



Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission

Press Release:

63 Civilians Killed in Afghanistan in the Last Two Weeks Kabul, 23 February 2010

In the last two weeks 63 civilians have been killed and tens of other civilians injured as a result of military operations in Afghanistan. The high death toll from Pro-Government Forces (PGF) operations in Marjah, Helmand, a PGF airstrike targeting what appear to be civilian vehicles in Daikondi, and a suicide attacks and mine placement by Anti-Government Forces (AGF) suggest neither side to the conflict is taking sufficient precautions to prevent civilian deaths, as required under international law.

The PGF Operation ‘Mushtarak’ in Marjah, Helmand province has been touted as a new type of operation, with greater planning and cooperation with Afghan National Security Forces and greater care toward preventing civilian harm. While such efforts are welcome, AIHRC is concerned at the loss of life and civilian harm already caused by this operation. AIHRC found that in the first 12 days of Operation Mushtarak 28 civilians, including 13 children, were killed and approximately 70 civilians, including 30 children, were injured.

Witnesses suggested the majority of the casualties were caused by PGF artillery and rocket-fire. However, AIHRC has also received numerous reports of Anti-Government Elements planting landmines in homes and residential areas, which pose a grave threat to civilians in the area. These mines can continue to harm civilian persons or property for months or even years later.

Pro-Government Forces must exert greater care to distinguish between civilians and combatants in their offensive in Marjah. The AIHRC also calls on Anti-Government Elements to observe their responsibilities to civilians by not using civilians as human shields, and not planting mines or other explosive devices in residential areas.

AIHRC is also concerned about the level of displacement caused by this operation. Approximately 3461 families have been displaced as a result of Operation Mushtarak. Crowded into Lashkargah city or other surrounding areas with little access to humanitarian support, these IDPs face serious shelter and food problems. The Commission calls on government authorities and their international partners to address these critical humanitarian needs immediately.

The recent surge in violence has not been limited to Marjah. On 21 February 2010, international military forces ordered an air strike on three civilian vehicles in Chobzar region of Kejrán district of Daikondi province. Twenty-one Afghan civilians were killed and 16 other civilians were injured including children and women. There is so far little evidence justifying such an attack on what appears to have been a clearly civilian target. This strike appears to violate ISAF's own tactical restrictions on airstrikes, and raises questions of distinction and proportionality under international law. The AIHRC calls upon international forces to publish the results of their investigation regarding this incident as soon as possible. In addition, they should provide appropriate compensation for the casualties and losses sustained by the civilians. Those responsible for executing this attack, and for providing the misinformation that led to it, should be appropriately investigated and disciplined.

On 22 February 2010 as a result of a suicide attack 14 Afghan civilians were killed and 10 others were injured in the Sorkh Road area of Jalalabad city. No parties to the conflict have claimed responsibility for the incident so far; however, the tactics used fit a pattern of those used by AGF. The AIHRC has consistently called on AGF to refrain from using such indiscriminate tactics.

Nader Naderi Commissioner and spokesman of the AIHRC said today "Unfortunately during more than eight years of conflict Afghan civilians have paid the highest price." he added, "The attack on civilian vehicles in Daikundi once again shows that the measures taken to minimize civilian casualties and safeguard civilians' lives are still not enough. Civilians are sustaining harm from both parties to the conflict."

The AIHRC calls on the parties to the conflict to respect the laws of war. Warring parties must not use tactics that unduly endanger civilian lives and property.

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