

Flash Update 2 – Fighting, displacement and civilian casualties in Southern Afghanistan (14 October 2020)

Key Highlights

- Heavy fighting in southern Afghanistan, near Lashkargah city in Hilmand province, has displaced thousands of people and interrupted critical health services, as families seek refuge in neighboring areas.
- Four assessment teams have been deployed to assess the humanitarian impact of the situation.

Situation Overview:

Fighting that started on 11 October between the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) and a non-state armed group (NSAG) continued on 14 October near Lashkargah city in Hilmand province. Military operations and airstrikes took place in several areas on 13 October with the ANSF reportedly regaining control of numerous checkpoints. On 14 October, sporadic clashes were reported in Nahr-e-Saraj and Nad-e-Ali districts which have been some of the most affected areas since the start of the fighting on Sunday. Today, the Minister of Defense reportedly arrived in Lashkargah City to assess the situation. While the highway between the West and Kandahar has reportedly re-opened after it had been blocked due to the presence of Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) and armed clashes, the highway between Kandahar and Lashkargah remains closed.

Anticipated Humanitarian Impact:

Local authorities initially estimated that some 35,000 people (around 5,000 households) were displaced into Lashkargah city. Assessment teams are currently verifying these numbers with 1,051 IDPs confirmed so far. Following yesterday's influx of IDPs, no new displacement was reported today from Nahr-e-Saraj, Nad-e-Ali/Marja and the outskirts of Lashkargah. While some 400 families (approximately 3,000 people) were temporarily displaced within Nawa-e-Barakzay district to Dasht and Kharaba areas, the majority have since returned home.

Initial reports suggest that two health clinics (Nawa Comprehensive Health Clinic and Bolan Basic Health Clinic) were closed on 14 October due to active fighting. Seven other health facilities in Nad-e-Ali/Marja, Nahr-e-Saraj, Lashkargah and Nawa closed down on 14 October due to threats to health staff. Before closing, the health facilities were operating in a reduced capacity, focusing on trauma care only. The closure of the health facilities affects more than 38,000 people in the area and deprives them of access to critical health services.

Coordination:

The Afghanistan National Disaster Management Authority (ANDMA) began food distribution today to 120 IDP households (approximately 800 IDPs), with up to 1,000 IDP households (7,000 people) expected to receive ANDMA assistance in Lashkargah City in the coming days. OCHA is closely coordinating with ANDMA and MORR to ensure efficient information flows about the assistance and to avoid duplication. On 14 October, the Operational Coordination Team (OCT) deployed four joint needs assessment teams to assess the needs of the IDPs, with a particular focus on the areas of Ahmad Shahi Mena, Sarkar and Safian in Lashkargah. Electricity and telecommunication lines have been disrupted in some affected areas, hindering the flow of information. This has affected people's ability to communicate and humanitarian partners' ability to conduct assessments.

Currently, there is capacity in Lashkargah to cover the immediate needs of new IDPs. UNICEF has WASH and NFI packages for 4,500 households while IRC has cash capacity for more than 2,000 households. UNHCR will deliver assistance to 600 households (200 tents and 400 NFI kits). OCHA is working with clusters to deliver further assistance, including tents, food and water which have been highlighted as immediate needs. WHO will relocate three Mobile Health Teams (MHTs) to provide medical services to IDPs population in Lashkargah City.

The next update will be published as the situation changes and new information becomes available.