

[Afghan conflict causes more than 2,000 civilian casualties in first quarter of 2018, UN mission reports](#)

Armed conflict in Afghanistan killed 763 civilians and injured 1,495 in the first three months of this year, the United Nations mission there said Thursday.

“All parties to the conflict in Afghanistan must do everything in their power to protect civilians from harm,” said Ingrid Hayden, the Secretary-General’s Deputy Special Representative for Afghanistan. “Afghan [civilians continue to suffer](#), caught in the conflict, in ways that are preventable; this must stop now.”

The 2,258 civilian casualties, documented from 1 January to 31 March by the UN Assistance Mission in the country, known as UNAMA, are at the similar levels recorded in the first three months of 2017 and 2016. Anti-Government elements caused 1,500 civilian casualties, up six per cent from the same period last year.

Suicide improvised explosive devices (IED) and complex attacks were the leading cause of civilian casualties – a new trend. The Mission found that combats on the ground were the second leading cause, followed by targeted and deliberate killings, explosive remnants of war, and aerial operations.

The full report is available in English, Dari and Pashto [here](#).

[UN launches initiative to improve road safety worldwide](#)

Some 1.3 million drivers, passengers and pedestrians die each year on the world’s roads, the United Nations took a major step to address this tragedy by launching on Thursday a trust fund to spur action that could save lives and prevent the loss of opportunity associated with road accidents.

Speaking at the UN General Assembly where the launch was announced, Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed highlighted the opportunities offered by the UN Road Safety Trust Fund.

“We have [a chance to save the lives of millions of people](#) around the world,

and to prevent injuries, suffering and the loss of opportunity associated with road accidents,” she said, urging all stakeholders to contribute to the Trust Fund and to step up their efforts to achieve global road safety targets.

[According](#) to the UN Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), the Organization’s development arm in the continent, which is also the secretariat for the Trust Fund, every \$1,500 contributed to the Fund could save one life; prevent 10 serious injuries; and leverage \$51,000 towards investments in road safety.

“The Road Safety Trust Fund will serve as a catalyst for much-needed progress towards the road safety targets of the Sustainable Development Goals,” said Olga Algayerova, the head of UNECE.

Dealing specifically with road safety, SDG targets [3.6](#) and [11.2](#) aim to halve the number of global deaths and injuries from road traffic accidents; and to provide access to safe, affordable, accessible and sustainable transport systems as well as improve road safety for all, respectively.

“[We] are committed to working with all stakeholders to multiply the impact of global action to improve road safety,” added Ms. Algayerova.

Echoing these words, Jean Todt, the President of the Fédération Internationale de l’Automobile and the UN [Special Envoy for Road Safety](#), also underlined the importance scaling up of resources to achieve global road safety targets.

“[The Trust Fund] has the potential to galvanize our global efforts to address the road safety situation, building on the progress made and experience gained over the Decade of Action for Road Safety 2011-2020,” he expressed.

The [Trust Fund](#) will support efforts along the five pillars of the Global Plan for the Decade of Action for Road Safety, which include strengthened road safety management capacities; improved safety of road infrastructure and broader transport networks; enhanced safety of vehicles; improved behaviour of road users; and improved post-crash care.

General Assembly urges effective measures to improve road safety

Also today, the UN General Assembly – the UN body with universal membership of all 193 Member States – adopted a resolution on road safety in which it called for a host of measures to prevent road accidents and to minimizing the resulting damage.

One of the measures, it urged, the adoption policies and measures to implement vehicle safety regulations to ensure that all new motor vehicles meet “applicable minimum regulations for the protection of occupants and other road users, with seat belts, airbags and active safety systems fitted as standard equipment.”

[DPR Korea: UN says \\$111 million needed to provide life-saving aid, tackle malnutrition](#)

The United Nations and its partners are urgently requesting \$111 million in humanitarian funding to assist millions of people in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), including children whose growth has been stunted because they are not getting enough to eat.

"Humanitarian assistance is a vital lifeline for [millions of ordinary people](#) living in DPR Korea," UN Resident Coordinator in the north Asian country, Tapan Mishra, said Thursday.

"However, funding has been rapidly declining every year, with less than one-third of the amount required for humanitarian programmes raised in 2017," he added.

According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs ([OCHA](#)), amidst political tensions, chronic food insecurity, early childhood malnutrition and nutrition insecurity are widespread in DPRK.

More than 10 million people, or 40 per cent of the DPRK's population, are believed to need humanitarian assistance. Insufficient intake of nutrition continues to be a serious concern with more than one-quarter of children stunted.

OCHA cited many complex, intertwined reasons for the high rates of undernutrition in DPRK, including, mountainous terrain, with only 17 per cent of land good for cultivation, and farming largely reliant on traditional farming methods. Further, changing weather patterns have left the country vulnerable to droughts and floods, which often result in low agricultural production.

People also struggle to access basic services, with a large portion of the population living without a reliable source of safe water and almost a quarter without basic sanitation facilities, contributing to serious health concerns.

The [Needs and Priorities Plan](#) 2018, released on Wednesday in Pyongyang, outlines the financial needs to cover roughly six million people, including funding for activities to enhance access to nutritious food, healthcare, water and sanitation services, as well as to make communities resilient to natural disasters.

Mr. Mishra said that last year's programme reached more than six million

people with aid.

“Yet, without adequate funding, agencies will be forced to scale-down their life-saving work, with serious impacts on the lives of ordinary people,” he stressed.

[Returning home, Afghans continue to face challenges in rebuilding their lives – UN agencies](#)

In 2017, about 58,000 Afghan refugees voluntarily returned to their country after decades abroad only to be met with protection risks and “significant” barriers to long-term reintegration into society, two United Nations agencies working in the Asian country reported on Thursday.

The [Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees](#) (UNHCR) and the [International Organization for Migration](#) (IOM) said that despite efforts to support those coming back, the greatest challenge lies in a comprehensive, community-wide response that leaves no one behind.

“In spite of the inherent challenges of returning home after many decades abroad, IOM and UNHCR are working hand in hand to ensure sustainable solutions are provided to returning Afghans,” said Laurence Hart, the head of IOM operations in the country.

“[We] work together to complement each other’s efforts in areas of high return, with partners and the Government, for greater efficiency and to ensure support to those communities to mitigate protection risks,” added Fathiaa Abdalla, the head of the UNHCR office in Afghanistan.

Each year, registered Afghan refugees and undocumented Afghans make the decision to return home from Iran and Pakistan, in spite of the difficult situation in Afghanistan.

Since 2002, more than 5.24 million registered Afghan refugees have returned – more than 58,000 in 2017, according to a new, first of its kind, joint IOM-UNHCR report.

“Given the scope of the ongoing conflict, high levels of internal displacement, already overstretched services and difficulty finding jobs, returning Afghans face protection risks and significant barriers to sustainable reintegration,” said the two UN agencies.

UNHCR and IOM have been collaborating closely in the country to assist the

returning refugees and undocumented migrants. Together with the Government, they have also been actively coordinating the provision of humanitarian post-arrival and reintegration assistance.

With estimates that 280,000 registered refugees and 420,000 undocumented Afghans expected to return in 2018, the two agencies are harmonizing their operations, in particular related to monitoring, reporting and analysis and developing key indicators for displacement and mobility tracking.

These estimates depend on a number of factors, including the situation in places of return as well as countries where the refugees and undocumented persons are staying in.

[UN human rights experts urge Viet Nam not to stifle dissenting voices](#)

United Nations experts have urged Viet Nam not to crackdown on civil society or stifle dissent, after the authorities jailed several human rights defenders for “conducting activities to overthrow the people’s government” – a charge that carries the possibility of the death sentence or life imprisonment.

These activities have received rulings, with the founder of Brotherhood for Democracy, Nguyen Van Dai, sentenced to 15 years in prison and five years of house arrest. The defenders have two weeks to appeal against the sentences.

“We are [deeply concerned](#) at the way these peaceful campaigners have been treated and in particular, over the use of Article 79 of the 1999 penal code of Viet Nam,” which carries the possibility of the death sentence or life imprisonment, the experts said.

Two human rights lawyers were arrested in 2015 while attempting to meet European Union delegates before an annual EU-Vietnam Human Rights Dialogue. Another four activities were arrested in July 2017 amid a general crackdown on freedom of expression.

Created in 2013, the Brotherhood for Democracy consists mostly of former jailed dissidents who set up an online group calling for democracy.

The UN experts are particularly concerned that all six were held in pre-trial detention with very limited access to legal counsel, in a clear breach of international human rights standards, and that they were prosecuted in relation to their activities as human rights defenders and pro-democracy activists.

In 2017, there was a substantial increase in the number of arrests and detentions of human rights defenders in Viet Nam.

“We urge the authorities not to crack down on civil society to muzzle dissenting voices and stifle the people’s rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly and association in violation of the country’s obligations under international human rights law,” the experts stressed.

The UN experts are Michel Forst, Special Rapporteur on the situation [of human rights defenders](#); José Antonio Guevara Bermúdez, current Chair-Rapporteur of the [Working Group on Arbitrary Detention](#); and David Kaye, Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the [right to freedom of opinion and expression](#).