



ISAF Spokesman  
Headquarters  
International Security Assistance Force  
Kabul, Afghanistan  
APO AE, 09356



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Salaam-a aleikum. Welcome to all of you.

This week, UNAMA released its Annual Report on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict. ISAF is still reviewing the findings and the recommendations in the report carefully, with the intent of implementing those recommendations that may assist us in limiting civilian casualties Afghanistan. We appreciate UNAMA's rigorous work in indentifying and recommending solutions, and we share the goal of reducing the loss of innocent lives.

The Commander of ISAF, General Allen, has made it clear: The priority of ISAF has been and will be on limiting civilian casualties. This past year, ISAF-caused civilian casualties have generally declined since a peak in July 2011, representing the lowest number of ISAF-caused civilian casualties since 2009. However, we realize that there is much

work to be done yet in reducing these tragic cases of loss of civilian lives.

ISAF only recently held its Air Civilian Casualty Conference, to create a mechanism to bring Air Operators of the coalition partners together to discuss lessons learned, in order to evolve employment and civilian casualty mitigation techniques, tactics and procedures in support of current and future ISAF missions in Afghanistan. ISAF is currently planning to hold a Conference on Civilian Casualties in March.

We share President Karzai's concerns about the number and impact of civilian casualties, and we continue to work with the President and the Afghan government to do everything possible to protect the innocent citizens of this great country. Every civilian casualty is tragic and detrimental to our course. Over the past year, Afghan and coalition forces have increasingly made preventing civilian casualties a top priority.

General Allen ensured that all commanders reviewed and certified all of their troops on updated tactical and driving directives, with the emphasis to prevent civilian casualties.

The same cannot be said about the Taliban and insurgents, who indiscriminantly target and are responsible for the majority of civilian casualties today.

ISAF personnel do all they can to avoid civilian casualties, but there is a risk in any operation, especially with an enemy that operates by disguising themselves amongst the civilian population, both for protection and to deliberately instigate situations where civilian casualties are likely to occur.

Even Mullah Omar has recognized the high number of innocent civilian deaths that he and his fighters have caused, and continue to cause, with their careless use of improvised explosive devices. Unfortunately, despite orders from Mullah Omar to quit harming civilians, we saw an increased use of IED's, harming Afghan adults and children this past

year. The vast majority of all the insurgent-caused civilian casualties were the result of IEDs strikes. This is an issue that Mullah Omar has to come clean with. Was he sincere with his order to his troops to stop killing innocent civilians ? If yes, then why do his followers still violate this order ?

ISAF investigates every civilian casualty allegation to determine the facts and help prevent future similar incidents. Each incident is reviewed by ISAF senior leaders, to ensure the right direction and resources are in place to prevent further civilian casualties. ISAF clearly understands that earning and keeping the Afghan people's faith and trust is paramount. ISAF does everything it can, everyday, to prevent accidental or unintentional casualties through a variety of procedures and directives which call upon our forces to exercise restraint during operations. Again, every civilian casualty is tragic and detrimental to ISAF. We will continue to do everything possible to prevent civilian casualties throughout 2012.