



Afghanistan – Researched and compiled by the Refugee Documentation Centre of Ireland on 4 December 2014

Any information as to whether indiscriminate violence poses a threat to civilian populations in Afghanistan.

The Executive Summary of a report published by the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan states::

"In the first half of 2014, the armed conflict in Afghanistan took a dangerous new turn for civilians. For the first time since 2009 when UNAMA began systematically documenting civilian casualties in Afghanistan, more civilians were found to have been killed and injured in ground engagements and crossfire between Anti-Government Elements and Afghan national security forces than any other tactic. In previous years, the majority of civilians were killed and injured by improvised explosive devices. Between 1 January and 30 June 2014, UNAMA documented 4,853 civilian casualties, (1,564 civilian deaths and 3,289 injured) recording a 17 per cent increase in civilian deaths, and a 28 per cent increase in civilians injured for a 24 per cent overall increase in civilian casualties compared to the first six months of 2013." (UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) (9 July 2014) *Afghanistan: Midyear Report 2014 – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict*, p.1)

This report also states:

"The intensification of ground fighting in civilian-populated areas took an unprecedented toll on women and children. Child casualties from ground engagements more than doubled, with 520 children civilian casualties (112 children killed and 408 injured) up 110 per cent from 2013. Ground engagements caused 256 women civilian casualties (64 women killed and 192 injured), up 61 per cent from 2013. More than half of all civilian casualties from ground engagements resulted from indirect fire, mostly mortars and grenades impacting homes, agricultural fields and playgrounds where women and children were commonly found with the remaining casualties from civilians caught in crossfire. Overall, conflict-related violence had a particularly harmful impact on women and children in the first half of 2014. UNAMA recorded 1,071 children civilian casualties (295 children killed and 776 injured) up 34 per cent compared to the first six months of 2013. One hundred and forty eight (148) women killed and 292 injured (440 women civilian casualties), up 24 per cent from 2013. Improvised explosive devices (IEDs) used by Anti-Government Elements – the second highest cause of civilian casualties – also killed and injured Afghan civilians at unprecedented levels.¹⁵ Between 1 January and 30 June 2014, UNAMA documented 1,463 civilian casualties (463 civilian deaths and 1,000 injured) a seven per cent increase from the same period in 2013 and the highest recorded number of civilian deaths and injuries from IEDs since 2009. Improvised explosive devices continued to be placed indiscriminately in areas populated or frequented by civilians and the use of illegal pressure-plate IEDs increased in

violation of international humanitarian law. UNAMA documented 205 incidents of Anti-Government Elements activating remote-controlled improvised explosive devices (RC-IEDS)¹⁶ in public areas, with devastating consequences for civilians. Between 1 January and 30 June 2014, UNAMA recorded 637 civilian casualties (150 civilians killed and 487 injured) from RC-IED attacks, a 13 per cent increase from the same period in 2013.¹⁷ Remote-controlled IEDs accounted for 44 per cent of all civilian casualties from IEDs and 13 per cent of total civilian casualties for the first six months of 2014. The majority of civilian casualties from RC-IED attacks appeared to have resulted from attacks directed at Afghan security forces, mostly Afghan National Police.” (ibid, pp.3-4)

In a chapter titled “Anti-Government Elements and Protection of Civilians” (section headed “Improvised Explosive Devices”) this report states:

“Regarding the indiscriminate use of IEDs, UNAMA continued to verify instances of Anti-Government Elements planting or using IEDs in locations that appeared not to be directed at a specific military objective, and detonating IEDs in a manner or location where the effects could not be limited in violation of international humanitarian law. UNAMA documented many IED detonations in markets, public roads and other public areas frequented by civilians.” (ibid, p.12)

A section of this report headed “Suicide and Complex Attacks” states:

“In the first six months of 2014, suicide and complex attacks killed 156 civilians and injured 427 (583 civilian casualties). Despite a seven per cent decrease in civilian casualties from such attacks compared to the first six months of 2013, suicide and complex attacks were the third leading cause of civilian deaths and injuries in the first half of 2014, after ground engagements and IEDs.” (ibid, p.16)

A section headed “Indiscriminate attacks” states:

“In addition to attacks deliberately targeting civilians, UNAMA observed that the Taliban used indiscriminate tactics in attacks against armed forces, which had devastating consequences for civilians. The use of improvised explosive devices (IEDs), area weapons systems and/or indirect fire (mortars, grenades and rockets) in the vicinity of civilian-populated areas may amount to indiscriminate attacks and, as such, may also constitute war crimes. In each incident documented by UNAMA, these weapons had an indiscriminate effect, striking military objectives and civilians or civilian objects without distinction.” (ibid, p.23)

A report published by Amnesty International, in a section titled “Killings of Civilians During International Military Operations”, states:

“Many thousands of Afghan civilians have been killed in international military operations since 2001, with at least 1,800 of the deaths occurring during the five-year period from 2009 to 2013. Although the available data has gaps and weaknesses, it appears that the frequency and magnitude of civilian casualties caused by international forces in Afghanistan have dropped substantially since 2009. This welcome development is due in part to the fact that international forces are involved in fewer military operations overall, but it

also reflects important changes in military tactics. Guided by tactical directives and other protocols, international forces have limited the use of force against residential compounds, improved the intelligence used for targeting operations, and taken other steps that have had a positive impact on the protection of civilian life. Especially in recent years, the vast majority of civilian deaths in Afghanistan have been the result of attacks by the Taliban and other armed opposition groups. Such groups have failed to take basic precautions to avoid harming civilians, have employed civilians as human shields, and in some instances have directly targeted civilians in violation of the laws of war.” (Amnesty International (11 August 2014) *Left in the dark: Failures of accountability for civilian casualties caused by international military operations in Afghanistan*, p.18)

In a section titled “Air Strikes” this report states:

“Air strikes alone have claimed the lives of thousands of civilians in Afghanistan. From 2009 to 2013, UNAMA counted approximately 1,000 civilian deaths due to air strikes, more than half of the total number of deaths attributable to international forces during that period. All of the largest incidents of civilian casualties, those in which 50 or more people have been killed, have involved air strikes. Among the worst were the 2009 attack on Granai village, Farah province, in which at least 86 were killed, and the 2009 attack near Omar Kheil village, Kunduz province (discussed below), in which many scores were killed. In 2013, 118 civilians, including 37 children, were killed in air strikes. In recent years, President Karzai has put increasing pressure on international forces to limit or even discontinue air strikes, emphasizing the need to protect the civilian population. In June 2012, he called for an absolute halt to aerial bombings, saying that international forces would be barred from using them ‘even when they are under attack.’ While air strikes have continued, nonetheless, it appears that international forces are using smaller munitions than in the past. Most recent allegations of civilian deaths attributable to air strikes have involved incidents in which fewer than 10 people were killed.” (ibid, p.19)

An article from the New York Times states:

“An airstrike by the American-led coalition killed at least four civilians, including two women, Afghan officials said Tuesday. The attack prompted a sharp rebuke from President Hamid Karzai, who has long bristled at the deaths of Afghans in military operations led by foreign forces. The strike took place a day earlier in Shindand District, in western Afghanistan, after Taliban fighters fired rockets at an Afghan military air base that also houses coalition forces, said Abdul Qayum Noorzai, the district police chief. The insurgents escaped on a pair of motorcycles. A short time later, around 7 p.m., a coalition aircraft targeted four people on two motorcycles, but those struck were civilians, not the Taliban fighters who had fired the rockets, Mr. Noorzai said.” (New York Times (6 August 2014) *Afghan Civilians Killed in Airstrike by American-Led Coalition*)

A BBC News report states:

“At least 11 Afghan civilians including women and children have been killed and 16 injured in a Nato airstrike in the eastern province of Kunar, local security officials have told the BBC. The airstrike took place in Narang district

after local police and soldiers came under attack, they said. Nato is investigating the air strike, which President Hamid Karzai condemned. Civilians deaths have caused tension between him and Nato.” (BBC News (10 September 2014) *At least 11 Afghan civilians 'killed by Nato airstrike'*)

A report from Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty states:

“Afghan officials say roadside bombs have killed at least 10 people in Afghanistan. The deadliest attack on July 12 happened in southern Kandahar Province, where eight civilians were killed when a roadside bomb blew up their vehicle. Two people were killed in a similar incident in eastern Nangarhar Province.” (Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (12 July 2014) *Roadside Bombs Kill At Least 10 In Afghanistan*)

An Agence France Presse states:

“A suicide bomber detonated an explosive-packed motorcycle in northern Afghanistan Thursday, killing six civilians and wounding more than 20 in a crowded market as shoppers bought supplies for the upcoming festival of Eid-ul-Fitr, officials said.” (Agence France Presse (24 July 2014) *Motorbike bomb kills six civilians in north Afghanistan: officials*)

See also Agence France Presse report which states:

“A suicide attacker targeted a NATO convoy in Kabul on Sunday, killing four civilians and wounding at least 35 others, officials said, in the latest violence to hit the capital as politicians wrangle over election results. The NATO force said none of its soldiers had been killed, but did not give any details of injuries in the blast, which came as foreign troops wind down combat operations at the end of a 13-year war against Taliban insurgents. ‘Two children, a woman and a man were killed and 35 others were wounded in the attack,’ Kabul police said in a statement.” (Agence France Presse (10 August 2014) *4 civilians killed in Kabul suicide attack on NATO convoy*)

A report on this incident from the Xinhua General News Service states:

“At least five persons including the suicide bomber and four civilians were killed and 35 other civilians sustained injuries as a suicide car bomb rocked the fortified Afghan capital city Kabul on Sunday, Interior Ministry said in a statement released here. ‘A suicide bomber riding explosive-laden car blew it up next to a convoy of foreign forces on Darul Aman road at 11:30 a.m. local time today killing himself and four others, all innocent civilians,’ said the statement. ‘Those killed in the suicide attack include two children, a woman and man and 35 other civilians including a child and a lady sustained injuries,’ it said.” (Xinhua General News Service (10 August 2014) *Suicide car bomb kills 5, wounds 35 in Kabul*)

An Agence France Presse report states:

“A major Taliban offensive in eastern Afghanistan over the past week has left up to 100 civilians and security personnel dead, 12 of them beheaded, officials said Friday, as violence worsens with the withdrawal of US-led troops. This summer's fighting season has seen Taliban militants advance in several provinces, exploiting a prolonged political deadlock in Kabul over

disputed presidential election results. The latest series of attacks have focused on Ajristan district in the strategically important province of Ghazni, after recent offensives in Kandahar, Helmand and Logar. "The militants beheaded 12 civilians in four villages," Mohammad Ali Ahmadi, deputy governor of Ghazni, told AFP." (Agence France Presse (26 September 2014) *Afghanistan: Up to 100 Afghans killed, 12 beheaded, in Taliban offensive*)

A Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty report states:

"Afghan police say five people were killed and two were wounded when gunmen opened fire on a car in an attack in one of the country's eastern provinces. The attack on October 24 in Nangahar province occurred as seven civilians were travelling through Khogyani district early in the morning. A spokesman for the provincial police, Hazrat Hussain Mashraqiwal, said the attack was carried out by 'insurgents,' a term that usually refers to the Taliban." (Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (24 October 2014) *Insurgents Kill Five Civilians In Attack In Afghanistan*)

A Deutsche Presse-Agentur report states:

"At least three civilians were killed and nine others injured in two separate Taliban attacks in eastern Afghanistan, local officials said Sunday. One man was killed and five people, including four women, were wounded when a Taliban missile attack hit a house in Alishing district of eastern province of Laghman late Saturday, the provincial governor's office said in a statement. In Alingar district, Taliban opened fire on a rickshaw, in which two civilians were killed and four others wounded, it said." (Deutsche Presse-Agentur (2 November 2014) *Taliban attacks kill 3 Afghan civilians, leave 9 injured*)

An Agence France Presse report states:

"A suicide bomber on Sunday attacked the vehicle convoy of a prominent female Afghan MP near the parliament in Kabul, killing three civilians and injuring 22 others, officials said. The blast, in which the attacker detonated an explosives-packed car, badly damaged Shukria Barakzai's vehicle and shattered nearby windows on the main road in the west of the city." (Agence France Presse (16 November 2014) *Afghanistan: Female Afghan MP survives suicide attack, 3 dead*)

A Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty report states:

"Afghan officials say a suicide bomber has killed at least 50 people and injured about 60 others at a volleyball tournament in the country's eastern province of Paktika. Mokhlis Afghan, a spokesman for the provincial governor, said the attack happened during an inter-district tournament attended by a large crowd in the Yahyakhail district late in the afternoon on November 23. The attacker walked into a crowd of spectators and detonated his explosive vest while the match was still going on. Most of the casualties were civilians." (Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (23 November 2014) *Suicide Bomber Kills Dozens At Afghan Volleyball Tournament*)

See also article from The Guardian which refers to this incident as follows:

“The volleyball match attack, which wounded 63, took place in a village in Yahyakhail district in Paktika province, one of the most unstable areas in the country. The bomber entered a large crowd, wearing a belt with explosives, and blew himself up in the middle of spectators and players, said Mokhles Afghan, spokesperson for the governor of Paktika. The match was part of a youth tournament between three districts of Paktika, and as a result most casualties were young people.” (The Guardian (24 November 2014) *Suicide bomber kills at least 50 at volleyball match in Afghanistan*)

An article from the online edition of the Daily Mail states:

“A suicide bomber attacked a British embassy vehicle in the Afghan capital Kabul this morning, killing at least five Afghan civilians and wounding more than 30 others. An embassy spokesman confirmed the attack and said some people in the vehicle were wounded, without providing further details. He added that the vehicle was not carrying any British diplomats. Kabir Amiri, the administrative head of Kabul hospitals, said that at least five Afghan civilians were killed and up to 34 wounded. Afghan Public Health Ministry spokesman Kanishka Bektash Turkistani said the wounded included five children.” (Mail Online (27 November 2014) *Breaking News: Suicide bomber 'on motorbike' attacks British diplomatic vehicle in Afghan capital killing at least five people*)

This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research and Information Unit within time constraints. This response is not and does not purport to be conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum. Please read in full all documents referred to.

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