

## *Afghan Civilian Casualties Soar as U.S. Exits, Monitors Say*

Detentions and summary executions of those accused of colluding with the Kabul government were also reported, with the Taliban found to be largely responsible.

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KABUL, Afghanistan — Civilian casualties and rights violations are rising sharply in Afghanistan, human rights groups say, with the Taliban carrying out the bulk of the offenses as they wage a campaign against the government amid the void left by departing American forces.

Since the Taliban intensified their offensive in early May, the United Nations said in a report released on Monday, nearly 2,400 civilians have been killed or injured, as many as in the preceding four months. The total, the U.N. said, was the highest recorded for the May-to-June period since monitoring began in 2009.

The Taliban's campaign, conducted mostly in rural areas, has reached the edges of provincial centers, including Afghanistan's second-largest city, Kandahar, where thousands are fleeing as fighting encroaches on urban neighborhoods. The insurgents now control over half of the country's districts but have not captured any of Afghanistan's 34 provincial capitals.

What the U.N. calls "anti-government elements" — the Taliban, the Islamic State and undetermined others — were responsible for 64 percent of the civilian casualties, the organization said. Government forces were responsible for 25 percent, it said.

Separately, Human Rights Watch said that hundreds accused by the Taliban of collusion with the Kabul government had been detained by the insurgents in the border area south of Kandahar, and that some had been summarily executed.

"There are grave concerns that Taliban forces in Kandahar may commit further atrocities to retaliate against the government and security forces," Patricia Grossman, associate Asia director at Human Rights Watch, said in a statement.

In one such killing, a 17-year-old named Nangialy who had once worked for the police was taken from a family car west of Kandahar on July 9, and shot and killed by the Taliban, his uncle Mohammad Yousuf said.

The family was fleeing the fighting, Mr. Yousuf said, when Taliban fighters stopped their car.

"His mother screamed for them to spare him," Mr. Yousuf recalled. "She said to the Taliban, 'My son is innocent; he left the police job two months ago,' and that she only has two sons. She pleaded with the fighters: 'For God's sake, don't take him away from me.'"

A local imam tried to intervene, offering himself as a guarantor for the boy, but to no avail, the uncle said.

"A Talib came and told his friends, who were arguing with the imam, that he has been finished," Mr. Yousuf said. The teenager was shot 11 times.

The U.N. report said 46 percent of all civilian casualties for the January-to-June period involved women and children — 32 percent boys and girls, and 14 percent women.

A series of U.S. airstrikes in recent days has slowed the Taliban advance on Kandahar. A top American general said on Sunday night that the strikes would continue.