

Reintegrating former rebels into civilian life a 'serious concern' in Colombia: UN Mission chief

The reintegration of former members of the Colombian FARC-EP rebel movement, which signed an historic peace deal with the country's government in 2016, remains a subject of serious concern, said the head of the [UN Verification Mission](#) set up to monitor the deal, on Wednesday.

Jean Arnault warned members of the Security Council that the vast majority of those being reintegrated still have no clear economic prospects or livelihoods, once the monthly sum they currently receive as part of the peace process, comes to an end next August.

The Colombian National Council for Reintegration, which includes members of FARC and the Government, has a huge task before it, he said, and must agree on its approach to projects, lands and reintegration.

Over the past year, he continued, FARC-EP, the Government and the UN Verification Mission have learned that local authorities must be empowered, and more systematic links should be developed with the private sector, universities and other actors "willing and able to assist with long-term reintegration."

Another worry expressed by Mr. Arnault was the sense of legal uncertainty felt by former FARC-EP members. Reconciling peace and justice, he said, is a controversial and emotional issue everywhere. The peace process seeks to bring the full guarantee of due process, victim's participation and the benefits of restorative sanctions, which he described as a "promising solution to old and difficult dilemmas."

The Verification Mission chief deplored the continued killings of social leaders in Colombia, citing the killing, just a few days ago in the town of Bolivar, of the leader of a government-sponsored coca crop substitution committee, an element of the peace process, together with his two sons. He said that there is a pressing need to prevent and prosecute these crimes.

Noting positive developments, Mr. Arnault said there was a strong spirit of cooperation between the members of the bodies tasked with implementing the peace agreement, and the political participation of former FARC rebels in Colombia's two chambers of Congress, where they are contributing to debates and legislation.

Charges against Baha'i in Yemen must be dropped: UN experts urge release of detainees

A group of UN independent human rights experts [have called](#) for the immediate release of 24 people, mostly from Baha'i minority, who have been held by authorities in the Yemeni capital, Sana'a, since the middle of last month.

The detainees face charges of apostasy – or abandoning the state-sanctioned religion – teaching the Baha'i faith and spying; the latter, is subject to the death penalty.

The five UN experts said that charges “must be dropped and discriminatory practices based on religion, outlawed”.

At least 22 of those being held are Baha'is, including eight women and one minor. The individuals were prosecuted on 15 September without investigation or warning prior to the start of the trials.

Baha'i is a faith that emphasizes the worth of all religions since its establishment in the 19th century, according to the international community's website. Around one per cent of Yemen's non-Muslim population are estimated to subscribe to the faith.

It is unacceptable for anyone, including persons belonging to religious minorities, to be targeted or discriminated based on religion or belief – *UN expert Ahmed Shaheed*

Houthi rebels, who are Shia Muslims, have controlled Sana'a since 2014, as part of the long-running conflict with officially-recognized Government forces and their allies for full control of the country. According to news reports, the Houthis have been responsible for a wave of detentions targeting Bahai's.

UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, [Ahmed Shaheed](#) said the recent wave of detentions in Yemen appears to be an intimidation tactic intended to pressure Baha'is into recanting their faith.

In a statement last May, he stressed that “it is unacceptable for anyone, including persons belonging to religious minorities, to be targeted or discriminated based on religion or belief.”

The statement from the UN experts said: “We are very concerned at the criminal prosecution of these persons based on charges connected to their religion or belief.” Referring to charges of espionage, they added, “we are particularly concerned that some of the convictions include crimes that carry

the death penalty.”

Five of the indicted attended a court hearing on 29 September in Sana'a, where the judge ordered the names of the remaining 19 individuals to be published in a local newspaper. The next court appearance is scheduled for later this month.

“We reiterate our call to the de facto authorities in Sana'a to put an immediate stop on the persecution of Baha'is in Yemen,” the UN experts said, adding that international human rights obligations apply to de facto authorities, the same as any governing authority.

[FROM THE FIELD: One South Sudanese woman's harrowing escape to UN camp](#)

A South Sudanese woman has been telling a high-level delegation of officials from the African Union and United Nations how she walked for five days and nights to find sanctuary from violent clashes in a UN protection site.



UNMISS/Isaac Billy

Nyamile Malual Jiech told the senior officials that during the journey with her children she had seen three men lining up to rape one woman.

A new peace agreement was signed between warring parties in South Sudan in September in an attempt to bring an end to nearly five years of conflict. But, fighting has continued in some parts of the country.

Nyamile Malual Jiech is now sheltering in a camp for civilians in Bentiu under the protection of the UN peacekeeping mission, [UNMISS](#).

Read more about her story [here](#):

[Afghanistan: Civilians continue to die in record numbers, new UN report shows](#)

The conflict in Afghanistan continues to exact a terrible toll on civilians, with the highest number of fatalities recorded for the first nine months of this year, since 2014, a United Nations report has revealed.

According to the [quarterly update on protection of civilians](#), issued on Wednesday by the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), 8,050 civilians died or were wounded between January and September, with use of suicide bombings and other improvised explosive devices (IEDs) by anti-government elements, accounting for almost half the casualties.

“Every civilian death leaves a family devastated, grieving and struggling to come to terms with the loss, and each civilian injured or maimed causes untold suffering,” Danielle Bell, the head of UNAMA’s human rights office, said in a news release.

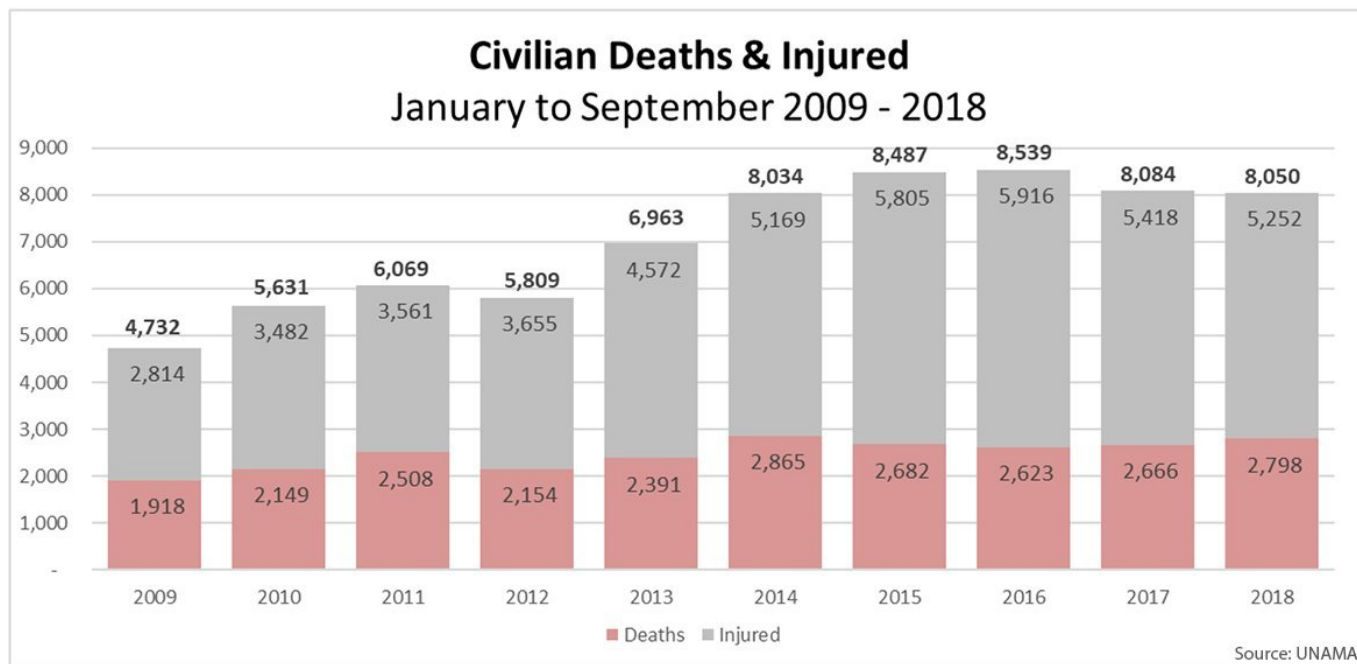
Across the country, Nangarhar, Kabul, Helmand, Ghazni and Faryab provinces recorded the highest number civilian casualties, and for the first time, Nangarhar (located on the border with Pakistan) surpassed the capital Kabul in terms of highest number of deaths and injuries.

“The worrying rise in civilian casualties in Nangarhar reflects an unacceptable trend that is indicative of how Afghan civilians continue to bear the brunt of this ongoing conflict,” added Ms. Bell.

The report also found that ground engagements were the second leading cause of civilian casualties, after suicide attacks and IEDs. This was followed by targeted and deliberate killings, aerial operations and explosive remnants of war.

Of grave concern was the increasing direct targeting of civilians, including ethnic and religious minorities, noted the report.

Actions by pro-Government forces resulted in 761 civilian deaths and 992 injures, while 231 civilians perished and 602 were injured in crossfire between opposing fighters.



Source: UNAMA

Civilian deaths and injuries in Afghanistan, January to September 2009-2018

No military solution to fighting

In the news release, the top UN official in Afghanistan reiterated his call for an immediate and peaceful settlement to the conflict to end the suffering of the Afghan people.

“There can be no military solution to the fighting in Afghanistan,” said Tadamichi Yamamoto, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for the country and the head of UNAMA.

“All parties can and should do their utmost to protect civilians from harm, including by making concrete progress toward peace.”

UNAMA also called on all anti-government elements to “immediately cease” the deliberate targeting of civilians, particularly with the use of illegal and indiscriminate IEDs, and underscored the need on all parties to uphold their obligations under international law, at all times, to protect civilians from harm.

Authorized by the Security Council, the UN Mission works to lessen the impact of the conflict on civilians and issues [regular reports](#) on the situation. Since 2012, the civilian causality reports have been prepared jointly with the [Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights](#) (OHCHR). The [findings](#) are based on strict verification regime including in depth investigation into the incidents.

'Put an end to the death penalty now', urges Guterres, marking World Day

Progress made toward eliminating the death penalty has been “marred by setbacks,” said [United Nations Secretary-General](#) António Guterres in a statement on Wednesday, marking the 16th World Day Against the Death Penalty.

He noted that hundreds of offenders – often impoverished, women or hailing from minority groups – have been executed without legal representation or transparent criminal proceedings, which might have spared them from the death penalty.

“In some countries, people are sentenced to death in secret trials, without due process, increasing the potential for error or abuse” – UN chief Guterres

Some 170 States have abolished or put a stay on executions, since the UN [General Assembly's](#) first call for a moratorium on its use, in 2007. Mr. Guterres noted the lack of transparency in some countries where the death penalty is still used, underscoring its incompatibility with human rights standards.

Mr. Guterres said he was “deeply disturbed” in particular, by the number of juvenile offenders being executed. Only last week, Zeinab Sekaanvand Lokran of Iran, was executed for killing her husband, when she was 17, despite a trial marred by irregularities.

“In some countries, people are sentenced to death in secret trials, without due process, increasing the potential for error or abuse” said the UN chief.

These comments echo those of UN Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights, Andrew Gilmour. In an interview with UN News last November, he said there was “far too much secrecy, and it’s quite indicative of the fact that although many countries are giving up the practice, those that retain it, nevertheless feel that they have something to hide.”

He noted the majority of executions today are carried out in China, Pakistan, Iraq, Iran, and Saudi Arabia.

Mr. Guterres concluded with a call for all nations to abolish the practice of executions. “I call on those remaining, to join the majority and put an end to the death penalty now,” he added.