



humanitarian news and analysis

a project of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

Back

Print report

AFGHANISTAN: Over 2,000 civilians killed in first 10 months of 2009



Photo: Obinna Anyadike/IRIN

Shahid Gula lost her husband in an airstrike in 2003. She supports nine family members

KABUL, 12 November 2009 (IRIN) - Armed conflict in Afghanistan claimed the lives of over 2,000 civilians from January to October 2009, and the numbers are rising, according to the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA).

"In the first 10 months of 2009, UNAMA recorded 2,021 civilian deaths, compared with 1,838 for the same period in 2008, and 1,275 in 2007," Navi Pillay, the UN high commissioner on human rights, said in a statement sent to the UN Security Council on 11 November by her deputy, Kyung-wha Kang.

Civilians have increasingly been caught in the cross-fire and their basic human rights such as access to health, education, food and shelter have been violated by the warring parties, the statement said.

"Civilian casualties continue to mount, with hundreds killed every year by armed anti-government elements, government forces, and international forces carrying out both air strikes and ground assaults," it said.

More civilians have died in attacks by Taliban insurgents than by aerial strikes and military operations by pro-government Afghan and international forces: According to UNAMA, 1,397 were killed by anti-government elements, 465 by pro-government forces and 165 by other actors.

August was the deadliest month for Afghan civilians, with 294 reported deaths, UNAMA said.

However, a purported Taliban spokesman, Qari Yusuf Ahmadi, rejected UNAMA's findings and blamed pro-government forces for most of the civilian deaths.

Impunity

Afghanistan Rights Monitor (ARM), a local rights watchdog, said a culture of impunity had exacerbated human rights violations.

"Thousands of civilians have been killed by warring parties over the past few years but not a single individual has been convicted of crimes against humanity or war crimes," Ajmal Samadi, the director of ARM, told IRIN.

Similar criticisms were voiced by Nader Nadery, a commissioner with the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC): "There is a total state of impunity on the part of the Taliban who often deliberately harm civilians."

In UN rights commissioner Pillay's statement to the Security Council "more political will and less political exceptionalism" has been requested in order to protect civilians in situations of armed conflict.

"A higher level of political will must be mobilized to take timely and effective action to prevent atrocities, protect the vulnerable, hold perpetrators to account, and ensure redress for victims," Pillay was quoted in a press release on 11 November as saying.

"The failure to pursue a credible transitional justice strategy including holding to account those responsible for the gravest of crimes over more than three decades of war, and the climate of impunity created thereby, is a significant factor in the challenging political context and growing insecurity that now envelope Afghanistan," it said.

ad/cb

Themes: (IRIN) Conflict, (IRIN) Human Rights

[ENDS]

Report can be found online at:

