

Civilian deaths in Afghanistan hit record high – UN

The number of civilians killed in Afghanistan hit a record high in the first half of the year, despite last month's unprecedented ceasefire between the Afghan Government and the Taliban, the United Nations reported on Sunday.

According to the [latest figures](#) released on Sunday by the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, known as [UNAMA](#), documents 5,122 civilian casualties (1,692 deaths and 3,430 injured) – a three per cent overall decrease in casualties from last year.

But civilian deaths were up by one per cent, the most recorded in the same time period, since UNAMA began systematic documentation of civilian casualties in 2009.

The continuing record high casualty rates being inflicted on civilians despite the unilateral ceasefires by Government and Taliban that occurred over the Eid al-Fitr holiday period between 15-17 June 2018.

Aside from casualties resulting from two Da'esh/Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant-Khorasan Province (ISKP)-claimed suicide attacks in Nangarhar during the ceasefires, UNAMA said that it had documented almost no other civilian casualties during the break in fighting.

"The brief ceasefire demonstrated that [the fighting can be stopped](#) and that Afghan civilians no longer need to bear the brunt of the war," said Tadamichi Yamamoto, the top UN official in Afghanistan.

"We urge parties to seize all opportunities to find a peaceful settlement – this is the best way that they can protect all civilians," said Yamamoto, who is also head of UNAMA.

The report, which comes amid fears of an uptick in violence, also noted that the use of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) in attacks by Anti-Government Elements remained the leading cause of civilian casualties.

The combined use of suicide and non-suicide IEDs caused nearly half of all civilian casualties. Continuing trends first documented last year by UNAMA, the majority of IED casualties were caused by suicide and complex attacks, which again were responsible for record high civilian casualties, resulting in 1,413 civilian casualties (427 deaths and 986 injured), a 22 per cent increase.

Ground engagements were the second leading cause of civilian casualties, followed by targeted and deliberate killings, aerial operations, and explosive remnants of war. Civilians living in the provinces of Kabul, Nangarhar, Faryab, Helmand and Kandahar were most impacted by the conflict.

“UNAMA continued to document the toxic consequences of this conflict, with Afghan boys and girls killed, maimed, sexually assaulted, abused, recruited and used by parties to the conflict,” said Danielle Bell, UNAMA’s human rights chief.

She said that conflict-related violence continued to erode the rights of children to education, healthcare, freedom of movement and other fundamental rights, as well as family life, playing outdoors and simply enjoying a childhood free of the “brutal effects of war.”

Actions by the Government of Afghanistan to prevent civilian casualties continued, resulting in a reduction of civilian deaths and injuries from their operations, particularly from ground fighting, an area that UNAMA has consistently focused its advocacy with parties to the conflict in recent years.

The full UNAMA Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict 2018 mid-year can be found [here](#).

Pakistan: UN strongly condemns terrorist attack that leaves scores dead and wounded at election rally

The United Nations Security Council has strongly condemned the terrorist attack in south-west Pakistan that killed more than 120 people and left scores wounded at an election rally Friday.

In a press statement, the Security Council denounced the attack as “heinous and cowardly” and urged all States, in accordance with their obligations under international law and relevant Council resolutions, to cooperate actively with the Pakistan Government and other relevant authorities to bring to justice the perpetrators and financiers of this and other such terrorist acts.

The Council said the attack, a suicide bombing, according to media in the region, took place in Mastung, a town in Pakistan’s south-western Balochistan province, and resulted in more than 128 people killed and 200 people injured.

The members of the Council expressed their deepest sympathy and condolences to the families of the victims and to the Government of Pakistan and they wished a speedy and full recovery to those who were injured.

In a separate [statement](#) condemning recent terrorist attacks in Pakistan targeting political rallies and candidates, [Secretary-General António](#)

[Guterres](#) also extended his heartfelt condolences to the families of the victims and to the country's Government and people.

"The United Nations stands in solidarity with and supports the efforts of the Government of Pakistan in the fight against terrorism," said the statement, issued by a UN spokesperson.

Friday's attack was the latest in a series of bombings targeting campaign events in Pakistan over the last week. The country is set to hold nationwide polls on 25 July.

[UN Forum examines three pillars of 2030 Global Goals](#)

When endorsing the 17 ambitious Sustainable Goals which aim to end hunger and extreme poverty, Member States agreed to one essential, cross-cutting aspect: as progress would be made towards a more sustainable world, the most vulnerable would not be excluded.

This means that the specific needs of vulnerable countries – including lowest-income States, landlocked and small island nations, or wartorn nations – must be addressed, and that the Goals and targets agreed upon need to be met for all segments of society.

People living in poverty, children, persons with disabilities, people living with HIV/AIDS, older persons, indigenous peoples, refugees and migrants, are often excluded from positive change. HLPF panelists on Friday emphasized the need for their voices to be heard, and their active participation as agents of change to be promoted.

The panel discussed the need for integrated social policy frameworks that aim to progressively achieve universal coverage, while addressing the specific needs of vulnerable people through targeted policies and programmes.

The fifth day of the HLPF on Sustainable Development also focused on Goal 15, for the protection of nature and its ecosystems. Member States committed to safeguarding biodiversity, combating desertification, sustainably managing forests and halting land degradation, all of which define the quality of our food and water supplies, are job-generating activities, and are therefore essential components for human health and well-being.

"We should build on and invest in our natural systems that have been providing us with life and opportunity since our first people – intact, resilient land ecosystems," said Chiagozie Chima Udeh, from the-Plant-for-the-Planet Foundation. "Let's do the right thing – show that you value trees,

forests and other land based ecosystems. SDG15, our biodiversity and our forests give us a chance to achieve all of the SDGs. Let's not postpone what we can achieve today, it is only 12 years to 2030," he pleaded.

Today, biodiversity is in decline in all regions of the world, a trend that continues to accelerate largely due to human activities such as food production, pollution, and wildlife poaching and trafficking.

A reckoning of the issue is slowly taking place and Governments, private sector and civil society are working on more holistic approaches and towards more accurate and meaningful measurements of the true value of nature.

Finally, the Forum examined progress made on Goal 17, which focuses on national, regional and global trends to establish global partnerships for sustainable development, as well as challenges and opportunities ahead.

The HLPF, which meets annually under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council ([ECOSOC](#)) and which will run this year through 18 July, brings together more than 1,000 Government, business and civil society leaders to share lessons learnt and best practices and discuss progress made towards the SDGs adopted by 193 Member States in 2015 , based on the UN Secretary-General's annual [progress report](#).

[Iceland to take vacated US seat on Human Rights Council](#)

Iceland has for the first time been elected to the Human Rights Council, filling the seat vacated by the United States, which withdrew from the body last month, citing bias.

The United Nations General Assembly on Friday elected Iceland to serve on the Geneva-based global rights body effective immediately, through to the end of next year.

Iceland inherits no particular responsibilities from the US, raising questions about future action on key human rights issues promoted specifically by Washington, such as Sudan, South Sudan and the right to freedom of expression.

On 19 June, the US announced its decision to leave the Council. Senior US officials accused the Council of displaying entrenched bias against Israel, and criticized what they said was the body's willingness to admit nations which were themselves human rights abusers.

US Ambassador to the UN Nikki Haley, according to reports, noted that the

move did not signify in any way, that the US was retreating from its own human rights commitments.

In a statement issued by UN Spokesman Stéphane Dujarric, [Secretary-General António Guterres](#) said that he would have “much preferred” the US remain and that the 47-member intergovernmental body was a part of the UN’s overall “Human Rights architecture”, which “plays a very important role in the promotion and protection of human rights worldwide.”

The Human Rights Council’s next scheduled meeting is in September.

[Fresh airstrikes kill dozens in conflict-ravaged Syria](#)

Despite the return of tens of thousands of internally displaced people (IDPs) to Syria following local agreements and changes in territorial control, the United Nations said on Friday that fresh airstrikes have reportedly killed dozens of civilians “in several areas” of the country.

“Our humanitarian colleagues were alarmed by the impact of reported hostilities on civilians in several areas of Syria,” UN Deputy Spokesperson Farhan Haq told reporters at UN Headquarters in New York.

As some 234,500 remain displaced across Syria’s south-west where fighting has intensified for weeks now, one attack hit an IDP site between Bagouz and Susah villages in the country’s eastern city of Deir Ezzour, killing dozens.

“Yesterday, hostilities reportedly continued for the third day in the Akrad mountains area in western rural Idleb governorate and northeast Lattakia governorate in which several people, including a woman and two children, were reportedly killed and many others injured by airstrikes,” added Mr. Haq.

“Hostilities continued to affect civilians around the Yarmouk Basin area in southwest Dara’a governorate,” the deputy spokesperson continued. “In Hayt town, strikes reportedly killed three children and a woman and wounded six other people.”

Last week, the [UN High Commissioner for Refugees](#) (UNHCR), Filippo Grandi, called the situation in Syria “dire,” painting a grim picture of people struggling without shelter or protection from desert heat and winds, and dwindling food supplies – calling on all those fighting “to [cease hostilities](#).”

According to media reports, the UN’s call came hours after a symbolic victory for Assad’s forces that illustrated the conflict’s turning tides. Syrian

State media reported that Government forces had hoisted the national flag over the city of Deraa, in an area that has been controlled by rebels for many years.