UNAMA
United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan
Strategic Communications
Press Release
http://unama.unmissions.org

CIVILIAN CASUALTIES HIT NEW HIGH IN 2015

KABUL, 14 February 2016 – The number of civilian casualties in Afghanistan during 2015 are the highest recorded, the UN said today on the release of its 2015 Annual Report on Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict.

The annual report, produced by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) in coordination with the UN Human Rights Office, shows that increased ground fighting in and around populated areas, along with suicide and other attacks in major cities, were the main causes of conflict-related civilian deaths and injuries in 2015.

“This report records yet another rise in the number of civilians hurt or killed. The harm done to civilians is totally unacceptable,” said Nicholas Haysom, the Secretary-General’s Special Representative for Afghanistan and head of UNAMA. “We call on those inflicting this pain on the people of Afghanistan to take concrete action to protect civilians and put a stop to the killing and maiming of civilians in 2016.”

UNAMA documented 11,002 civilian casualties (3,545 deaths and 7,457 injured) in 2015, exceeding the previous record levels of civilian casualties that occurred in 2014. The latest figures show an overall increase of four per cent during 2015 in total civilian casualties from the previous year. UNAMA began its systematic documentation of civilian casualties in 2009.

Ground engagements between parties to the conflict caused the highest number of total civilian casualties (fatalities and injuries), followed by improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and suicide and complex attacks. Ground engagements caused the most fatalities amongst civilians, followed by targeted and deliberate killings.

“The people of Afghanistan continue to suffer brutal and unprincipled attacks that are forbidden under international law,” said the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein. “This is happening with almost complete impunity. The perpetrators of the violations, documented by UNAMA and my staff, must be held to account. And the international community should emphasise far more vigorously that the rights of civilians should be protected.”

Anti-Government Elements continued to cause the most harm – 62 per cent of all civilian casualties – despite a 10 per cent reduction from 2014 in the total civilian casualties resulting from their attacks. Notwithstanding the overall decrease, the report documents Anti-Government Elements increasing use of some tactics that deliberately or indiscriminately cause civilian harm, including targeted killings of civilians, complex and suicide attacks, as well as indiscriminate and illegal pressure-plate IEDs. In addition this reduction of Anti-Government Elements caused casualties must be considered in the light of the increase in unattributed casualties.

Civilian deaths and injuries caused by Pro-Government Forces caused 17 per cent of civilian casualties – 14 per cent from Afghan security forces, two per cent from international military forces, and one per cent from pro-Government armed groups. The report documents increased civilian casualties caused by Pro-Government Forces, including during ground engagements, aerial operations, and the activities of pro-Government armed groups.

Fighting between the parties to the conflict, which could not be attributed to one specific party, caused 17 per cent of civilian casualties. Unattributed explosive remnants of war caused four per cent and cross-border shelling from Pakistan into Afghanistan caused less than half of one per cent.

Ground engagements between parties to the conflict caused 4,137 civilian casualties (1,116 deaths and 3,021 injured) – a 15 per cent increase from 2014 – and the leading cause of civilian casualties in Afghanistan. Improvised explosive devices caused 2,368 civilian casualties (713 deaths and 1,655 injured). While this represents a 20 per cent decrease it is still the second leading cause of civilian casualties in Afghanistan.

In 2015, UNAMA documented a 37 per cent increase in women casualties and a 14 per cent increase in child casualties.

“In 2015, the conflict caused extreme harm to the civilian population, with particularly appalling consequences for children. Unprecedented numbers of children were needlessly killed and injured last year – one in four casualties in 2015 was a child,” said Danielle Bell, UNAMA Director of Human Rights. “Other children suffered the loss of parents, and increasingly their mothers, sisters, and female role models – one in 10 casualties was a woman.”

Selected accounts from victims of conflict related violence:

“It was around 10 in the morning and I was playing with my two-year-old daughter when a mortar landed in my home and exploded. I was in shock. A small piece of shrapnel hit my daughter on her back and my wife was severely injured – two pieces of shrapnel hit her right leg while she was in the kitchen cooking. Later another mortar landed elsewhere in our neighbourhood. The doctor discharged my daughter after a day but my wife could not move her leg and had to undergo surgery.”

-- Relative of two victims injured during crossfire between Afghan security forces and Taliban in Aqcha district, Jawzjan province, on 11 May 2015. The crossfire killed one boy and injured 11 other civilians, including two girls and a boy.

“He called my mobile and said, ‘Hey brother…I was shot in my stomach…I don’t know who shot me…my injuries are serious…I can see pieces of my own intestines on my motorcycle’. After that, the line went dead. I tried to call him back several times, but his phone was switched off and no one could reach the site of the incident to take him back because of the fighting. The next day, I saw his dead body and his motorcycle on TV. His body remained in the streets for three days, until my relatives could recover it and bury him. When I saw his body, he still had his phone in his hand…a small piece of bread was in his mouth, and his body was completely burnt and had turned black”.

-- Brother of a civilian man killed in crossfire in Kunduz city, on 1 October. The victim had gone out to obtain water for his family as residential water supplies had been cut during the Taliban occupation.

The report outlines key steps to be taken by parties to the conflict to mitigate casualties and protect civilians from harm, including the following:

Anti-Government Elements:

Cease the deliberate targeting of civilians and civilian locations, in particular, journalists, human rights defenders, judges and prosecutors, civilian Government officers, aid workers, and places of worship and culture.

Cease the use of IEDs in all areas frequented by civilians and stop using illegal pressure-plate IEDs.

Cease indiscriminate and disproportionate complex and suicide attacks and cease firing mortars, rockets and grenades from and into civilian-populated areas.

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.

Government of Afghanistan:

Cease the use of mortars, rockets, grenades, other indirect weapons, and aerial attacks in civilian-populated areas.

Finalize the national policy on civilian casualty mitigation backed by an action plan with concrete objectives to prevent civilian casualties in the conduct of hostilities.

Immediately disband and disarm all armed groups, militias and 'national uprising movements'.

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.

Ensure that victims of violations have an effective remedy; strengthen procedures for compensation to women and families of civilians killed and injured in conflict-related violence.

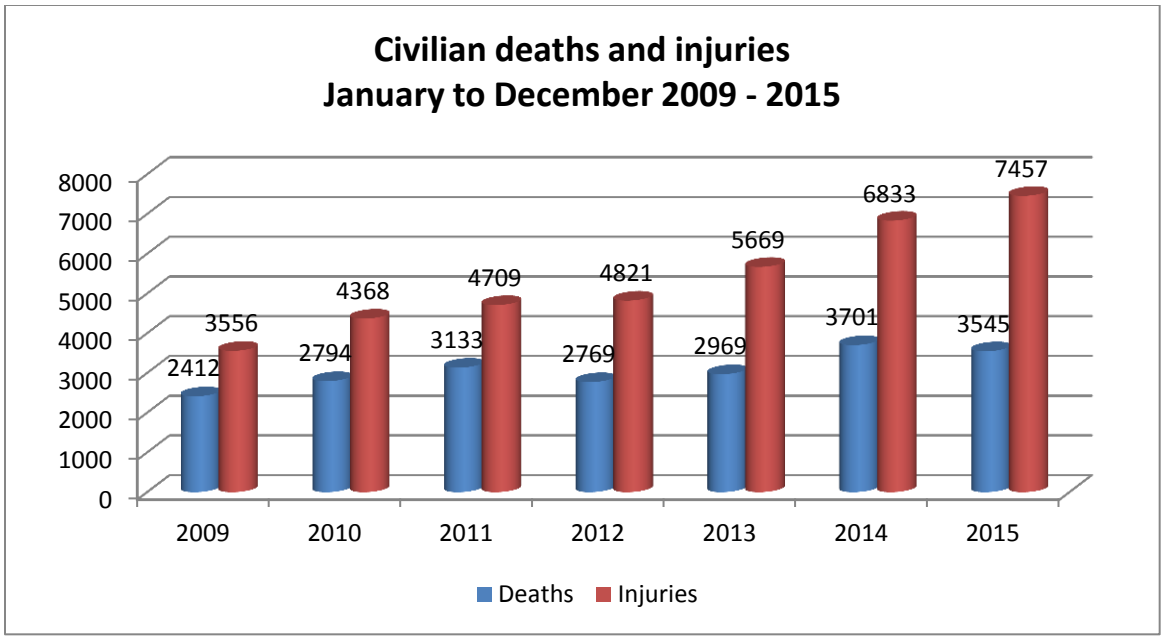
International Military Forces:

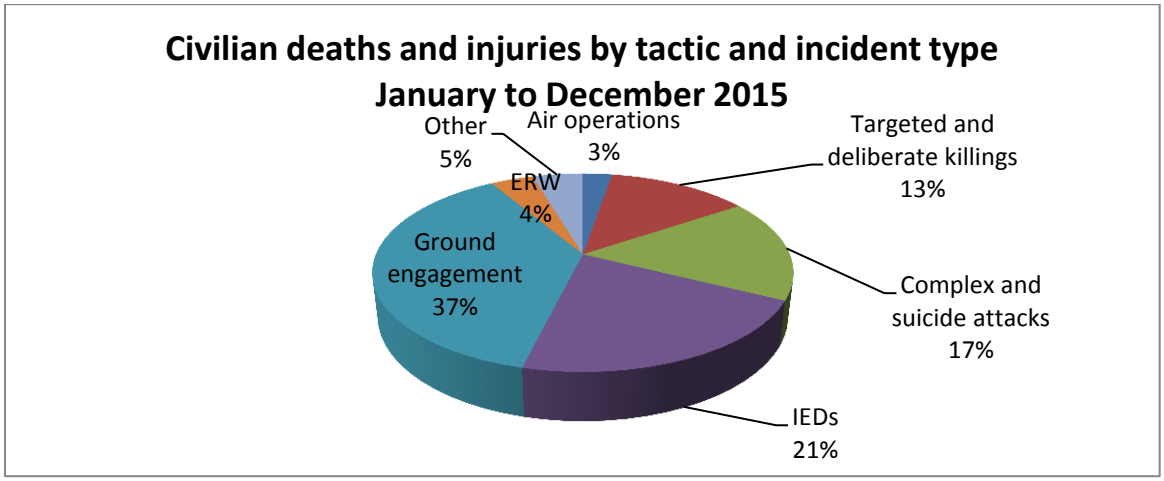
Conduct an independent, impartial, transparent and effective investigation of the attack against the MSF hospital and make the findings public. Ensure accountability for those responsible.

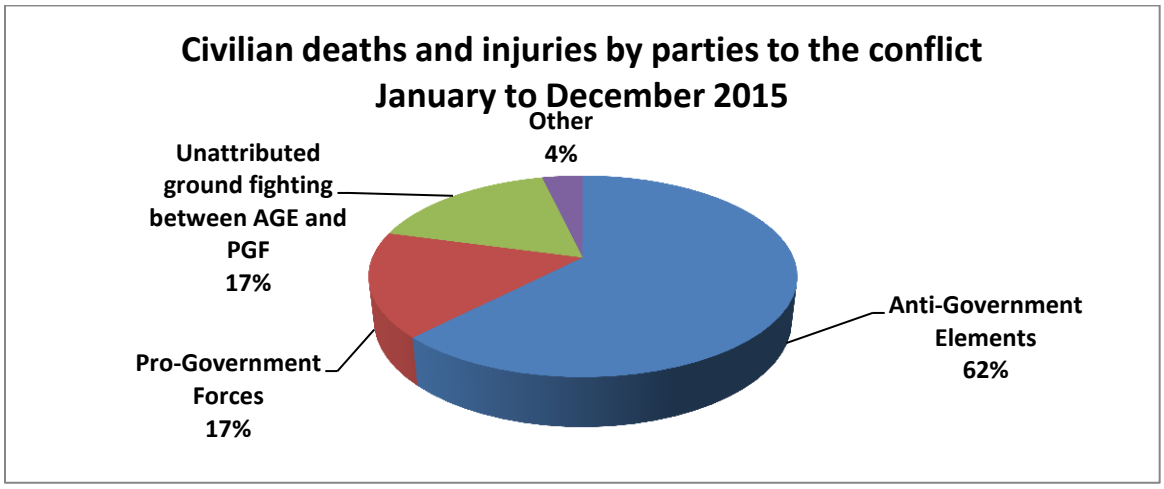
Review current targeting protocols, operational policies and pre-engagement targeting criteria to prevent attacks against civilian locations, including hospitals.

Support the Government of Afghanistan to develop and implement a national policy on civilian casualty mitigation in the conduct of hostilities.

***


Civilian deaths and injuries
January to December 2009 - 2015
8000
7000
6000
5000
4000
3000
2000
1000
0
2412
3556
2794
4368
3133
4709
2769
4821
2969
5669
3701
6833
3545
7457
2009
2010
2011
2012
2013
2014
2015
Deaths
Injuries


Civilian deaths and injuries by tactic and incident type
January to December 2015
Other 5%
Air operations 3%
Targeted and deliberate killings 13%
ERW 4%
Ground engagement 37%
Complex and suicide attacks 17%
IEDs 21%


Civilian deaths and injuries by parties to the conflict
January to December 2015
Other 4%
Unattributed ground fighting between AGE and PGF 17%
Anti-Government Elements 62%
Pro-Government Forces 17%