

**Open Debate on the Protection of Civilians During Armed Conflict**  
**Monday, 22nd November 2010, Security Council Chamber (GA-TSC-01)**

***Statement by H.E. Mr. Zahir Tanin, Permanent Representative of Afghanistan to the United Nations***

First, let me thank you, Mr. President, for convening this meeting on the protection of civilians in armed conflict — a topic of particular importance in Afghanistan. I would also like to thank the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs for their briefings, and welcome the recent report of the Secretary-General on the protection of civilians in armed conflict (S/2010/579).

Nine years ago, the Afghan people overwhelmingly supported the United States-led intervention and joined the United States and coalition forces in the fight against terrorism. They saw the international military campaign as crucial to security in the country and the region and to bringing an end to their suffering. From 2001 to 2006, the trust and cooperation between the Afghan people and the international community helped the country to become increasingly stable. However, with the re-emergence in 2006 of the Taliban from sanctuaries in the region and its attempts to attack national and international forces, parts of the country began to slide back into conflict. Violence and insecurity, particularly in the past two years, have widely affected people's security, and thousands of civilians have lost their lives. The increase in the number of civilian casualties has negatively affected the people's trust in the prospect of peace, security and development in the country. Afghans are the first to feel the tragic effects of conflict in their country. Civilian casualties are caused mainly by intentional acts of the Taliban, Al-Qaida and other extremist groups. Terrorists and extremists have recently expanded the scope of their activities, attacking all sectors of Afghan society. By resorting to new and brutal tactics, including suicide bombings, abductions, targeted assassinations and the indiscriminate use of improvised explosive devices, they show complete disregard for human life. Furthermore, terrorists and extremists continue to conduct attacks from densely populated areas and to use civilians as human shields. Nevertheless, there are also a number of unfortunate, unintended casualties resulting from the military operations and activities of international forces and the joint military operations of both international and Afghan forces.

As shown in the 2010 mid-year report of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (S/2010/463), the number of civilian casualties due to violence in my country has increased. In the first six months of 2010, there were 3,268 civilian casualties, including 1,271 deaths as a result of armed conflict — or an average of over 18 civilian casualties a day. It shows a 31 per cent increase from the same period last year. Seventy-six per cent of the incidents were the result of the activities of the Taliban and Al-Qaida terrorist groups. Six thousand civilian casualties occurred in 2009.

In discussing civilian casualties, let us remember that we are referring to people — to the loss of human life, all too often of innocent women, children and elders. Such deaths must not be looked at as merely the consequences of ongoing violence or as collateral damage. Each death in Afghanistan represents a life lost, a family left behind and an entire future denied its potential.

The protection of civilians during military operations is our shared responsibility and an international obligation. Increased coordination between international and Afghan forces during military operations and greater cooperation between the international community and the Afghan Government are necessary for ensuring the safety and security of civilian populations. This is an important issue that has long been a crucial point of discussion with Afghanistan's international partners. My Government has called on international forces to take measures necessary to minimize or eliminate civilian casualties. We appreciate the NATO commanders' commitment to give a central place to the protection of civilians in their new military strategy. We hope that further necessary steps will be taken in this regard so as to safeguard the lives and rights of Afghan civilians, particularly in the areas affected by conflict. To protect the lives of civilians, Afghanistan is committed to working with the international community to achieve lasting peace and stability in the country. The protection of civilians must be placed in the context of the emerging transition, in which Afghan national forces will begin to assume full responsibility by 2014.

Just this weekend at the NATO summit in Lisbon, we embarked on the transition from an internationally guided process to an Afghan-led one. Security is at the core of this transition. It is essential that NATO and our

international partners enhance training for Afghan security forces in order to ensure enduring security and consequently the elimination of civilian casualties. The transition is happening while the enemy is attempting to disrupt the Government's activities and continuing its attacks on the Afghan people and Government and the international forces. As the Afghan Government seeks to prepare itself to take on the responsibility for leading security efforts, the continuing support of the Afghan people for our shared efforts and their active participation in the stabilization process are crucial to success.

The protection and promotion of the rights of civilians should be among the top priorities of the international engagement in Afghanistan. In his address to the heads of State at the NATO summit in Lisbon, President Karzai said, "We are in dialogue with the International Security Assistance Force on issues of serious concern to the Afghan people, in particular: civilian casualties, detentions, lawless behavior by some security companies and, at times, NATO's posture. We need the space to discuss these issues and resolve them in a spirit of collaboration and teamwork. The sustainable solution to these issues will, of course, come from the realization of our common objective of replacing international forces with Afghan security forces."

We are of the conviction that civilian protection is not confined to preventing civilian casualties. Ending the loss of civilians requires the establishment of lasting peace and stability. The recent Joint Coordination and Monitoring Board's progress report on the Afghanistan National Development Strategy, covering the first 100 days after the Kabul Conference, rightly points out that we have achieved more success in improving security. Afghanistan has completed 89 per cent of planned activities in the area of security and has exceeded expectations in the growth of the national army and national police.

In addition to military efforts, the Afghan Government is engaged in a comprehensive outreach initiative aimed at achieving lasting peace and security. The Afghan-led peace process calls on the Taliban to lay down their arms and join the peace process and reconciliation efforts. Engaging the armed opposition in peace talks, creating Afghanistan's High Peace Council and selecting 60 members for it are significant steps towards strengthening peace and reconciliation efforts. Our national reconciliation process is based on our growing responsibility for the promotion of human rights, building trust and continuing outreach to the people of Afghanistan. Going forward, the issue of protecting civilians in armed conflict will continue to be central to our national efforts. Today's meeting reminds us of the importance of civilians in the overall work of the United Nations and the international community's efforts in general. We look forward to further collaboration with our international partners in achieving our ultimate objective: ending violence and attaining lasting peace. The success of our joint efforts is the best way to ensure the protection of civilians.