

PRESS RELEASE: Latest UNAMA figures show continuing record high civilian casualties



KABUL, 12 April 2015 – Latest figures from the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) show a continuing trend of record high civilian casualties, with deaths and injuries from ground engagements in Afghanistan remaining the leading cause.

Today, with the release of UNAMA's findings from the first quarter of 2015, UNAMA calls on all parties to the conflict to recognize and act to prevent harm to civilians.

"With the seasonal resumption of higher levels of conflict-related violence, the United Nations urges all parties to the conflict to take all necessary measures to protect civilians," said Nicholas Haysom, the Secretary-General's Special Representative for Afghanistan and head of UNAMA. "The parties in particular should refrain from using mortars and rockets in any areas populated by civilians."

In the first three months of 2015, civilian casualties from ground engagements rose by eight per cent compared to the same period in 2014. Ground fighting between Pro-Government Forces and Anti-Government Elements caused 521 civilian casualties

(136 civilians killed and 385 injured).

UNAMA is particularly concerned about the impact on civilians of further conflict-related operations by the Afghan National Security Forces and Anti-Government Elements in the coming months.

Between 1 January and 31 March, UNAMA documented 266 civilian casualties (62 deaths and 204 injured) from mortars and rockets, up 43 per cent from the same period last year and accounting for half of civilian casualties from ground engagements.

Total civilian deaths and injuries in the first quarter of 2015 followed the record high levels of 2014. Between 1 January and 31 March, UNAMA documented 1,810 civilian casualties (655 deaths and 1,155 injured), a two per cent decrease from the same period in 2014.

The latest figures further demonstrate a continued rise in women casualties with an increase of 15 per cent on the same period last year. Conflict-related violence killed 55 women and injured 117. Child casualties surpassed the unprecedented levels recorded last year with 430 child civilian casualties (123 deaths and 307 injured). In line with increased ground fighting in civilian populated areas, ground engagements remained the leading cause of women and children civilian casualties.

Anti-Government Elements remained responsible for the largest proportion of total civilian casualties at 73 per cent, with Pro-Government Forces responsible for 14 per cent and seven per cent attributed to both parties. Responsibility could not be attributed for six per cent of civilian casualties, caused mainly by explosive remnants of war.

Improvised Explosive Devices or IEDs remained the second leading cause of civilian casualties in the first quarter of 2015 resulting in 430 civilian casualties (155 civilian deaths and 275 injured), a 19 per cent reduction from the same period last year. Of these, UNAMA recorded a six per cent decrease in civilian casualties from remote-controlled IEDs (41 civilian deaths and 105 injured).

Targeted killings were the third leading cause of civilian deaths and injuries. In the first three months of 2015, civilian casualties from targeted killings increased by 34 per cent, with UNAMA documenting 309 civilian casualties (217 killed and 92 injured) in 192 separate incidents.

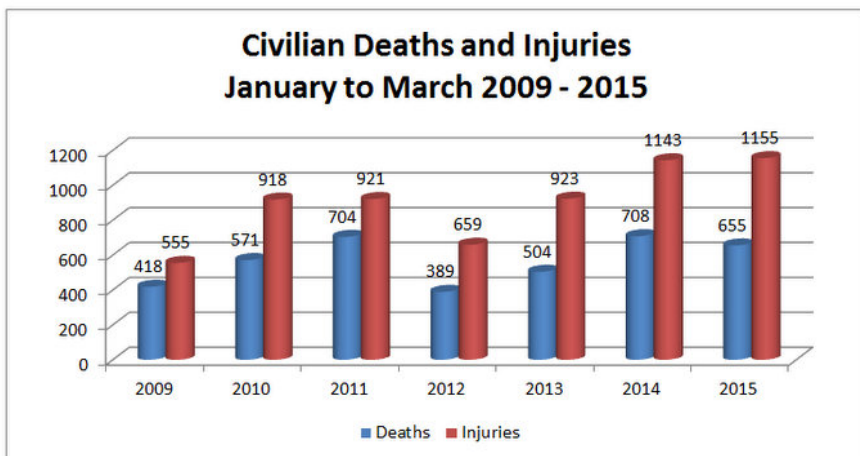
The Taliban claimed responsibility for 48 incidents of targeted killings, including deliberate killings of tribal elders, judges, prosecutors and civilian Government workers. Under international humanitarian law, a civilian is any person who is not taking a direct part in hostilities.

"The United Nations calls on the Taliban to cease all attacks against persons who are not taking a direct part in hostilities," said Georgette Gagnon, Director of Human Rights for UNAMA. "The UN notes that direct attacks on civilians are strictly prohibited under international law which binds all parties to the conflict and may amount to war crimes."

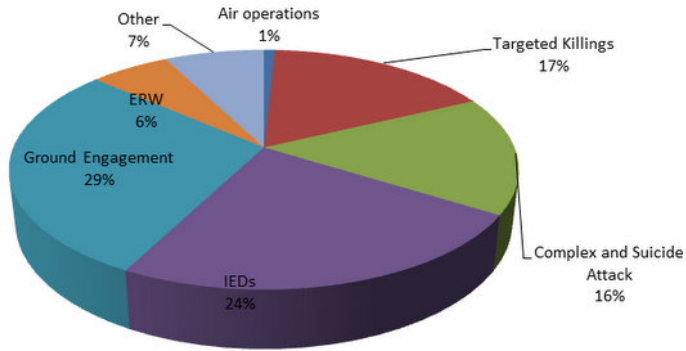
Casualties caused by suicide attacks remained on par with 2014 levels with 268 civilian casualties (55 deaths and 213 injured).

Civilian casualties from aerial operations by international military forces declined 42 per cent compared to the first quarter of 2014, with 15 civilian casualties (seven civilian deaths and eight injured) recorded from 1 January to 31 March 2015.

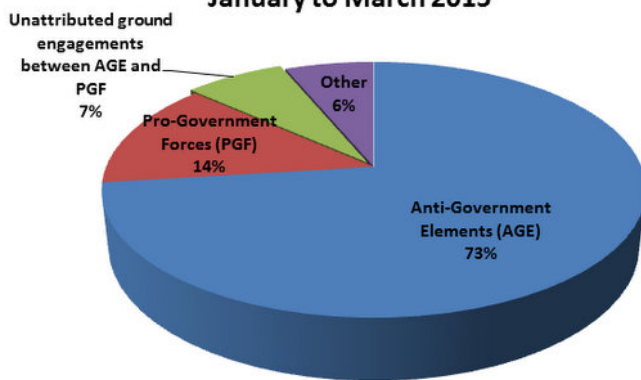
"With all signs pointing to increased ground conflict in the coming months, with devastating consequences for civilians, parties must act urgently on the commitments they've made to prevent harm to civilians, especially women and children," said Georgette Gagnon. "The consequences of the conflict go far beyond the horrific loss of life and injury to civilians. Conflict-related violence also devastates Afghan families through displacement, loss of livelihood, destruction of homes and other losses."



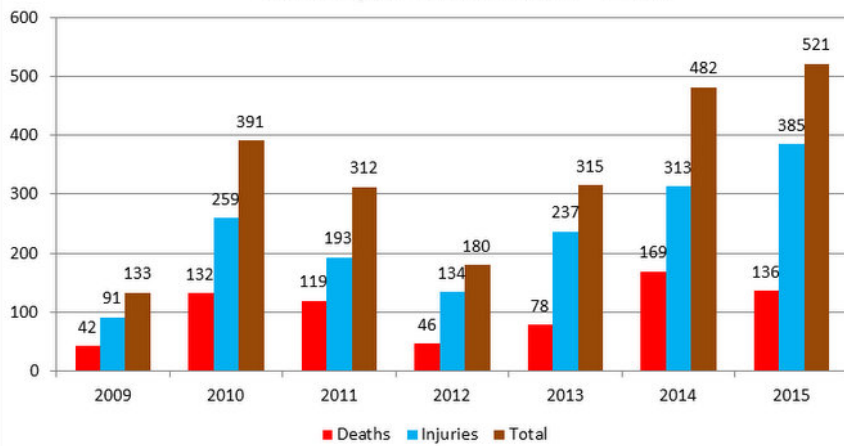
Civilian deaths and injuries by tactic and incident type January to March 2015



Civilian Deaths and Injuries by Parties to the Conflict January to March 2015



Civilian Casualties by Ground Engagements January to March 2009 - 2015



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