UNAMA Press Release | UNITED NATIONS ASSISTANCE MISSION IN AFGHANISTAN

UNAMA FIRST QUARTER 2017 CIVILIAN CASUALTY DATA

KABUL, 27 April 2017 - The UN Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) urges all parties to the conflict to take immediate and concrete measures to better protect civilians from harm, as the latest data for 2017 released today by UNAMA shows continued high numbers of civilian casualties.

"It is civilians, with increasing numbers of women and children, who far too often bear the brunt of the conflict," said Tadamichi Yamamoto, the Secretary-General's Special Representative for Afghanistan. "With the so-called fighting season imminent, I appeal to all parties to take every measure possible to prevent unnecessary and unacceptable harm to Afghan civilians."

In the first quarter of 2017, UNAMA documented 2,181 civilian casualties (715 dead and 1,466 injured), a four per cent decrease compared to the same period in 2016. Civilian deaths decreased by two per cent while civilian injuries decreased by five per cent.

Consistent with trends in 2016, ground engagements continued to cause most civilian casualties, followed by improvised explosive devices, as well as suicide and complex attacks.

The decrease in civilian casualties recorded by UNAMA is chiefly attributable to a 19 per cent reduction in civilian deaths and injuries caused by ground engagements between Pro-Government Forces and Anti-Government Elements. While UNAMA welcomes such a decrease and all efforts to protect civilians, it notes the record levels of internal displacement within Afghanistan during 2016 and that the reduction in numbers may be related to the movement of civilians from several areas severely affected by conflict. Notwithstanding this decrease, ground fighting remained the leading cause of civilian casualties - accounting for 35 per cent of all civilian casualties.

Geographically, Kabul province had the highest number of civilian casualties due to suicide and complex attacks in Kabul city, followed by Helmand, Kandahar, Nangarhar and Uruzgan provinces.

Anti-Government Elements caused 62 per cent of civilian casualties – 1,353 civilian casualties (447 dead and 906 injured), reflecting a five per cent increase compared to the same period in 2016.

Anti-Government Elements continued to target civilians intentionally and deploy indiscriminate tactics in areas with a civilian presence – in clear violation of their obligations under international humanitarian law. UNAMA documented attacks targeting civilian government employees, tribal elders, Muslim Shi'a mosques, humanitarian de-miners, NGO workers and civilians perceived to be government supporters.

"During an armed conflict, the intentional killing and injuring of civilians is a war crime" said Yamamoto. "Anti-Government Elements must stop this deplorable practice and everybody must apply – and respect – the definition of 'civilian' provided by international humanitarian law."

Improvised explosive devices (all non-suicide switch types) remained the second leading cause of civilian casualties – responsible for 409 civilian casualties (126 dead and 283 injured) – a decrease of one per cent compared to the same period in 2016 and comprising 19 per cent of all civilian casualties.

Of concern, UNAMA recorded a 12 per cent increase in civilian casualties caused by pressure-plate improvised explosive devices – 218 civilian casualties (86 dead and 132 injured).

By virtue of their indiscriminate nature, pressure-plate improvised devices are illegal and pose substantial risks to civilians due to the inability of users to direct the effects of the device at a particular target once activated. UNAMA reiterates in the strongest terms its request to Anti-Government Elements to immediately end the use of this tactic.

Suicide and complex attacks continued to cause record levels of civilian harm. The Mission recorded a five percent increase in civilian casualties from these tactics – 374 civilian casualties (108 dead and 266 injured) – accounting for 17 per cent of all civilian casualties.

UNAMA attributed 21 per cent of civilian casualties to Pro-Government Forces – 451 civilian casualties (165 dead and 286 injured) – a decrease of two per cent compared to the same period in 2016.

While most civilian casualties caused by Pro-Government Forces occurred indirectly during ground fighting with Anti-Government Elements, UNAMA recorded a substantial increase in civilian casualties from aerial operations.

The mission documented 148 civilian casualties (72 dead and 76 injured) from aerial operations, a disturbing increase compared to 29 civilian casualties (eight dead and 21 injured) in the first quarter of 2016. On 3 March, an Afghan Air Force helicopter strike killed seven children and injured 24 civilians in the Bala Baluk district of Farah province during an operation targeting the Taliban.

Nine per cent of civilian casualties arose from ground fighting between Anti-Government Elements and Pro-Government Forces where the responsible party could not be determined. Unattributed unexploded ordnance caused the majority of the remaining civilian casualties.

Civilian casualties from unexploded ordnance increased by one per cent to 203 civilian casualties (50 deaths and 153 injured), of which children comprised 81 per cent.

UNAMA is extremely concerned by increases in both child and women civilian casualties, particularly deaths. The mission recorded a 24 per cent increase in women civilian casualties, documenting 273 women casualties (88 dead and 185 injured) due to increases in women killed or injured by aerial operations and suicide and complex attacks. Conflict-related deaths of women increased by 54 per cent while the number of injured women increased by 13 per cent.

Also in the first quarter, the mission recorded 735 child casualties (210 dead and 525 injured), a three per cent increase compared to the same period in 2016. Child deaths increased by 17 per cent while child injuries decreased by one per cent. Children comprised 34 per cent of all civilian casualties during the first quarter.

Increases in child casualties from aerial operations and improvised explosive devices, in conjunction with high numbers of children killed or injured by unexploded ordnance, drove the rise in child casualties.

“The 17 per cent increase in child casualties reflects the failure of parties to the conflict to take adequate precautions to protect civilians, including through marking and clearing unexploded ordnance after fighting ends,” said Danielle Bell, UNAMA’s Human Rights Director. “These numbers represent the lives of 735 girls, boys and infants - 735stories of death, maiming, physical pain, emotional trauma and grief. Parties must act now to protect children in 2017.”

Between 1 January and 31 March, the mission documented 17 conflict-related incidents targeting health-care or health-care workers, including the *Daesh*/Islamic State Khorasan Province-claimed attack on Kabul’s Sardar Mohammad Daud Khan Hospital that resulted in the deaths of 26 civilians and injury of 30 others in addition to numerous military medical staff and injured combatants.

UNAMA once again urges the Government of Afghanistan to prioritise the endorsement and implementation of its National Policy on Civilian Casualty Prevention and Mitigation, including the completion of an action plan for its implementation that contains measurable objectives.

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For more detailed information, please consult the UNAMA annual and midyear reports on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict that document the impact of the conflict on civilians in Afghanistan and include recommendations to protect civilians and civilian communities (available at: http://unama.unmissions.org/protection-of-civilians-reports).

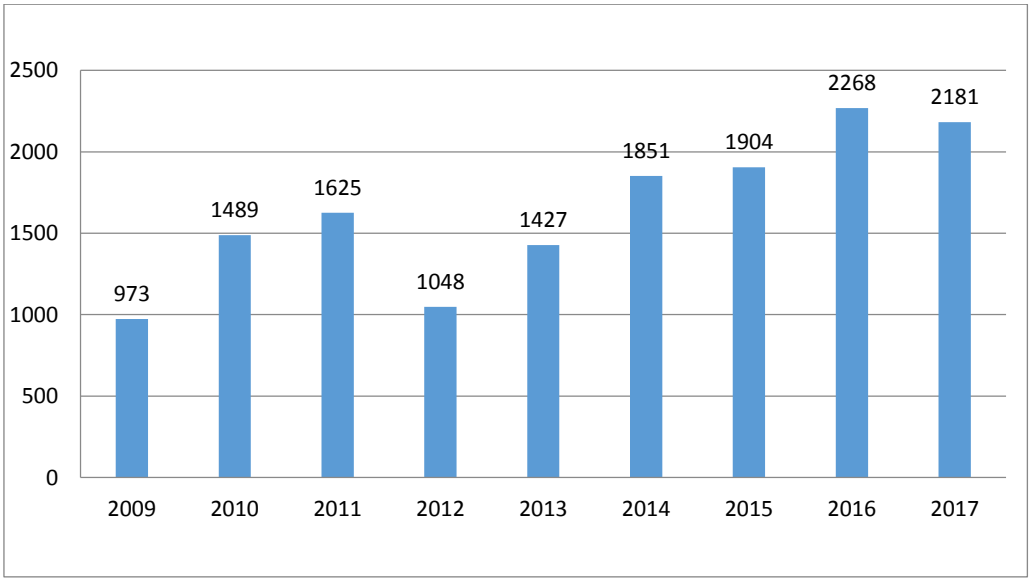
The next full report is expected in July 2017 and will cover the period of 1 January to 30 June 2017.

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UNAMA is mandated to support the Afghan Government and the people of Afghanistan as a political mission that provides 'good offices' among other key services. 'Good offices' are diplomatic steps the UN takes publicly and in private, drawing on its independence, impartiality and integrity, to prevent international disputes from arising, escalating or spreading. UNAMA assists the process of peace and reconciliation; monitors and promotes human rights, including the protection of civilians in armed conflict; promotes good governance; and encourages regional cooperation. The Mission also promotes coherent development support by the international community.

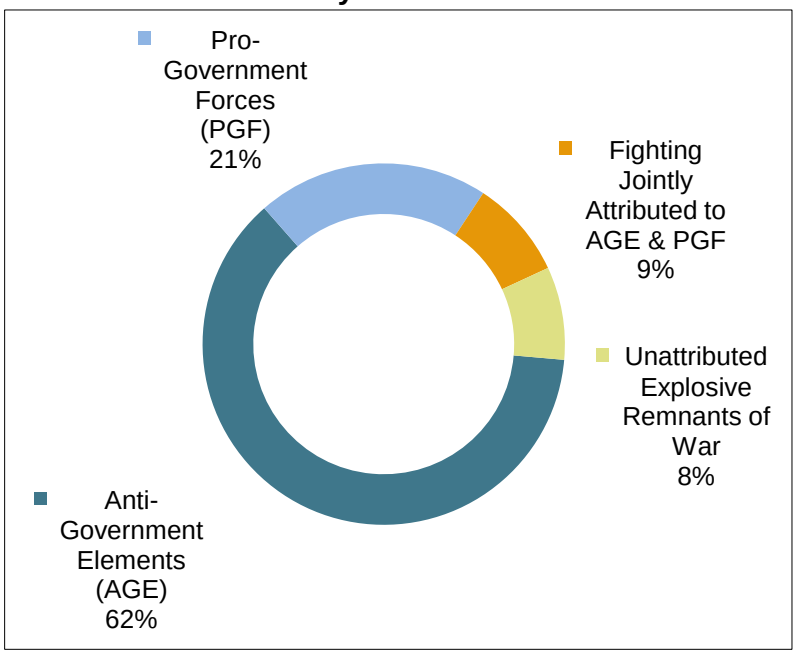
Charts and Graphs

Civilian Deaths & Injuries: January to March 2009 - 2017



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Civilian Deaths and Injuries by Party to the Conflict
January to March 2017



Civilian Casualties by Tactic & Incident Type
January to March 2017

