

[Afghanistan: End attacks on civilians, prosecute perpetrators, says senior UN rights official](#)

A top United Nations rights official has welcomed the Afghan Government's "undeniable commitment" to improving an often "dire" human rights record, while also voicing concern over continued attacks on civilians ahead of key elections later in the year.

Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights, Andrew Gilmour, was speaking at the end of a four-day visit to Afghanistan in which he noted rising civilian casualties, due mainly to terrorist attacks, but also highlighted continuing discrimination against women at many levels of society.

"The Government has made significant progress in ending violence against women, but the use of 'mediation' for the gravest cases of violence, including murder; severe violence and harmful traditional practices, [is to be regretted](#)," said Mr. Gilmour.

"What would send a strong signal to those men who continue to violently abuse women with impunity, would be to start seriously prosecuting them," he added.

While recognizing the Government's work on human rights, particularly its ratification of the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture, which reinforces Afghanistan's compliance with international human rights standards, he urged the authorities to investigate and prosecute military or civilian perpetrators of so-called "bacha bazi" – a form of sexual abuse against boys.

Turning to the vulnerability of civilians in recent days during the registration process for elections in October, he referred to a report released by the UN Assistance Mission ([UNAMA](#)) on Thursday, that detailed a disturbing pattern of [attacks at election-related facilities](#), which have resulted so far in 271 civilians killed and injured.

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Meeting with President Ashraf Ghani on Wednesday, Mr. Gilmour welcomed the President's clear commitment to take additional measures to protect civilians, despite extremely difficult circumstances.

At a conference on peace and reconciliation, he called the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) an impressive and crucial pillar of society, saying: "the people of Afghanistan want security and a lasting

peace built on accountability and justice. I hope the Government hear these compelling voices.”

Reduce civilian casualties during military operations

In the Kunduz province, Mr. Gilmour stressed to the provincial authorities the need to reduce civilian casualties during military operations.

He spoke with community representatives from Laghmani village, Dasht-e-Archi district about the Afghan forces’ firing on 2 April of rockets and machine guns on a religious gathering – leading to the reported death and injury of more than 100 people, mainly children.

The UN rights official said he was deeply troubled by the incident and urged the Government at the highest levels to better protect civilians, hold perpetrators accountable in line with their obligations under international humanitarian law and restore trust between the residents of Dasht-e-archi and the Government.

“Accepting full responsibility for what clearly was a terrible mistake, and a sincere apology for the suffering caused, is always a useful step in advancing reconciliation and failure to do so provides great ammunition for terrorists and extremists,” he said.