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## UN: More civilian casualties in Afghanistan so far this year than last

By Josh Smith

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An Afghan boy covers his face as U.S. soldiers, not shown, pass by during a patrol in a village near Forward Operating Base Zangabad, in southern Afghanistan, in March 2013.

Civilian casualties in Afghanistan increased 16 percent in the first eight months of 2013 compared with last year, the United Nations reported on Wednesday.

Some regions of the country have seen “stark” increases in violence against civilians, United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan Human Rights Director Georgette Gagnon, told journalists in the eastern Afghan city of Jalalabad.

The volatile eastern provinces of Kunar, Laghman, Nangarhar and Nuristan, for example, saw a 54 percent increase, Gagnon said, according to a U.N. news release.

“Anti-government groups — which continue to deliberately target civilians — have caused the vast majority of civilian deaths and injuries,” she said. “Their activities, not limited to violence, include intimidation, threat and abduction of civilians.”

As Afghan security forces have taken the lead in fighting Taliban-led insurgents, civilians have increasingly been caught in the crossfire. In the eastern region of Afghanistan, most civilians are wounded or killed during firefights and other ground engagements, rather than by improvised explosive devices or in targeted attacks, according to the U.N.

During her visit in eastern Afghanistan, Gagnon called on all sides to do more to protect civilians caught in the war, as well as prevent all kinds of violence against women.