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Civilian casualties up by 14pc in 2013: UN

Feb 8, 2014

Civilian casualties in Afghanistan's armed conflict rose by 14 percent in the outgoing year when 2,959 non-combatants were killed and another 5,656 injured, the United Nations said on Saturday.

Similar to record high numbers of 2011, the increase reversed the decline in 2012, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) said in a report, calling the use of IEDs the biggest killer of civilians in 2013.

Increased ground engagements -- fighting between security personnel and the government's armed opponents -- constituted the second biggest causes of civilian casualties in 2013, according to UNAMA's latest report.

The report attributed 74 percent of the collateral damage to militants, 11 percent to pro-government forces and 10 percent to ground engagements. Five percent of civilian casualties were unattributed.

IEDs used by insurgents caused 177 women casualties, up by 20 percent from 2012. As many as 1,756 child casualties, showing an increase of 34 percent, were recorded last year.

"It is the awful reality that most women and children were killed and injured in their daily lives - - at home on their way to school, working in the fields or traveling to a social event," said Georgette Gagnon, the UNAMA director of human rights.

UNAMA said 561 children were killed and 1,195 wounded in 2013, when 235 women died and 511 were wounded.

"Armed conflict took an unrelenting toll on Afghan civilians in 2013," said UNSG's special envoy, Jan Kubis, who stressed at the start of 2014, it was imperative that all parties halted the worsening impact of the conflict on civilians.

Statements on protecting civilians by the Taliban leadership were not nearly enough to end the killing and injuring of innocent civilians, he said, asking the militants to stop deliberately attacking civilians and using IEDS indiscriminately.

There were 54 airstrikes that resulted in civilian casualties, showing a 10 percent drop from the number of such cases in 2012. But women and children accounted for 50 percent of casualties.

The number of civilian victims from drone strikes tripled from 2012, the report said.

Similarly, there was a sharp rise in incidents attributed the Afghan Local Police (ALP), which was accused of flagrant human rights violations. The ALP-linked casualties included summary executions, punishments and acts of revenge.