties (269 killed and 748 injured) from ground engagement to Pro-Government Forces.

<sup>45</sup> A howitzer is a large-calibre artillery system that is used for its indirect fire capability.

<sup>46</sup> From 1 January to 30 September 2020, UNAMA attributed 630 civilian casualties (167 killed and 463 injured) from the use of indirect fire during ground engagements to the Afghan National Army.

<sup>47</sup> From 1 January to 30 September 2020, UNAMA documented 420 child casualties (109 killed and 311 injured) 164 women casualties (35 killed and 29 injured) from indirect fire attributed to Pro-Government Forces.

on three civilian houses, resulting in six civilians killed and 11 civilians injured, the vast majority women and children. On 6 September, in Sherzad district, Nangarhar province, the Afghan National Army fired mortar rounds towards the Taliban, impacting a residential compound. As a result, six civilians were killed and four other civilians sustained injuries; all casualties were women and children. On 19 September, in Zari district, Balkh province, the Afghan National Army fired mortars towards Taliban positions. One of the mortars impacted near a shop, killing three civilians and injuring eight other civilians.

UNAMA remains concerned about the increasing number of civilian casualties caused by airstrikes by the Afghan Air Force. Although the total number of civilian casualties from all airstrikes decreased by 46 per cent in the first nine months of 2020 in comparison to the same period in 2019, this was mainly due to fewer civilian casualties caused by airstrikes conducted by international military forces.<sup>48</sup>

From 1 January to 30 September, UNAMA documented 63 incidents of Afghan Air Force airstrikes causing 349 civilian casualties (156 killed and 193 injured). This corresponds to a 70 per cent increase in civilian casualties

and a 50 per cent increase in civilians killed from airstrikes in comparison with the first nine months of 2019.<sup>49</sup> Civilian casualties of the Afghan Air Force are often caused when airstrikes hit civilian homes, causing, on average, more than five civilian casualties per civilian casualty incident. More than six out of 10 civilian casualties in such airstrikes are women and children.<sup>50</sup> On 22 July, in Guzara district, Herat province, Afghan Air Force helicopters conducted airstrikes against a gathering organized for a former Taliban commander who was recently released from Bagram prison. One airstrike targeted the gathering itself, killing nine civilians and injuring nine others. A second airstrike targeted a vehicle driving away from the gathering, killing four civilians and injuring five others. On 19 September, in Khanabad district, Kunduz province, the Afghan Air Force conducted an airstrike against the Taliban. Residents who gathered in front of a house that caught fire from the airstrike were harmed when a second airstrike impacted the same location, resulting in the killing of 15 civilians and the injuring of five others.

UNAMA reiterates its call on the Government of Afghanistan to cease the use of indirect fire (howitzers, mortars, grenades) and other explosives with wide area effects in populated areas, and to continue to

“ *[M]y son lost a lot of blood due to injuries to his stomach. He has become very weak and he feels a lot of pain [...] My son was operated on twice. What happened in this case with our children, has badly affected us psychologically. We are all afraid of airplanes, when we hear an airplane flying around our village, all my sons become afraid and they hide in the corner of the house.* ”

- Victim and father of a victim of an Afghan Air Force airstrike in the northern region.

<sup>48</sup> From 1 January to 30 September 2020, UNAMA attributed 24 incidents with 110 civilian casualties (83 killed and 27 injured) from airstrikes to international military forces, in comparison to 122 incidents with 668 civilian casualties (468 killed and 200 injured) in the same period of 2019.

<sup>49</sup> From 1 January to 30 September 2019, UNAMA attributed 44 incidents with 205 civilian casualties (104 killed and 101 injured) from airstrikes to the Afghan Air Force.

<sup>50</sup> From 1 January to 30 September 2020, UNAMA attributed 151 child casualties (64 killed and 87 injured) and 65 women casualties (26 killed and 39 injured) from airstrikes to the Afghan Air Force.

develop and improve tactical directives, rules of engagement and other procedures in relation to the use of armed aircraft. UNAMA further reminds the Government of Afghanistan that its obligation to take all feasible precautions to protect civilians is not lessened even in situations where Anti-Government Elements

have co-located themselves intentionally with civilians in order to prevent themselves from being targeted. UNAMA reminds Anti-Government Elements that such co-location is prohibited under international humanitarian law.

## IMPACT OF THE ARMED CONFLICT ON VICTIMS

UNAMA continues to monitor the human rights impact of the armed conflict on victims and their family members<sup>51</sup> through post-incident interviews. This line of monitoring and reporting seeks to amplify voices of those affected by the armed conflict through gathering victims' accounts and examining how their economic, social and cultural rights were, and are, affected. It also determines the degree to which parties to the conflict acknowledge and take responsibility for an incident and the harm caused, and how victims' rights to truth, justice and reparations are being addressed. UNAMA has also used its good offices to connect some of the interviewed victims with service providers, has followed up on several occasions with relevant offices on the payment of compensation, and plans to do further work in this area

in the coming months. UNAMA also brings the issue of victims' rights to the attention of the parties to the conflict, with suggestions on mechanisms to address them.

UNAMA noted a continuation of the trends elaborated on in its midyear report<sup>52</sup> as it continued to conduct interviews with victims and their families from across Afghanistan. Between June and September 2020, UNAMA conducted a total of 83 such interviews, upon which the information in this report is based. Of the interviewed victims who were physically injured, 85 per cent stated that the incident had caused long-term physical disability or disfigurement. All surviving victims or relatives interviewed attest that the incident had

*“ When he did not notice any firing, he thought the situation had turned back to normal and he left the house. Unfortunately, when he stepped out of the door, he was shot and injured [...]. My husband fell to the ground, on the street. Nobody was there to help him, and he remained there until he died due to serious bleeding. My husband was not a rich man, but he was everything to me and my children [...] Since he is not with us, I feel alone with thousands of responsibilities for my children [...] I do not have even one afghani to pay for our treatment. I wish I were not alive to see this situation. ”*

- Woman, whose husband was killed by crossfire during a ground engagement in the northeastern region.

<sup>51</sup> For the purposes of this report, the term "victim" also includes the immediate family or dependants of the direct victim. UNAMA monitors civilian victims who sustained injuries due to the fighting or are part of the immediate family of a civilian who was killed in the context of the armed conflict. The death or injury of the civilians may or may not be a consequence of a violation of international humanitarian law.

<sup>52</sup> See, UNAMA 2020 Protection of Civilians Midyear Report (July 2020), available at <https://unama.unmissions.org/protection-of-civilians-reports>.

## Afghanistan Peace Negotiations offer an opportunity for parties to the conflict to consider the irreversible loss and devastating effect that the war has had on Afghans and to address victims' rights.

led to emotional and mental distress, many with manifestations such as nightmares or trouble sleeping. Ninety per cent of victims suffered financial loss, usually due to the death of a family breadwinner, and expensive medical bills. Sixty-eight per cent of those interviewed reported that, as a result of the incident, their social and cultural life was affected. For example, many victims or relatives felt they could no longer participate in weddings, visit family or friends, worship at the mosque, or attend school because of their traumatic experience. In addition, 22 per cent of victims indicated that they had been displaced because of the incident.<sup>53</sup> These interviews are but a small sample of the enduring harm that civilians have suffered as a result of the war.

Victim interviews have revealed a significant failure of the parties to the conflict to acknowledge harm, to seek to reconcile the damage done, or even to make contact with victims and their families. As stated by one man whose wife and son were killed by a Taliban roadside pressure-plate IED in August:

*“Life is now a kind of burden on my shoulder and I never enjoy being alive. All the time I am thinking ‘why am I alive?’, for the head of my family, my wife, was killed, as well as my hope for the future. [...] No party has acknowledged that they caused the incident and that they have to be sorry for this [...] no one cares if my life was destroyed and my house has become only ruins of stones and mud.”*

Eighty-three per cent of victims interviewed indicated that they did not receive information from a party to the conflict after the incident, and over half of the interviewees stated that they were not contacted by the parties after their loss or injury. Only 15 per cent of victims indicated receiving any kind of acknowledgement of harm by a party to the conflict, and only approximately 12 per cent of victims were aware of any investigation into the incident. One woman was left with multiple lacerations from mortar shrapnel after her house was hit during a ground engagement in the eastern region of Afghanistan. One of several family members injured, she stated that:

*“No one tried to reach us to help us in our dire situation. Neither the Taliban, nor the government nor the ANA took any action to reach us to acknowledge the harm or to compensate us for the harm. Up to now, no one has tried to speak to us regarding the incident.”*



**85%** of victims interviewed suffered long-term or permanent disabilities



**100%** of victims interviewed reported negative effects on their emotional well-being



**90%** of victims interviewed suffered financial loss



**22%** of victims interviewed were forced to move homes



**68%** of victims interviewed reported negative effects on their ability to participate in social life

<sup>53</sup> Some interviewees expressed the desire to relocate, but stated that they did not have the financial means to do so.

One boy, injured by an Afghan national security forces mortar in the eastern region of Afghanistan, stated:

*“Nobody takes responsibility for their wrong doings. For them, civilians are like animals. The parties who are fighting each other do not care about us.”*

While government and non-government organisations’ mechanisms for providing compensation or aid to victims of the conflict do exist, over 75 per cent of victims who stated that they applied for assistance reported that they are still awaiting their compensation, did not receive the full amount, or were unsuccessful in their application. One victim reported being told he would need to pay bribes to apply for compensation with the Government of Afghanistan.

The top two needs voiced by victims as most important to them, moving forward were financial compensation and efforts to prevent recurrence of such incidents. One man, whose brother was injured in an Afghan National Army airstrike in the western region of Afghanistan, stated:

*“When such incidents happen [...] civilians cannot raise their voice. If the Government is responsible for the incident, the Government must compensate and financially support the victims, because victims [...] are injured and in need of medical treatment and their family also [has] needs for their life expenses.”*



**17%** of victims interviewed received information from a party to the conflict about what happened to them or their loved ones



**12%** of victims interviewed were aware of formal investigations taking place



**45%** of victims interviewed reported that UNAMA was the only entity to speak to them about the incident



**15%** of victims interviewed received acknowledgement of harm from parties to the conflict



**14%** of victims interviewed received financial compensation

Afghanistan Peace Negotiations offer an opportunity for parties to the conflict to consider the irreversible loss and devastating effect that the war has had on Afghans, and address victims’ rights to truth, justice, and reparations. Many victims indicated that they simply want peace. One father in the western region, whose children were killed when an errant mortar impacted his house, stated:

*“I don’t want anything. Just to make sure that the situation will get better, and someone else’s children would not die as mine [did].”*



## METHODOLOGY

*For the purpose of its reports on the protection of civilians, UNAMA only includes documented civilian casualties that are verified. Civilian casualties are recorded as 'verified' where, based on the totality of the information reviewed by UNAMA, it has determined that there is 'clear and convincing' evidence that civilians have been killed or injured. In order to meet this standard, UNAMA requires at least three different and independent types of sources, i.e. a victim, witness, medical practitioner, local authorities, confirmation by a party to the conflict, a community leader or other sources. Wherever possible, information is obtained from the primary accounts of victims and/or witnesses of the incident and through on-site fact-finding. Where UNAMA is not satisfied with the*

*reliability and credibility of information concerning civilian casualties, it will not consider it as verified. Unverified incidents are not included in this report. UNAMA does not claim that the statistics presented in this report are complete, and it acknowledges possible under-reporting of civilian casualties given limitations inherent in the operating environment, particularly considering the recent challenges posed by movement restrictions in place due to the COVID-19 pandemic.*

*For more detailed information, please consult the UNAMA annual reports on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, available at: <http://unama.unmissions.org/protection-of-civiliansreports>.*