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## **Afghanistan: Protection of civilians must improve as security transition looms**

The UN Security Council must ensure that the protection of civilians and the promotion of human rights lie at the heart of Afghan and international efforts in Afghanistan, Amnesty International said in an [open letter](#) today.

The mandate of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) is expected to be extended until the end of 2014 on 10 October by the Security Council.

“As the security transfer from international to Afghan forces enters its final stage, it is essential that the Afghan government, ISAF and the USA ensure that all necessary safeguards are in place to prevent and account for rising civilian casualties,” said Horia Mosadiq, Amnesty International’s Afghanistan Researcher.

“With ISAF combat troops completing their withdrawal, their governments must continue to provide international expertise, political support and pressure, as well as financial assistance. This is crucial to secure the modest gains of the past 12 years and further advance human rights.”

According to the UN, there was a rise in civilian casualties in Afghanistan in the first half of 2013, compared with the same period last year. More than 1,319 civilians were killed, mostly by armed insurgents, with Afghan and international forces responsible for nine per cent, and a further 12 per cent caused by clashes between these forces and insurgents.

Amnesty International recognizes that ISAF and US forces have made efforts to limit civilian casualties, but stresses that more could be done. Greater care should be taken to prevent casualties, especially during airstrikes and night raids on civilian homes.

The Security Council should also press the Afghan authorities and their international allies to strengthen measures to prevent and account for civilian casualties caused by Afghan forces, with adequate compensation for victims and family members.

“International and Afghan forces must provide justice for civilian casualties, including by investigating suspected violations of the laws of war, prosecuting the perpetrators of such violations, and providing assistance to victims of wrongful military operations,” said Mosadiq.

In addition, the Security Council should ensure that women’s human rights are not forgotten during the security transition. There is a particular need to provide better protection for women’s rights activists, who continue to face great personal risk.

The Security Council has repeatedly emphasized the importance of protecting women’s rights in Afghanistan, but the situation of women has not improved over the last year, and has in some respects

even deteriorated.

“Many women rights activists are still threatened from all sides, be it in their homes, from armed groups or from the authorities. Some are now more afraid to speak out against discrimination and attacks, with the fear of reprisals ever present. Meanwhile, parliamentary revisions to key legislation protecting women from violence threaten to undermine those positive steps that have been taken,” said Mosadiq.

Women remain generally excluded from important decision-making processes. Still only nine of 70 members on the High Peace Council – the Afghan government-appointed body charged with negotiation with armed groups like the Taliban – are women. The quotas for women in local elected bodies have been reduced and women’s participation in the judiciary is grossly inadequate.

“Women must not be sidelined from key decision-making processes on Afghanistan’s future. In its resolutions, the Security Council has repeatedly stressed that women deserve a seat at the negotiating table and to have their recommendations heard. Despite the dangers, many qualified women remain ready and willing to help determine Afghanistan’s future. The Council should now ensure that they have the space and the necessary support to do so,” said Mosadiq.