

UNAMA

United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan

Strategic Communication and Spokespersons Unit, Kabul, Afghanistan

Press Release

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Civilians Casualties rise by 24 per cent in first half of 2014

Ground engagements and crossfire now killing and injuring more Afghan civilians than IEDs

KABUL, 9 July 2014 – Ground combat among parties to the armed conflict in Afghanistan surpassed improvised explosive devices (IEDs) as the leading cause of conflict-related death and injury to Afghan civilians in the first six months of 2014, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) said today, in releasing its 2014 Mid-Year Report on Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, prepared in coordination with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.

Ground engagements and crossfire hit children and women with unprecedented force, with associated child casualties more than doubling in the first six months of 2014 and two-thirds more women killed and injured by ground engagements compared with 2013.

While civilian casualties caused by IEDs also increased to unprecedented levels over the same period in 2013, deaths and injuries caused by mortars, rocket-propelled grenades and small arms fire in ground engagements jumped dramatically as the frequency and intensity of these incidents increased in 2014, particularly in areas with concentrated civilian populations.

“The nature of the conflict in Afghanistan is changing in 2014 with an escalation of ground engagements in civilian-populated areas,” said the United Nations Special Representative for the Secretary-General in Afghanistan and head of UNAMA, Ján Kubiš. “The impact on civilians, including the most vulnerable Afghans, is proving to be devastating.”

From 1 January to 30 June 2014, UNAMA documented 4,853 civilian casualties, up 24 per cent over the same period in 2013. Included in the toll were 1,564 civilian deaths (up 17 per cent) and 3,289 injuries (up 28 per cent). Ground engagements caused two of

every five civilian casualties in 2014 accounting for 39 per cent of all civilian casualties: 1,901 in total, up 89 per cent from 2013, with 474 civilians killed and 1,427 injured.

Total child civilian casualties increased 34 per cent in the first six months of 2014 to 1,071, including 295 killed and 776 injured, while total women civilian casualties increased 24 per cent to 440, including 148 killed and 292 injured. Ground engagements took the lives of 112 children and injured 408, with the total 520 child casualties, an increase of 110 per cent over 2013. Ground engagements killed 64 Afghan women and injured 192, with the total 256 women casualties, up 61 per cent over 2013.

"In 2014, the fight is increasingly taking place in communities, public places and near the homes of ordinary Afghans, with death and injury to women and children in a continued disturbing upward spiral," said the Director of Human Rights for UNAMA, Georgette Gagnon. "More efforts are needed to protect civilians from the harms of conflict and to ensure accountability for those deliberately and indiscriminately killing them."

Improvised explosive devices used by Anti-Government Elements, the second leading cause of civilian casualties in 2014, were behind 1,463 civilian casualties, up seven per cent from 2013 and the highest number of civilian casualties from this tactic recorded in a six month period since 2009. The use of remote-controlled IEDs increased 13 per cent, with 205 incidents causing 637 civilian casualties including 150 deaths and 487 injuries. Of utmost concern, the use of indiscriminate illegal pressure-plate IEDs experienced a resurgence in 2014, killing 161 civilians and injuring 147, with a total 308 civilian casualties, a 33 per cent increase over 2013.

Suicide and complex attacks by Anti-Government Elements, the third leading cause of civilian casualties, killed 156 and injured 427, with the total of 583 civilian casualties. In the first half of 2014, the Taliban publicly claimed responsibility for 147 attacks that resulted in 553 civilian casualties with 234 civilians killed and 319 injured. While Taliban fighters appeared to direct 76 of these attacks at military targets that indiscriminately harmed civilians, 69 attacks deliberately targeted civilians, including tribal elders, civilian Government and justice sector employees, and civilians in restaurants.

"Afghan civilians continue to pay the highest price in the conflict in Afghanistan," said the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Navi Pillay. "I urge the parties to the conflict to take all necessary measures to protect civilians to prevent a further increase in civilian deaths and injuries in the remaining months of 2014."

"Attacks which fail to distinguish between a military and civilian objective and attacks that deliberately target civilians are serious violations of international humanitarian law and may amount to war crimes," Ms. Pillay added.

UNAMA attributed 74 per cent of all civilian casualties to Anti-Government Elements and nine per cent to Pro-Government Forces (eight per cent to Afghan national security

forces and one per cent to international military forces), while 12 per cent occurred in ground engagements between insurgents and Afghan forces which could not be attributed to a specific party. The remaining casualties were caused mainly by explosive remnants of war.

Of the 1,901 civilian casualties resulting from ground combat and crossfire, UNAMA attributed 988 (52 per cent) to Anti-Government Elements and 274 (14 per cent) to Pro-Government Forces, while 599 (32 per cent) could not be attributed and 38 civilian casualties (two per cent) resulted from cross-border shelling.

Compared with the first six months of 2009, when UNAMA began to monitor civilian casualties, the number of civilians killed by Anti-Government Elements doubled in 2014 (from 599 to 1,208), while the number of civilians killed by Pro-Government forces has been cut by half (from 302 to 158), almost entirely due to reduced civilian casualties from aerial operations of international military forces.

“The long-term trend shows that Anti-Government Elements are responsible for an increasingly large share of civilian casualties in the conflict,” said Special Representative Kubiš. “While all parties to the conflict – including Afghan national security forces - must do more to uphold their obligations under international law to avoid harm to civilians, the onus is clearly on the Taliban and other Anti-Government Elements to reverse this trend and deliver on their stated commitments to do so.”

SELECTED ACCOUNTS OF AFGHAN CIVILIANS FROM UNAMA’s 2014 MID-YEAR REPORT ON PROTECTION OF CIVILIANS

“It was the day before the election. I was performing my prayer in the local mosque with my son and some of our villagers when we heard fighting break out. It was between Taliban and Government forces. Both sides were using big weapons – mortars and rocket-propelled grenades. Suddenly, a mortar round exploded into our mosque. I saw two men and a boy killed right in front of me. One of them was my son. I was only wounded on my hand, but my son was killed. Four other men, who were visitors to our mosque, were wounded.”

Civilian victim of mortar round that impacted on a mosque in Pachir Wa Agam district, Nangarhar province, on 4 April 2014. Three civilians – including a 15-year-old boy – were killed and five injured.

“I heard a terrifying sound. My shop was shaken by an explosion and the glass smashed. I saw many children, women, men and young boys injured, bleeding and scattered on the ground. Other shopkeepers and I helped bring the injured to the hospital. No one was killed at the scene, but three died at hospital from their wounds. There were no Afghan security personnel at the scene when the explosion occurred. The target of the IED was just innocent people.”

Shopkeeper and witness to a remote-controlled IED detonation at a busy market in Maimana city, Faryab province, on 4 June 2014. Three civilians were killed and 14 injured.

UNAMA shared a draft of its 2014 Mid-Year Report on Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict with the Government of Afghanistan, the Taliban and the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). Comments from all these parties were carefully reviewed and addressed as appropriate in the report. UNAMA continues to work with all parties to the conflict to support their efforts to protect civilians and to end and prevent civilian casualties.

UNAMA makes the following recommendations in its 2014 Mid-Year Report to improve the protection of civilians:

Anti-Government Elements

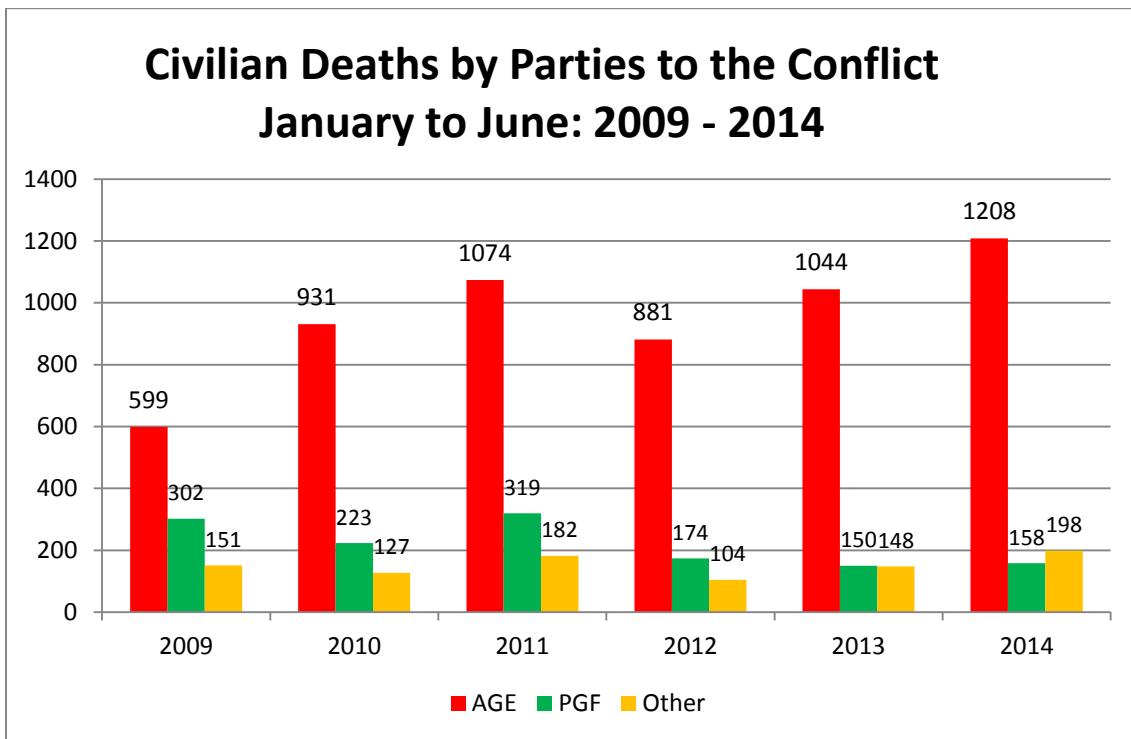
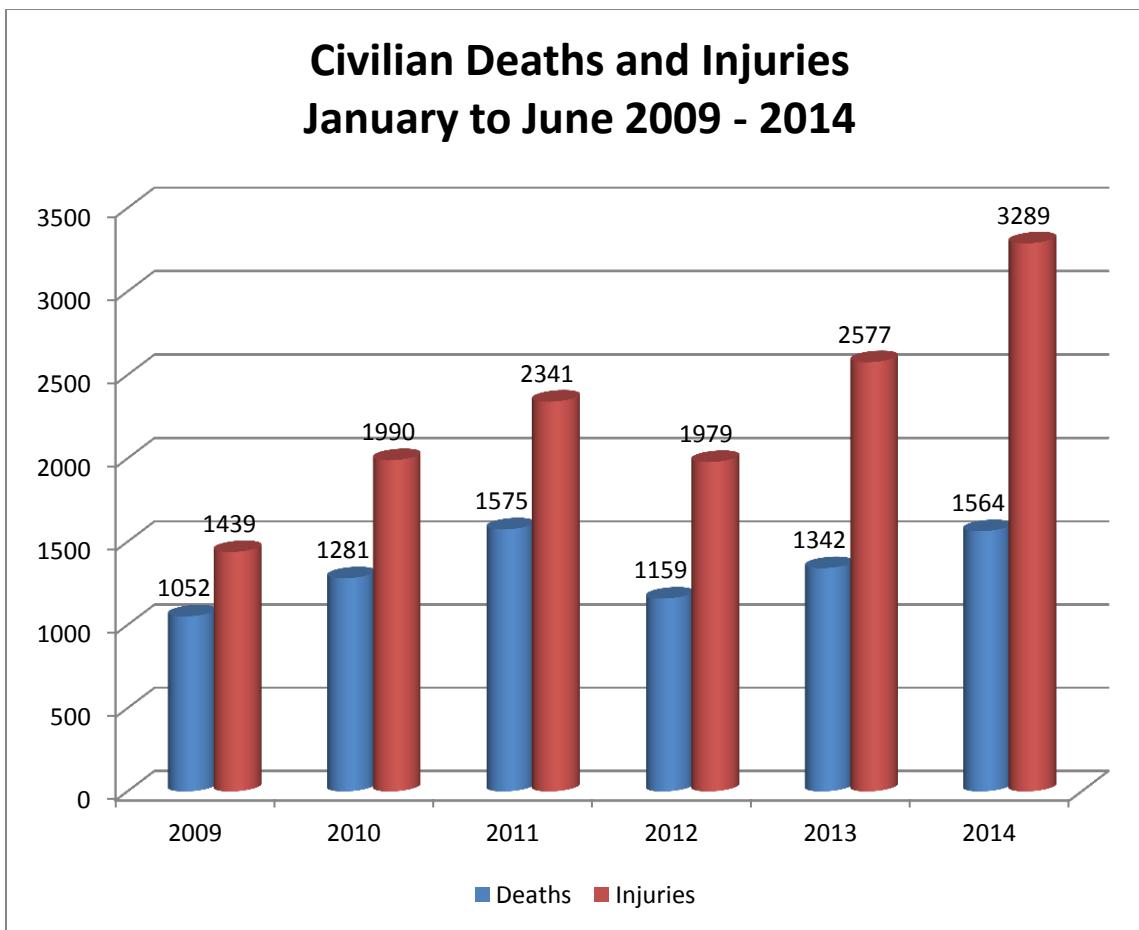
- Cease firing mortars, rockets and grenades into civilian-populated areas.
- Cease the indiscriminate and disproportionate use of IEDs, particularly in all areas frequented by civilians, and stop using illegal pressure-plate IEDs.
- Cease all attacks from and in civilian locations, including restaurants, civilian homes, public roads, consulates, civilian Government offices, including court houses.
- Apply a definition of 'civilian' that is consistent with international humanitarian law and prevent civilian casualties through compliance with the international principles of distinction, proportionality and precautions in attack.
- Enforce codes of conduct, instructions and directives instructing members to prevent and avoid civilian casualties and hold accountable those members who target, kill and injure civilians.

Government of Afghanistan

- Cease firing mortars, rockets and grenades into civilian-populated areas.
- Take concrete measures to reduce civilian casualties from ground engagements through revision and strengthening tactical directives, rules of engagement and other procedures, and ensure proper training and resourcing of all Afghan national security forces on civilian protection measures, mitigation and accountability.
- Continue to dedicate all necessary resources to enable the full implementation of the national counter-IED strategy. Prioritize the further development of Afghan national security forces' capacity to command, control and effectively conduct counter-IED operations and IED- disposal, including exploitation.
- Investigate all allegations of human right violations and abuses by Afghan national security forces and Pro-Government militias and allied forces, and prosecute and punish those found responsible as required under Afghan and international law.
- Continue to disband and disarm all illegal armed groups.

International Military Forces

- Maintain support to Afghan national security forces to ensure they are sufficiently resourced, trained and equipped to command, control and effectively conduct counter-IED operations and IED-disposal, including exploitation in 2014-16.
- Continue efforts to map, mark and clear unexploded ordnance from all international military bases and firing ranges that have closed since the onset of ISAF operations.
- Conduct post-operation reviews and investigations in cooperation with the Government of Afghanistan where civilian casualties occurred in operations that involved international security or intelligence forces, and take appropriate steps to ensure accountability, better operational practice and compensation.



Civilian deaths and injuries by tactic and incident type January to June 2014

