

## **Flash Update 6 – Fighting, displacement and civilian casualties in Southern Afghanistan (1 November 2020)**

### **KEY HIGHLIGHTS**

- Heavy fighting continues in southern Afghanistan across Hilmand, Kandahar and Uruzgan provinces, affecting thousands of people.
- Assessment teams are continuing their work to gauge the humanitarian impact of the situation. To date, 11,663 IDP have been verified in Hilmand and thousands of people are believed to be displaced in Kandahar and Uruzgan provinces, with assessments ongoing.

### **SITUATION OVERVIEW:**

#### **Hilmand**

Fighting that started on 11 October between the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) and a non-state armed group (NSAG) has carried on for more than two weeks near Lashkargah city in Hilmand province. The security situation in the area remains volatile. Military operations took place in several areas on 31 October. Fighting reportedly continued on Saturday in Babaje and Basharan in Lashkargah's PD3, Chahanjir in Nad-e-Ali district and Nawa-e-Barakzaiy district. Fighting has also been reported in Nahr-e-Saraj along route 601 – an important route connecting Lashkargah in Hilmand with the city of Kandahar to the east.

The presence of IEDs planted on main roads continues to hinder movement, with additional devices reportedly placed along the Lashkargah – Nawa-e-Barakzaiy road. The Lashkargah – Kandahar highway and the roads connecting Lashkargah to Nawa-e-Barakzaiy, Nad-e-Ali/Marja and Nahr-e-Saraj also remain closed to civilians due to the danger posed by IEDs, the presence of NSAG checkpoints, and physical damage to infrastructure such as culverts. However, people continue to use other routes in NSAG controlled areas.

#### **Kandahar**

According to reports received on 27 October, the fighting between ANSF and an NSAG continues to spread to Kandahar Province as the NSAG has reportedly entered Arghandab, Panjwaiy and Zharey districts. Moreover, military operations and airstrikes are ongoing in the area. The key roads connecting Kandahar city to Arghandab, Panjwaiy and Zharey are closed due to the presence of IEDs and physical damage to infrastructure such as culverts, however people are using other routes for movement. Additionally, it has been reported that the NSAG has, in some cases, allowed for civilian movement for essential reasons only.

#### **Uruzgan**

The security situation in Uruzgan remains volatile with fighting reported in Dehrawud and Gizab districts on 28 October. As of 31 October, the fighting was ongoing with several military operations and airstrikes conducted over the past few days. The key routes to Dehrawud and Gizab districts have been inaccessible to civilians due to the presence of IEDs and destroyed culverts. However, people continue to use other routes in NSAG controlled areas.

## **ANTICIPATED HUMANITARIAN IMPACT:**

Timely, reliable data and verification of IDPs is currently the priority in order to better understand the situation facing people affected in Hilmand, Kandahar and Uruzgan province. This will improve the quality of programming and speed of assistance, as well as support protection of those who have been recently displaced.

### **Hilmand**

The fighting has triggered the flight of residents with local authorities initially estimating that 35,000 people (around 5,000 households) were displaced into Lashkargah city. Assessment teams are still verifying these numbers with 11,663 IDPs confirmed so far. Interruptions to mobile phone networks continue to be a challenge in Lashkargah as well as other areas, hindering information flows and the progress of humanitarian assessments.

The violence has stretched hospitals in Lashkargah to capacity. Attacks on health facilities during the fighting are particularly concerning, with WHO reporting that 15 health facilities have been targeted. According to reports received on 27 October, 3 health facilities are still closed and 12 are open with limited capacity due to active fighting and the presence of IEDs. The closure of health clinics in the area due to insecurity is directly affecting more than 56,000 people, with more than 195,000 indirectly affected by the partial opening of the health facilities, according to WHO.

### **Kandahar**

While the number of displaced people is yet to be confirmed, thousands have reportedly fled fighting across Kandahar province. Local authorities have reported some 150 households from Hilmand province and 250 households from Dehrawud and Gizab districts in Uruzgan province have been displaced into Kandahar city due to the recent fighting. There have also been reports of some 400 households being displaced from Maywand to Dand district. Similarly, 500 households from Arghandab district have reportedly been displaced into Kandahar city with additional reports of displacement across Panjwaiy and Zharey districts in Kandahar province. According to reports, civilians residing in some of these areas have been asked by the NSAG to temporarily leave the area and relocate to NSAG controlled areas to avoid being caught in fighting.

Initial reports suggest that some humanitarian partners in Zharey, Panjwaiy and Arghandab districts have temporarily suspended their activities while they assess the security situation. On 28 October, Dehrawud District Hospital was closed due to active fighting. The closure of the hospital is believed to affect around 33,000 people in the area. Similarly, on 27 October, three health facilities (Hadira CHC, Nagahan Sub-Centre and Joy Lahore Sub-Centre) were closed in Arghandab district. The health facilities were reportedly closed due to the risk of IEDs making it difficult for health staff to access the clinics. The closure of the three health facilities is affecting around 60,000 people in the area.

The fighting in Arghandab district has severely impacted local livelihoods leaving farmers unable to access their land to harvest pomegranates.

Interruptions to mobile phone networks remain a challenge in several districts in Kandahar province, hindering information flows and the progress of humanitarian assessments.

## **Uruzgan**

The Operational Coordination Team (OCT) in Uruzgan is initially estimating that approximately 100 households from Dehrawud and Gizab districts have been displaced into Tirinkot city – the provincial capital of Uruzgan. Thousands more people may have been displaced by fighting across other districts in Uruzgan according to initial reports received from local authorities. The number of new IDPs in the province is yet to be confirmed and verified by humanitarian assessment teams.

Humanitarian partners operating in Dehrawud district have temporarily suspended their activities due to active fighting. The suspension of humanitarian activities in the district will leave people unable to access WASH, protection and shelter support as well as to receive key COVID-19 prevention messages to help protect people from transmission of the COVID-19 virus.

### **COORDINATION:**

OCHA is closely coordinating with the Government to provide assistance to IDPs based on need, ensuring efficient information flows and avoiding duplication of efforts.

## **Hilmand**

Four OCT teams led by DACAAR, along with staff from UNHCR, WFP, HAPA, APA, HRDA, SHAO, COAR, IRC, the Department of Refugees and Repatriation (DoRR) and the Provincial Governor's Office have been deployed to assess needs in different parts of Lashkargah. As of 29 October, 11,663 IDPs have been verified, with assessments ongoing. OCHA had coordinated the humanitarian response to 9,687 IDPs as of 29 October. OCHA is currently coordinating the response for the remaining 1,976 people verified by the assessment teams based on information about humanitarian needs that has been shared with all relevant clusters. The distribution to IDPs has included food from WFP, non-food items (including tents) and WASH items from DACAAR, UNHCR and UNICEF, and cash from IRC. The Provincial Rural Rehabilitation and Development Directorate (PRRD), through the support of UNICEF, continues to supply water in IDP locations through water tankering.

## **Kandahar**

Through the DRC-led Emergency Response Mechanism (ERM) consortium, five inter-agency assessment teams have so far been deployed to Dand and Arghandab districts to assess IDP needs. Additional teams could be deployed across the province over the coming days, as needed.

On 28 October, OCHA chaired an OCT meeting in Kandahar to discuss the humanitarian situation in the area and how to best respond to the needs of the IDPs. During the meeting, OCHA and members of the Hilmand OCT assessment teams shared lessons learned with the Kandahar OCT, DoRR and ANDMA. Information shared included best practices learned from their ongoing assessments and humanitarian response. During the meeting, the Kandahar OCT agreed to continue regular monitoring of the security situation and road conditions across the affected districts and to deploy additional assessment teams if needed. Government counterparts at the OCT meeting agreed to call for a Provincial Disaster Management Commission (PDMC) meeting to initiate a Government-led assessment to assess the needs of IDPs in Kandahar. The PDMC meeting – chaired by the Provincial Governor – was held on 1 November together with ANDMA. The involvement of the PDMC will ensure a joint needs assessment approach, avoid duplication of efforts and enhance reporting mechanisms. The Government also agreed to take part in the response by establishing temporary shelter for IDPs. DoRR and ANDMA will be responsible for tracking IDP movements. The tracked data will be regularly shared with OCHA and other humanitarian partners for further action. In order to directly

communicate with IDPs impacted by the emergency, DoRR and ANDMA informed the OCT that they would share their contact details across various social media platforms to encourage people to report on new displacement across the province.

### **Uruzgan**

During a recent OCT meeting, DoRR shared information about 100 households from Dehrawud and Gizab districts that had been displaced into Tirinkot city and encouraged humanitarian partners to follow up with needs assessments. The OCT agreed to deploy an inter-agency assessment team, led by NRC, on 1 November to assess the needs of the IDPs. An additional inter-agency team is planning to deploy to Dehrawud district in the coming days to assess the needs of new IDPs in the area.

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