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Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission

Special Investigation Team

Report Summary: Civilian Casualties in 2019

The findings by AIHRC show that a total of 86,823 civilians, including women and children have been killed or injured in the past ten years in Afghanistan. Among these civilian casualties, 28,979 are killed and 57,844 are injured. The above figures are the instances recorded at AIHRC; however, there may be cases of civilian casualties that occurred but were not recorded.

Civilian casualties during armed conflicts in 2019

Like the past years, 2019 was also a deadly year for Afghan civilians. Despite the 'peace talks' going on, there was unprecedented violence in the first three quarters of 2019 and many civilians were harmed. However, in the fourth quarter of 2019, the level of violence decreased among warring parties, likewise, the number of civilian casualties decreased too. The statistics recorded at AIHRC show that civilian casualties caused by anti-government armed groups decreased by 27 percent, and civilian casualties caused by Afghanistan government and its allies decreased by 44 percent in the last three months of 2019.

The findings by AIHRC show that the total number of civilian casualties in the last quarter of 2019 was 2,293. Meanwhile, in the last quarter of 2018, a total of 3,728 civilians were killed or injured. The comparison of the two periods shows that civilian casualties dropped by 38 percent in the last quarter of 2019.

Percentage of civilian casualties

A total of 10,772 civilians were killed or injured in 2019. Among the aforementioned number, 2,817 are killed, and 7,955 are injured. There are 6,845 men, 974 women, and 2,696 children among the casualties. In addition, the gender of 257 casualties has not been recorded at AIHRC.

The aforementioned figure shows 7.23 percent reduction of civilian casualties compared to 2018. In 2018, 11,611 civilian casualties were recorded at AIHRC; out of which 3,277 were killed and 8334 were injured.

Percentage of civilian casualties by gender and age

Women casualties

The statistics by AIHRC show that a total of 974 women casualties have been recorded in 2019 which includes 282 killed and 692 injured. In 2018, a total of 912 women were victimized, 256 of whom were killed and 656 were injured. Comparison of the abovementioned figures shows that there has been 3.83 percent increase in women casualties in 2019.

Children casualties

Unfortunately, there has been a rise in percentage of children casualties in 2019 due to war tactics used by warring parties. In 2019, the total number of children casualties is 2,696 (445 killed and 2,251 injured); while in 2018, this number was 2,690 (367 killed and 2,323 injured).

Men casualties

The total number of men casualties in 2019 was 6,845, including 1,937 killed and 4,908 injured. Meanwhile, there were a total of 7,786 men casualties (2,564 killed and 5,222 injured) in 2018. Comparison of the above mentioned figures show 13.74 percent reduction in men casualties in 2019.

Percentage of civilian casualties by perpetrators

Findings by AIHRC from armed conflicts show that among the total number of civilian casualties, the Taliban are responsible for 71 percent of it, ISIS for five percent, and the government of Afghanistan and its allies for 14 percent of civilian casualties. The perpetrators of nine percent of civilian casualties have remained unknown. The rest of civilian casualties were caused by Pakistani forces rocket fires.

Distinction of civilian casualties by type of incidents

Use of IEDs

The IEDs have been the major cause of civilian casualties in 2019. In general, 3,136 civilians are victimized by IEDs (magnetic mines, roadside mines). Among these, 803 are killed and 2,333 are injured. The mentioned figure amounts to 29 percent of all the civilian casualties in 2019. Compared to 2018, the number of civilian casualties caused by IEDs has doubled.

Ground battles

Second to IEDs, ground battles are the major cause of civilian casualties in 2019. Findings by AIHRC show that the ground battles between the Taliban and Afghan or international forces have left 2,478 civilian casualties (127 killed and 2,351 injured). The mentioned figure amounts to 23 percent of all civilian casualties in 2019. There were 2,294 civilian casualties due to ground battles in 2018. Compared to the aforementioned figures it indicates eight percent increase in civilian casualties in 2019.

Suicide attacks

Compared to the same period in 2018, civilian casualties caused by suicide attacks have dropped by 45 percent. However, the findings by AIHRC show 1,532 victims of suicide attacks in 2019 (447 killed and 1,192 injured). Nonetheless, the total number of civilian casualties caused by suicide attacks in 2018 was 3,403.

Rocket fires

In 2019, a total of 1,832 civilians were victimized as a result of rocket fires (474 killed and 1,358 injured). In 2018, this number was 2,048 which shows 10.55 percent reduction in 2019.

Target killing and terror

Many civilians were killed or injured due to target killing and terror in 2019. Out of 834 victims of target killing, 399 are killed and 434 are injured. Compared to 2018, it shows 13 percent increase. There were a total of 737 victims of target killing and terror in 2018.

Air strikes by the government and the international forces

A total of 750 civilians were killed due to air strikes by government forces in 2019 (485 killed and 265 injured). The major factors of civilian casualties in such cases are carelessness in conducting air strikes, war in residential areas, and using civilians as human shield. The number of civilian casualties caused by airstrikes in 2018 was 956 which show a 21 percent reduction.

Night raids

One of war tactics used by the government of Afghanistan and its allies, which has occasionally caused civilian casualties is night raids. As a result of night raids by aforementioned forces, 104 civilians are victimized which includes 82 killed and 22 injured. The number of civilian casualties caused by night raids was 58 in 2018. Unfortunately, the comparison of these figures show 79 percent increase in civilian casualties.

Distinction of civilian casualties by geographic location

Findings by AIHRC show that the majority of civilian casualties have occurred in South-Western Zone in 2019. There is a total of 3,453 civilian casualties in this zone which amounts to 32 percent of all civilian casualties in 2019. Likewise, here is the percentage of civilian casualties by zone: Eastern Zone, 2,271 civilian casualties (21 percent); Central Zone, 2,161 civilian casualties (20 percent); North-eastern Zone, 965 civilian casualties (nine percent); Western Zone, 749 civilian casualties (7 percent); Northern Zone, 638 civilian casualties (six percent); and Southern Zone, 535 civilian casualties (four percent).

Targeting the journalists

2019 was a challenging year for the journalists too. According to reports by NAI Organization, 31 journalists were victimized in 2019; ten of whom are killed and 21 are injured.

J. Internally displaced people

The armed conflicts between the government and its opponents have caused many civilians to move from one place to another. In addition, being threatened by armed groups and extortion are among other reasons why people are displaced in many provinces of the country. According to statistics by the Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation, 70,596 families from the country's central, northeastern, western, eastern and Northern Zones have had to flee their homes because of war and insecurity. Unfortunately, the mentioned displaced people are struggling with various challenges.

Recommendations

AIHRC calls on all warring parties – Government of Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GOIRA), international forces, the Taliban and other opposition groups – to pay keen attention to the Commission's recommendations and commit to their implementation.

All parties involved in the war in Afghanistan are urged to abide by IHL – the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and its Additional Protocols – and to observe these norms at all times. Any violation of these rules puts responsibility on those who violate the rules and will be legally prosecuted and put on trial.

Peace is the urgent need of the Afghan people. The conflicting parties are called to begin intra-Afghan dialogue as soon as possible and to establish a cease-fire, taking into consideration the maintenance of justice and human rights protection of the citizens.

The warring parties are urged not to harm the civilians under any circumstances. According to International Humanitarian Law, intentional killing or harming of civilians are examples of war crime.

All parties to the conflict are urged to refrain from fighting in residential areas or anywhere that may harm civilians and never use human beings as human shields. Similarly, taking hostages, assassinations targeted killings and summary trials of civilians are never justifiable and no military faction is allowed to do so.

Armed opposition groups are strongly urged not to attack public establishments and to refrain from destruction of electricity pylons, setting schools and hospitals on fire, and disruption of telecommunication networks.

The armed opposition groups are urged to provide the opportunity for AIHRC staff to visit the areas under their control constantly.

GOIRA is called upon to identify and prosecute all violators of IHL.

GOIRA should review and modify its war policies and procedures in a way that reduces civilian casualties and ensures accountability of the perpetrators of civilian casualties.

GOIRA is urged to take serious steps to ensure better security for its citizens as soon as possible. The government should identify and disarm all irresponsible gunmen.

GOIRA is called upon to provide an opportunity for the active presence of the International Criminal Court in Afghanistan and to co-operate with the Tribunal in addressing the cases of IHL violation.

GOIRA is required to provide all its members of the Defense and Security Forces with training on IHL principles.

The government and assistance agencies should provide more assistance to the victims and their families. Serious attention should also be paid to the individuals and families displaced by the war and more protection should be provided for them.

The GOIRA is recommended to draft 'Government's Action Plan to Support Victims of Terrorism' in cooperation with AIHRC and other national or international agencies to facilitate better supporting of victims.

The government and international military forces are seriously urged not to conduct airstrikes based on weak intelligence reports.

The GOIRA is urged to examine the functions and methods used by NDS Special Forces carefully. In addition, these forces should be trained on IHL, and their policies and strategies should be in line with international principles and values.