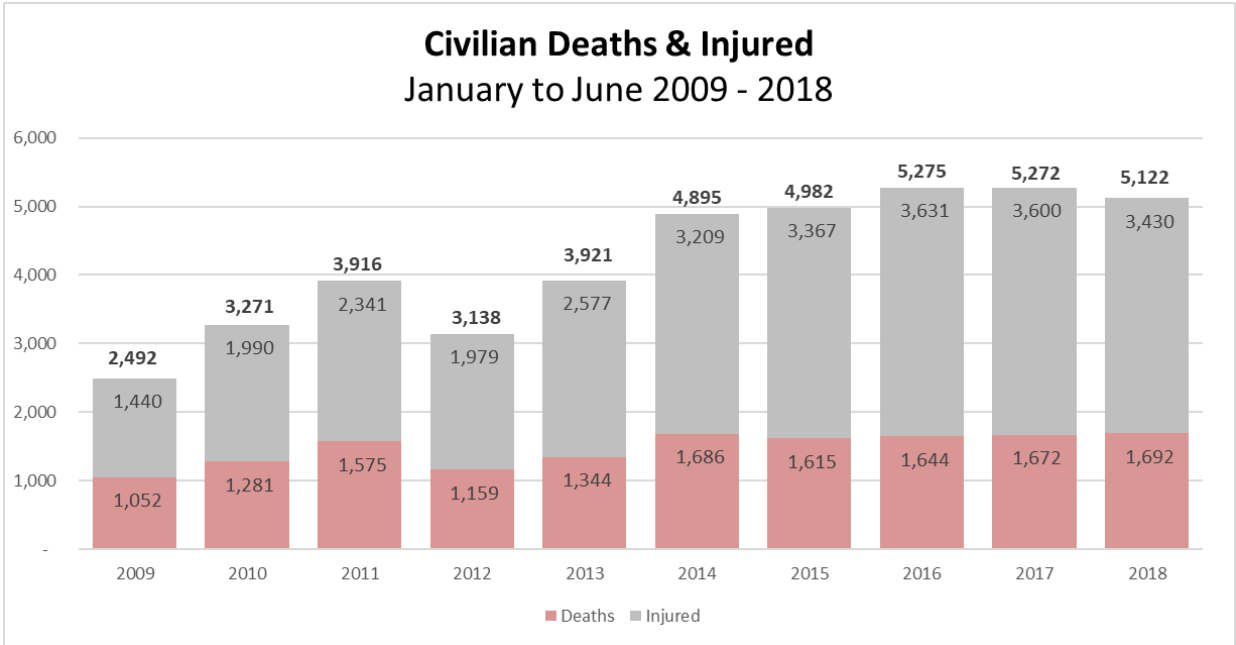




**MIDYEAR UPDATE ON THE PROTECTION OF CIVILIANS IN ARMED CONFLICT:  
1 JANUARY TO 30 JUNE 2018**

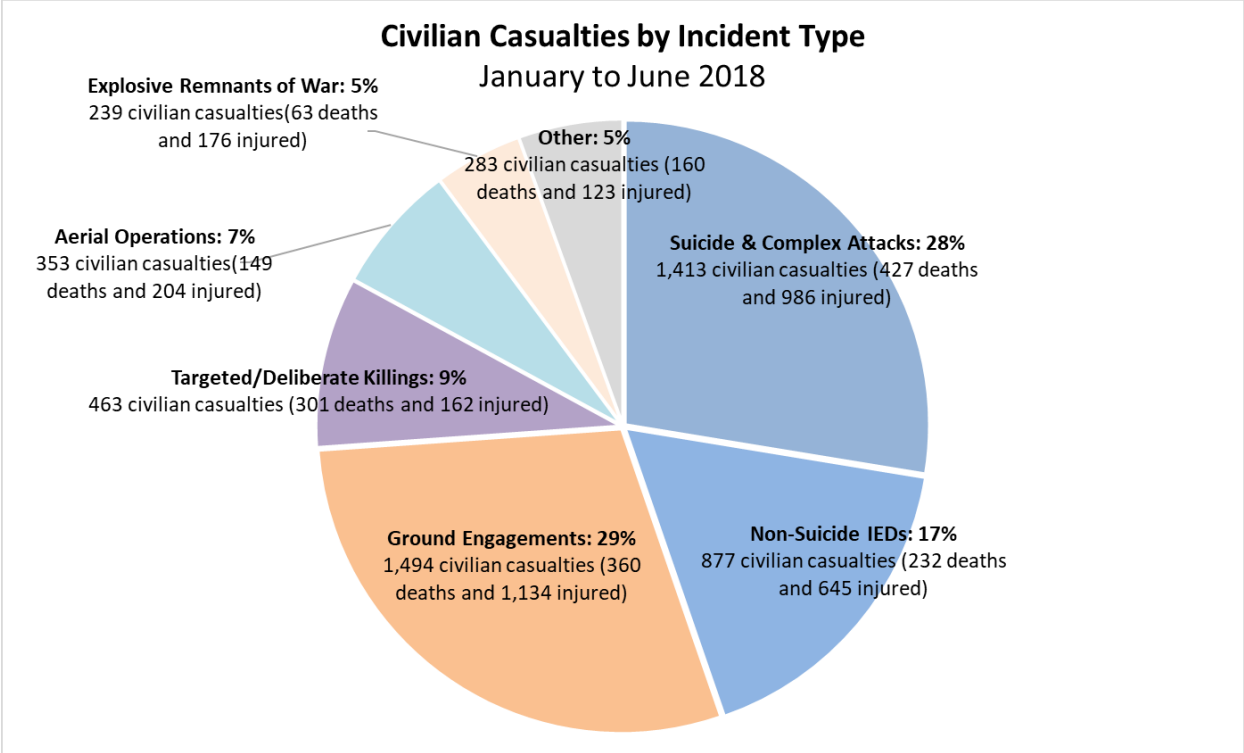
In the first six months of 2018, the armed conflict continued to destroy the lives and livelihoods of civilians at the same toxic levels as last year. The UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) renews its calls on parties to the conflict to increase efforts to protect the civilian population and encourages parties to work towards reaching a peaceful settlement.

From 1 January to 30 June 2018, UNAMA documented 5,122 civilian casualties (1,692 deaths and 3,430 injured) - a three per cent overall decrease from last year - reflecting the same levels of harm to civilians as those documented in during the same period in 2017 and 2016. Civilian deaths increased by one per cent while the number of civilians injured decreased by five per cent.



Improvised explosive device (IED) use in attacks by Anti-Government Elements remained the leading cause of civilian casualties in the first six months of 2018. The combined use of suicide and non-suicide IEDs caused nearly half (45 per cent) of all civilian casualties. Continuing trends first documented by UNAMA in 2017, the majority of IED casualties were caused by suicide and complex attacks, which again caused record high civilian casualties. 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.

While the mission documented decreases in civilian casualties from some incident types, notably an 18 per cent reduction in casualties caused by ground engagements, as well a significant decrease from targeted and deliberate killings, UNAMA documented a disturbing increase in the number of civilian casualties from suicide and complex attacks by Anti-Government Elements, with more than half attributed to *Daesh*/Islamic State-Khorasan Province (ISKP).



Of particular concern, civilian casualties in Nangarhar province more than doubled, reaching levels close to those recorded in Kabul.<sup>1</sup> Nearly two-thirds of Nangarhar civilian casualties were caused by IEDs, mainly suicide and complex attacks. Almost half of all civilian casualties in Nangarhar came from IED attacks (suicide and non-suicide) claimed by *Daesh*/ISKP. In Kabul province, 95 per cent of all civilian casualties were caused by suicide and complex attacks, with more than half caused by suicide and complex attacks claimed by *Daesh*/ISKP.

The armed conflict caused 544 women casualties (157 deaths and 387 injured) during the first six months of 2018, with almost half from ground engagements. Women increasingly lost their lives as a result of suicide and complex attacks, and also continued to suffer from targeted killings and aerial operations. While overall women casualties decreased by 15 per cent compared to the same period in 2017, women casualties remain of grave concern.

<sup>1</sup> UNAMA documented 993 civilian casualties (321 killed and 672 injured) in Kabul province during the first six months of 2018, a five per cent decrease compared with the same period in 2017. In Nangarhar province, the mission recorded 911 civilian casualties (304 deaths and 607 injured), a 142 per cent increase from the same period in 2017.

## Children and Armed Conflict

In the first six months of 2018, the suffering of children in armed conflict bore many faces in Afghanistan, with Afghan boys and girls killed, maimed, sexually assaulted, abused, recruited and used by parties to the conflict. 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 consequences of war.

UNAMA recorded 1,355 child casualties (363 deaths and 992 injured) as a result of the armed conflict in the first six months of 2018, an overall decrease of 15 per cent compared to the same period in 2017. The decrease mainly resulted from fewer children killed and injured during ground engagements, though this incident type remained the leading cause of child casualties. The mission also recorded a reduction in child casualties from non-suicide IEDs but noted with concern that child casualties from suicide and complex attacks and aerial attacks increased and that children continued to comprise more than one-third of casualties from pressure-plate IEDs. Though UNAMA recorded decreases in child casualties from explosive remnants of war in line with overall casualty reductions from this incident type, the mission reiterates concern that children again comprised 89 per cent of civilian casualties from explosive remnants of war.

The mission notes concern about an emerging trend of targeting of education by Anti-Government Elements as a reaction to operations by Pro-Government Forces. In Nangarhar province, through the month of June, the mission recorded 13 related incidents attributed to *Daesh*/ISKP following threats by the group to target girls' schools in retaliation for aerial attacks. The group targeted education officials and schools and undertook a complex attack against the department of education offices in Jalalabad, causing a total of 23 civilian casualties (six deaths and 17 injured). In Charkh District of Logar province, UNAMA recorded the closure of 29 schools by the Taliban following a Pro-Government Forces operation affecting one of their commanders' houses at the end of March.

During the first six months of 2018, UNAMA verified the recruitment and use of 22 boys<sup>2</sup> and documented credible allegations of the recruitment and use of seven boys by parties to the armed conflict.<sup>3</sup> These boys were used to participate in hostilities, including planting IEDs and killing of civilians.<sup>4</sup> In addition, UNAMA documented credible allegations of five cases of sexual abuse involving six boys, including for the purpose of *bacha bazi*, attributed to the Afghan National Police and Afghan Local Police.

## Elections

Between 1 January and 30 June 2018, UNAMA recorded 341 civilian casualties (117 deaths and 224 injured) from election-related violence, most of which (more than 250 casualties) came from two IED attacks on 22 April and 6 May in Kabul and Khost, respectively. Election-related violence

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<sup>2</sup> UNAMA attributed the recruitment and use of 17 boys to Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan in Afghanistan; two boys to *Daesh*/ISKP; and three boys to the Afghan Local Police.

<sup>3</sup> UNAMA attributed the recruitment and use of four boys to the Taliban and two boys to the Afghan National Police. One boy was used both by the National Directorate of Security and the Taliban.

<sup>4</sup> The use of children for planting IEDs and killings are attributed to Anti-Government Elements.

began with the commencement of voter registration on 14 April, after which UNAMA documented attacks on *tazkira* (national ID) distribution centres and voter registration sites, as well as election-related personnel, including elections workers and Afghan National Police officers dedicated to providing security to election-related sites, through the use of IEDs, suicide attacks and targeted killings. The mission also recorded threats, abductions, and killings of candidates and their supporters.<sup>5</sup>

The mission is concerned by the impact of Anti-Government Element attacks against election-related sites located at schools. During the voter registration process from April to June 2018, UNAMA documented 39 attacks targeting voter registration centres at schools resulting in child casualties, school closures and reduced attendance, impacting children's safety and right to education. UNAMA welcomes additional mitigation measures put in place at such sites for the next stages of the election and reiterates its call on Anti-Government Elements to cease targeting election-related sites.

### **Anti-Government Elements**

UNAMA notes with concern that the number of civilian casualties attributed to Anti-Government Elements continued at the same high levels throughout the first half of 2018, including increased civilian casualties from attacks targeting civilians. From 1 January to 30 June 2018, Anti-Government Elements caused 3,413 civilian casualties (1,127 deaths and 2,286 injured), approximately the same as in the first six months of 2017. UNAMA attributed 67 per cent of all civilian casualties to Anti-Government Elements, with 42 per cent attributed to Taliban, 18 per cent to *Daesh*/ISKP, and seven per cent to unidentified Anti-Government Elements (including less than one per cent to self-proclaimed *Daesh*/ISKP).

Suicide and complex attacks by Anti-Government Elements caused 1,413 civilian casualties (427 deaths and 986 injured) – 257 more casualties from 12 more attacks than the same period in 2017.<sup>6</sup> This marked a rise of 22 per cent in civilian casualties from suicide and complex attacks compared to the same period in 2017. UNAMA attributed 52 per cent of civilian casualties from suicide and complex attacks to *Daesh*/ISKP, 40 per cent to Taliban, and the remainder to unidentified Anti-Government Elements.

Civilian casualties from attacks by Anti-Government Elements deliberately targeting civilians also increased by 28 per cent compared with the first half of 2017,<sup>7</sup> mainly due to sharp increases in

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<sup>5</sup> See UNAMA Special Report on Election-Related attacks and abuses during the initial voter registration period, 10 May 2018, available at <http://unama.unmissions.org/protection-of-civilians-reports>.

<sup>6</sup> UNAMA recorded 36 suicide and complex attacks impacting civilians in the first half of 2018. During the same period last year, UNAMA documented 24 attacks causing 1,156 civilian casualties (259 deaths and 897 injured). More than 500 of the casualties in the first half of 2017 came from a 31 May 2017 truck bomb in the middle of Kabul city attributed to unidentified Anti-Government Elements.

<sup>7</sup> UNAMA recorded 1,806 civilian casualties (649 deaths and 1,157 injured) from attacks deliberately targeting civilians between 1 January and 30 June 2018, compared with 1,416 civilian casualties (468 deaths and 948 injured) from such attacks during the same period in 2017. These figures do not include attacks targeting Afghan National Police, which caused 322 civilian casualties (115 deaths and 207 injured), since despite that police are presumed to have civilian status, some may have been directly participating in hostilities at the time of attack.

civilian casualties from attacks against civilian government administration<sup>8</sup> and election-related incidents.<sup>9</sup> Anti-Government Element attacks targeting civilians accounted for 35 per cent of all civilian casualties and 53 per cent of the civilian casualties attributed to Anti-Government Elements. More than half of all civilian casualties from Anti-Government Element attacks targeting civilians came from attacks claimed by Taliban or *Daesh*/ISKP. Civilian casualties from attacks targeting civilians claimed by Taliban and *Daesh*/ISKP each increased fourfold.<sup>10</sup> Consistent with the disturbing trends observed in 2016 and 2017, Anti-Government Elements also continued to direct attacks against the Shi'a Muslim population, most of whom are ethnic Hazara, causing 366 civilian casualties (115 deaths and 251 injured), nearly all from suicide and complex attacks claimed by *Daesh*/ISKP.

The continued use of indiscriminate and unlawful pressure-plate IEDs by Anti-Government Elements caused 314 civilian casualties (114 deaths and 200 injured), mostly attributed to Taliban. UNAMA notes that this represents a 43 per cent reduction compared to the same period last year. The mission also recorded a 23 per cent decrease in civilian casualties caused by Anti-Government Elements (mainly Taliban) during ground engagements. UNAMA has engaged in extensive advocacy efforts in with parties to the conflict on civilian casualties caused by pressure-plate IEDs and ground engagements over the past several years.

### **Pro-Government Forces**

UNAMA attributed 1,047 civilian casualties to Pro-Government Forces between 1 January and 30 June 2018, approximately the same as during the corresponding period in 2017. Pro-Government Forces caused 20 per cent of all civilian casualties in the first half of 2018 (17 per cent by Afghan national security forces, two per cent by international military forces, and one per cent by pro-Government armed groups).

The mission documented a 21 per cent reduction in ground engagement civilian casualties attributed to Pro-Government Forces (mainly Afghan National Security Forces), though this was offset by a significant increase in civilian casualties from aerial attacks.

Amidst continued reports of significant increases in airstrikes, during the first six months of 2018, the mission documented 353 civilian casualties (149 deaths and 204 injured) from aerial attacks, a 52 per cent increase from the same period in 2017.<sup>11</sup> Of particular concern, women and children continued to comprise more than half of all aerial attack civilian casualties and the number of child casualties from these attacks increased by 64 per cent compared to the first half of 2017. The

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<sup>8</sup> Between 1 January and 30 June 2018, UNAMA recorded 600 civilian casualties (185 deaths and 415 injured) from attacks targeting civilian government administration, compared with 152 civilian casualties (49 deaths and 103 injured) from attacks against this target type during the same period in 2017.

<sup>9</sup> UNAMA recorded no election-related civilian casualties in 2017, 2016, or 2015 as no elections occurred in those years.

<sup>10</sup> Taliban claimed responsibility for 26 attacks targeting civilians resulting in 453 civilian casualties (175 deaths and 278 injured) in the first half of 2018, an increase of 421 per cent compared to the same period in 2017. *Daesh*/ISKP claimed responsibility for 15 attacks targeting civilians resulting in 595 civilian casualties (161 deaths and 434 injured), a 376 per cent increase.

<sup>11</sup> UNAMA recorded 232 civilian casualties (95 deaths and 137 injured) from aerial attacks in the first half of 2017.

majority of the increase came from one incident on 2 April in Dasht-e-Archi district of Kunduz province where Government forces targeted a religious ceremony at a madrassa, causing more than 100 casualties, many of whom were children.<sup>12</sup> UNAMA encourages the Government to ensure that it follows through on changes in targeting protocols and promises for compensation for victims following from this incident.<sup>13</sup> The mission attributed 52 per cent of all civilian casualties from aerial attacks to the Afghan Air Force, 45 per cent to international military forces, and the remaining three per cent to unidentified Pro-Government Forces.

The mission also notes concern at the increase in civilian casualties from search operations, including partnered operations between Afghan National Security Forces and international military forces. In particular, National Directorate of Security (NDS) Special Forces and pro-Government armed groups such as the Khost Protection Force have caused increased civilian casualties and other abuses. These forces are of particular concern as many of them appear to operate outside of the Afghan National Security Forces' chain of command, resulting in a lack of clear oversight and accountability given the absence of clearly defined jurisdiction for the investigation of any allegations against them.

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. UNAMA welcomes continued steps taken by the Government towards implementing the National Policy on Civilian Casualty Mitigation and Prevention and towards meeting the Government's responsibilities pursuant to Protocol V of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons concerning explosive remnants of war, which came into effect on 9 February 2018. The mission recalls that the international military has a responsibility to help ensure the Government meets Protocol V obligations and encourages the international community to continue to provide support however possible.

### **Eid-ul-Fitr Ceasefire**

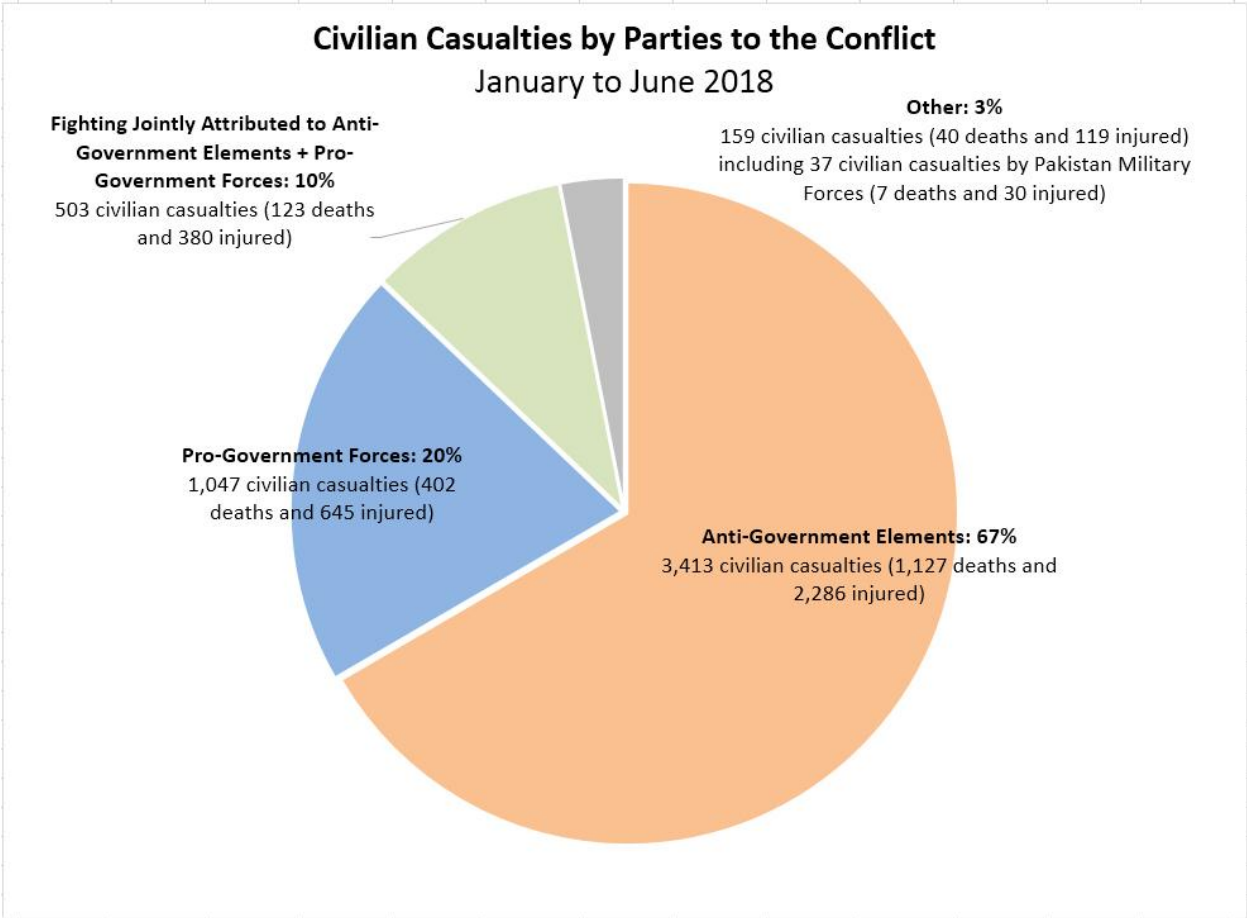
For a three-day period from 15 to 17 June 2018, corresponding with the start of the Eid-ul-Fitr holiday, unilateral ceasefires declared by Government and Taliban overlapped, resulting in the first real cessation of hostilities in 17 years. The break in fighting led to unprecedented improvements in freedom of movement for ordinary Afghans, some of whom visited family homes in Taliban controlled areas that they had been prevented from reaching for years. It also spared the lives of countless Afghan civilians, who continue to suffer at extreme levels from the armed conflict. Two *Daesh*/ISKP-claimed suicide attacks in Nangarhar on 16 and 17 June targeting civilians killed 48 and injured 133, particularly brutal attacks which crushed the peaceful atmosphere in Nangarhar. Apart from these attacks, UNAMA documented almost no other civilian casualties during the break in fighting. The brief ceasefire offered a glimmer of hope to the civilian

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<sup>12</sup> See UNAMA special report on Airstrikes in Dasht-e-Archi district, Kunduz province, 2 April 2018, released in May 2018, available at <http://unama.unmissions.org/protection-of-civilians-reports>.

<sup>13</sup> As of 10 July, UNAMA had received reports that many victims have not received compensation. Concerns over the amount paid to victims, eligibility determination, and other concerns about the process have been reported by various interlocutors.

population at a time when many may have been unable to imagine respite ahead. UNAMA remains hopeful that parties to the conflict in Afghanistan can reach a lasting peaceful settlement to the conflict, as the best way that they can best protect the civilian population from conflict is to end it.



For more detailed information, please consult the UNAMA annual reports on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict (available at: <http://unama.unmissions.org/protection-of-civilians-reports>).