

Nearly 6,000 civilian casualties in Afghanistan so far this year

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Kabul, October 29 (RHC)-- Nearly 6,000 Afghan civilians were killed or wounded in the first nine months of the year as heavy fighting between government forces and Taliban fighters rages on despite efforts to find peace, the United Nations has said.

From January to September, there were 5,939 civilian casualties in the fighting – 2,117 people killed and 3,822 wounded, the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) said in a quarterly report on Tuesday.

“High levels of violence continue with a devastating impact on civilians, with Afghanistan remaining among the deadliest places in the world to be a civilian,” the report said.

Civilian casualties were 30 percent lower than in the same period last year but UNAMA said violence has failed to slow since the beginning of talks between government negotiators and the Taliban that began in Qatar’s capital, Doha, last month.

The Taliban was responsible for 45 percent of civilian casualties while government troops caused 23 percent, it said. United States-led international forces were responsible for two percent. Most of the remainder occurred in crossfire, or were caused by ISIL (ISIS) or “undetermined” anti-government or pro-government elements, according to the report.

Ground fighting caused the most casualties followed by suicide and roadside bomb attacks, targeted killings by the Taliban and air raids by Afghan troops, the UN mission said.

Fighting has sharply increased in several parts of the country in recent weeks as government negotiators and the Taliban have failed to make progress in the peace talks.

Meanwhile, the U.S. envoy for Afghanistan, Zalmay Khalilzad, said on Tuesday that the level of violence in the country was still too high and the Kabul government and Taliban fighters must work harder towards forging a ceasefire at the Doha talks. Khalilzad made the comments before heading to the Qatari capital to hold meetings with the two sides.

“I return to the region disappointed that despite commitments to lower violence, it has not happened. The window to achieve a political settlement will not stay open forever,” he said in a tweet. There needs to be “an agreement on a reduction of violence leading to a permanent and comprehensive ceasefire”, added Khalilzad.

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