

# THE UN AND CASUALTY RECORDING

Good practice and the need for action



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Oxford Research Group (ORG) is an independent non-governmental organisation and registered charity based in London. ORG promotes the idea of sustainable approaches to global security as an alternative to violent confrontation, through original research, wide-ranging dialogue, and practical policy recommendations.

ORG is committed to the principle that every life lost to armed violence should be properly recognised. For this to become possible, every casualty of armed violence must be promptly recorded, correctly identified and publicly acknowledged. To bring this closer to fulfilment, the Every Casualty programme at ORG ([www.oxfordresearchgroup.org.uk/rcac](http://www.oxfordresearchgroup.org.uk/rcac); project website: [www.everycasualty.org](http://www.everycasualty.org)) is developing an improved understanding of the range of available casualty recording practices, along with guidance for their implementation. This has included extensive research into existing casualty recording work, which is contributing towards the identification and development of standards and good practice able to be implemented by a range of actors, including non-governmental organisations, states, and inter-governmental organisations.

In addition to its research, ORG facilitates an International Practitioner Network of casualty recording organisations ([www.everycasualty.org/practitioners/ipn](http://www.everycasualty.org/practitioners/ipn)) and is at the forefront of integrating policy goals into existing policy frameworks at the national and international level.

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## **Date of Publication**

April 2014

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

|           |  |
|-----------|--|
| ACAP:     | Afghanistan Civilian Assistance Program  |
| AIHRC:    | Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission  |
| ALP:      | Afghan Local Police  |
| AOAV:     | Action on Armed Violence   |
| CAAC:     | Children and Armed Conflict (in this report we refer to the UN Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict by the abbreviation CAAC) |
| CAD:      | Civil Affairs (component of UN peacekeeping)   |
| CCMT:     | Civilian Casualty Mitigation Team (of the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan)   |
| CTFMR:    | Country Task Force on Monitoring and Reporting (for the UN Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism on Children and Armed Conflict)  |
| DPA:      | UN Department for Political Affairs  |
| DPKO:     | UN Department for Peacekeeping Operations  |
| ERW:      | Explosive Remnants of War  |
| IASC:     | UN Inter-Agency Standing Committee   |
| IATFS:    | UN Inter-Agency Task Force on Syria  |
| ICRC:     | International Committee of the Red Cross   |
| IED:      | Improvised Explosive Device  |
| IHL:      | International Humanitarian Law   |
| IHRL:     | International Human Rights Law   |
| INSO:     | International NGO Safety Organisation  |
| IOM:      | International Organisation for Migration   |
| IPN:      | International Practitioner Network of casualty recording organisations   |
| ISAF:     | International Security Assistance Force (NATO-led international forces in Afghanistan)   |
| JMAC:     | Joint Mission Analysis Centers (DPKO)  |
| JOC:      | Joint Operations Center (DPKO)   |
| MACCA:    | Mine Action Coordination Centre of Afghanistan   |
| MONUSCO:  | UN Organisation Stabilisation Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo  |
| MRM:      | UN Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism created by UN Security Council Resolution 1612 on Children and Armed Conflict  |
| NGO:      | Non-governmental organisation  |
| OCHA:     | UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs   |
| OGPRtoP:  | UN Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect   |
| OHCHR:    | UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights  |
| ORG:      | Oxford Research Group  |
| PICC:     | President's Information Coordination Centre (Afghanistan)  |
| PoC:      | Protection of civilians in armed conflict  |
| SitCen:   | Situational Center, DPKO-DFS (Department of Field Support)   |
| UN:       | United Nations   |
| UNAMA:    | UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan   |
| UNAMA HR: | UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, Human Rights unit  |
| UNAMI:    | UN Assistance Mission in Iraq  |
| UNCT:     | UN Country Team  |
| UNDP:     | UN Development Programme   |
| UNDSS:    | UN Department for Safety and Security  |
| UNHCR:    | UN High Commission for Refugees  |
| UNHQ:     | In this report, UN offices in New York and Geneva  |
| UNICEF:   | UN Children's Fund   |
| UNMAS:    | UN Mine Action Service   |
| UNOCC:    | UN Operations and Crisis Centre  |
| UNSC:     | UN Security Council  |
| UNSMIS:   | UN Supervision Mission in Syria  |

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### UN civilian casualty recording has helped save lives

When the UN systematically records the direct civilian casualties of violent conflict, and acts effectively on this information, this can help save civilian lives. UN civilian casualty recording in Afghanistan has clearly shown this. Because of the potential value of casualty information, a number of the respondents to this study asserted that civilian casualty recording should be an essential first step in UN efforts to support the protection of civilians in armed conflict. In Afghanistan, advocacy based upon robust UN civilian casualty data has helped influence conflict parties to change their behaviour, and decrease the civilian death and injury that they cause. Oxford Research Group's interviews with UN staff on the subject of casualty recording, primarily focused on the recording of civilian casualties, also showed other benefits to this practice. Using systematic casualty data could contribute to UN operational planning and the assistance of victims and communities, both during and following the cessation of armed conflict. Casualty recording can or has supported the UN with: conflict analysis and situational awareness; humanitarian response and development planning, by helping identify areas of risk and need; programming such as mine action, including risk education; referral to and provision of assistance to survivors; promoting accountability; and advocacy with UN Member States in New York and Geneva as well as within conflict-affected countries, for policies and action to decrease the harm suffered by civilians in armed conflict.

### The UN does not generally record the casualties of armed conflict

Despite this, the UN does not systematically record casualties except in very few cases. As such, casualty recording is not a well-defined or widespread practice within the UN, nor is it recognised as an essential activity by the UN. Even where a mandate for it may exist, country-level leadership may not take undertake recording. Alternatively, the responsibility for casualty recording among the UN agencies, departments, and offices present in a country may be unclear. In order for effective civilian casualty recording to be routinely implemented, it must be more widely understood and supported within the UN as a priority activity in the protection of civilians. Its contribution to other action to assist civilians should also be recognised. One of the most important uses of information about casualties for the UN is advocacy for the prevention of future deaths and injuries. Given the difficulty of gaining influence in some political contexts, this may not always succeed. Yet without casualty recording, a key tool for leveraging action for violence reduction is missing, which could have implications for the protection of civilians.

### The UN should advance practice and pursue casualty recording as an essential activity

This study concludes that there is a demand for better

casualty data in the UN for a range of purposes. While states hold ultimate responsibility for the prompt recording, correct identification and public acknowledgement of the deaths of individuals within their territory, or in territories where the state conducts military operations, the advancement of casualty-recording practice by the UN in conflict-affected countries should be pursued. This would have clear benefits to the work of a range of UN entities, and so to the people that they serve. This report aims to contribute to the advancement of UN casualty-recording practice by: showing the need for casualty recording in different parts of the UN; analysing an example of the effective implementation of UN civilian casualty recording, by the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan's Human Rights unit; and elaborating key challenges and how these might be met. Essential steps for the development of casualty-recording practice within the UN are given in the recommendations that follow.

### The present opportunity to make UN casualty recording systematic should not be missed

The UN is currently implementing the "Rights Up Front Action Plan", which, amongst other things, is concerned with the improvement of information coordination within the UN. The Action Plan has been developed following the UN's conclusion that it failed in 2009 to advocate effectively with Member States and conflict parties on information about civilian casualties in Sri Lanka, leading to greater civilian suffering. The initiative presents an opportunity to bring about systematic casualty recording in the UN that supports the protection of civilians, as recommended in the 2013 Secretary-General's report on the protection of civilians in armed conflict. This opportunity has not yet been realised, but should not be missed.



Afghan woman holding a poster of family members killed in an airstrike in 2008. UNAMA HR records civilian casualties and advocates with conflict parties to reduce such civilian harm. (© Fraidoon Pooya/AP)

## RECOMMENDATIONS

This report demonstrates that advancing and developing casualty-recording practice and the use of casualty data in the UN would benefit the conflict-affected people that the UN serves. This report also shows that good practice already exists within the UN system and should be learned from.

This study concentrated on the recording of the direct civilian casualties of armed conflict, which provides the scope for the following recommendations. However, consideration should also be given to the value of recording all casualties in order to better support the uses and benefits of this data identified, and to casualty recording in situations of armed violence more broadly.

The recommendations of this study focus on assisting the development of consistent and systematic casualty recording within the UN. Such recording must be credible to Member States and for engaging in dialogue with others, including all conflict parties. While this study does not recommend the specific type of system or systems the UN should implement, it evaluates different possibilities. It may be necessary for specific implementation to vary by context, according to institutional capacities and the operational constraints imposed by any given environment.

Our recommendations are directed primarily at UN entities, which are encouraged to take steps to: firstly, **understand the application and benefits of casualty recording across the UN, and determine how the widest range of these could be effectively served;** and secondly, **design and implement effective casualty recording systems in conflict-affected countries, learning from existing practice.** This might include implementing a UN-wide casualty recording system as recommended by the UN Secretary-General.<sup>1</sup> A single system is one way – but not the only way – to try to ensure that casualty data produced by the UN can be comparable, and that a range of entities can potentially use the information produced.

Member States should raise their awareness of casualty recording and its benefits.<sup>2</sup> Member States must also provide support for UN casualty recording practice by, for example, approving mandates and resolutions with consistent and clear language calling for casualty recording and its sustained implementation.

The following recommendations for advancing UN casualty recording are derived from the analysis of interviews with individuals, working in a variety of capacities across a number of UN entities at headquarter-level and in Afghanistan.

### 1. Understand the different benefits of and demands for casualty information across the UN

This study demonstrates that casualty recording can support protection and the reduction of harm to civilians in conflict, and contribute to operational planning for humanitarian response and victim assistance.<sup>3</sup> **UN actors should take steps to better understand how information produced through casualty recording relates to the mandates, responsibilities, priorities, and operations of different UN entities.** This study focuses on situations of armed conflict, but UN mandates and priorities in other situations of armed violence should also be considered. A fuller identification of information needs and objectives in utilising such information will help mitigate potential conflicts of interest regarding sharing and acting on casualty data, and support the development of a principled and productive approach to advancing casualty recording within the UN.

### 2. Ensure casualty recording can be sustained throughout the duration of an armed conflict, including post-conflict

Casualty recording serves populations and programming best when it is continually implemented across time, throughout the duration of an armed conflict, including post-conflict. Where its relevance lasts beyond the lifetime of UN programmes, plans should be made for handover and legacy. **Given the potential impacts, commitment to sustaining casualty recording requires political support by Member States and UN actors alike. In the case of UN peacekeeping and political missions, for example, clear mandate language can be an advantage, but must also be matched by adequate planning and resourcing.**

### 3. Ensure that the purpose of casualty recording is clear

Effective casualty recording benefits from having clear objectives and outputs. Without such focus, information collection may expend valuable time and resources without contributing, in a focused way, to advocacy or operations. Casualty recording is invariably challenging, and faces limitations that may vary by context. Defining the methods for obtaining the best information under a given set of circumstances can be done more effectively where the purpose that the resulting data must serve is clear. The primary function of the UN's work to advance casualty recording should be to benefit the conflict-affected populations that the UN serves, through promoting better protection and assistance.

<sup>1</sup> UNSC (2013) [http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=S/2013/689](http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/2013/689) p17

<sup>2</sup> See Minor (2012) and Miceli and Olgiati (2014) as well as this report for further elaboration of casualty recording practice and benefits.

<sup>3</sup> Victims of conflict are defined broadly in this report, to include the dead, survivors including those injured, and their families and loved ones. (Our use of the term is not limited to those who have suffered violations of the law). Victim assistance refers to activities and programmes "oriented toward removing barriers...which hinder victims from full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others" (<http://victim-assistance.org/victim-assistance-obligations-and-norms/>). It originates as a concept in the assistance of landmine survivors.

#### 4. In implementing casualty recording, coordinate different UN entities' needs and activities

Coordination between UN entities focused on human rights, humanitarian response, development and other priorities is necessary for a mutual understanding of what casualty data and analysis are needed at both HQ and field level in different contexts. This includes understanding where the duplication of efforts to produce and act on casualty information might be necessary for mandates, and where it might not.

As **Part 1** of this report explains, demands for information on casualties made by UN staff at headquarters level (New York and Geneva - UNHQ) tend towards comprehensive, disaggregated information on individuals and incidents. Due focus should be given to what is required by field-based staff, including consideration of potential risks, and the needs of UNHQ should be reconciled with this. Doing so will ensure purpose-driven casualty recording that can be used effectively in the work of UN actors, to benefit the populations in need of protection and assistance.

#### 5. Develop UN-wide principles and standards for casualty recording, building from existing standards

Following discussions of information needs, **UN entities should collaboratively design UN-wide principles that can guide casualty-recording practice**, and which would help users and advocacy targets to assess the data produced. These principles might refer, for example, to transparency of methodology, impartiality, and mitigating risk. **Standards such as the basic points of information about incidents and individuals killed also need to be set, so that any information produced can be useful to the maximum number of actors.** Such standards can influence recording methodologies employed, encouraging good practice. In this process of setting principles and standards, lessons should be taken from examples of good practice, such as that of the Human Rights unit of the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA HR) described in **Part 2**. Oxford Research Group's own process to develop standards with NGO practitioners, drawing from their experiences and good practices, may also be useful,<sup>4</sup> as are existing documents such as the ICRC Professional Standards for Protection Work.<sup>5</sup> **The principles and standards developed can also provide a starting point for using casualty information from others such as NGOs in a more effective and standardised way.**



The UN building in New York. Advancing casualty recording would benefit the work of multiple UN entities.  
(© Knowsphotos <http://flic.kr/p/8kMp9v>)

<sup>4</sup> See p23 of this report, and Salama (2013)

<sup>5</sup> See ICRC (2013) and OHCHR's 'Training Manual on Human Rights Monitoring' (OHCHR (2001))

## 6. Determine responsibility for casualty recording, either overall or context-by-context

Once joint principles are agreed upon, determinations of responsibility for recording casualties should be undertaken. This task poses a significant challenge, as it requires deciding between various models of implementation. A stand-alone entity responsible for casualty recording could be created, or casualty recording could be incorporated within an existing UN entity's responsibilities. Alternatively, implementation may require undertaking the following in each context: identifying and considering the capacities that can be deployed to achieve a dedicated mechanism; identifying the most practical and achievable mechanisms that nevertheless conform to the standards set; ensuring in design the avoidance of negative impacts on UN entities operating in the same environment as those recording or providing information; and developing understanding as to how casualty recording will relate to different organisational mandates.

## 7. Develop systems learning from experience within the UN

Future UN development and implementation of casualty recording should learn from experience. Looking to examples such as the work of UNAMA HR, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, and the UN Assistance Mission in Iraq (UNAMI), as well as the UN's recent experiences in Sri Lanka, Syria and other contexts, may provide insights into approaches and challenges useful for developing effective practice, both in recording and acting upon information. Sharing of practice in a way that is structured rather than ad-hoc would be beneficial. Consideration

should also be given to state practices<sup>6</sup> and experiences from civil society.<sup>7</sup> The range of approaches to casualty recording, and what might be most useful or applicable given the constraints of the context and the core purpose of the information, should be considered.<sup>8</sup> A UN toolkit for casualty recording that can be adapted to context would be beneficial, and should include an effective, field-focused information system and practical guidelines.

## 8. Consider the value of harm tracking by conflict parties alongside casualty recording

Consideration should be given to the complementary roles of civilian harm tracking by conflict parties<sup>9</sup> and casualty recording. Having both mechanisms facilitates evidence-based discussions between military and non-military actors in conflict environments. All forces should undertake tracking. In Afghanistan the existence of tracking, by the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) and national forces, alongside UN casualty recording supported the protection of civilians and the reduction of casualties.

Ultimately, casualty-recording systems deployed by UN actors should reflect the range of needs and purposes articulated by different UN entities; information produced through casualty recording should be made accessible (within the UN, to all who can use it to support their activities, as well as publicly as long as it is safe to do so); and the work should be based on the political and practical lessons already learned by the UN in relation to this issue. In this way, casualty recording can contribute to supporting the needs of, and safeguarding the right to life and protected status, of civilians in armed conflict.



Displaced civilians in Sri Lanka, 2009. The 'Rights Up Front Action Plan' was developed in response to the UN's review of its failure to act effectively on casualty information in this context. (© Trokilinochchi <http://flic.kr/p/5RFFQU>)

<sup>6</sup> See Miceli and Olgiati (2014)

<sup>7</sup> See the International Practitioner Network of casualty recording organisations [www.everycasualty.org/ipn](http://www.everycasualty.org/ipn) and Minor et al (2012)

<sup>8</sup> A range of approaches was described in ORG's previous research. See Minor (2012).

<sup>9</sup> This involves a conflict party systematically gathering and analysing data about their operations, and its effects on the civilian population, including deaths, injuries, property damage and other civilian harm. See Center for Civilians in Conflict (2014) for a case study of tracking by ISAF in Afghanistan.

## INTRODUCTION

Since the UN Secretary-General's 2012 Report and the June 2012 UN Security Council (UNSC) Open Debate on the protection of civilians (PoC), casualty recording has become an issue of renewed interest to Member States, the UN, civil society, and conflict-affected communities. Despite this, there is little understanding as to whether such work is being undertaken, much less the attitudes towards it, within the UN. This report helps to address these gaps in understanding.

In **Part 1** (p12) the report looks at the experiences of, and attitudes towards, casualty recording and information on casualties from the perspectives of UN staff based in New York and Geneva (referred to in this report as UNHQ for simplicity). In doing so, the needs, realities, and uses of such information in the UN system in the experience of these individuals are identified. In **Part 2** (p23) the report examines a case study of UN casualty recording on the ground, by the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan's Human Rights unit (UNAMA HR). Referring to challenges and uses identified in **Part 1**, this case study looks in detail at how the UN can record casualties and the benefits this can have. **Part 3** discusses some challenges to UN casualty recording, found at UNHQ and in Afghanistan (p41), which also inform the overall recommendations (p3).

Casualty recording is a practice that strives to achieve the comprehensive, systematic and continuous documentation of direct individual deaths or injuries resulting from armed violence, and/or the incidents in which these occur.<sup>10</sup> Previous research, predominantly focused on NGOs,<sup>11</sup> has demonstrated that there are a variety of approaches to casualty recording in conflict through to post-conflict environments, giving different degrees of comprehensiveness and levels of certainty in information. Despite this variation, all of these approaches have demonstrated benefits for conflict-affected populations, and can be complementary to and build on each other.<sup>12</sup> This concept of a connected range of practice is relevant to the different demands for casualty information in the UN, and to the different methods and objectives for casualty recording the UN might adopt in different contexts. For example, real-time information useful to humanitarians for identifying areas of risk and need may not neces-

sarily need as much detail about individuals killed or as high a standard of proof as information that contributes to criminal prosecutions for human rights violations.<sup>13</sup> However, casualty recording systems can and should balance the need for thorough and comprehensive evidential details with the urgency of making initial information available, for example for humanitarian purposes.

Casualty recording enables an understanding of who has died, how, where, when and in what circumstances. The documented benefits of such information include: advocacy to reduce civilian casualties; informing the assessment of conflict environments for protective action by humanitarian responders; supporting victims' rights (such as the right to know the fate of loved ones) and survivors' assistance (such as compensation); acknowledgement through memorialisation; and contributions to accountability procedures and transitional justice processes.<sup>14</sup>

### The context of this report

This report comes at a relevant time. The UN is currently implementing its "Rights Up Front Action Plan",<sup>15</sup> developed in response to the UN's review of its failure to act and advocate effectively on information about casualties in Sri Lanka in 2009.<sup>16</sup> The implementation of the Action Plan also follows UN experiences in Syria, and failures to effectively monitor human rights protection elsewhere, such as in the Central African Republic. There is opportunity to discern not only how the collection and coordination of information on violations can be improved (on which the Action Plan focuses), but also information on the deaths and injuries of civilians more broadly.<sup>17</sup> The 2013 Secretary-General's Report on the protection of civilians in armed conflict called for the UN to establish a common system for civilian casualty recording "as part of broader efforts to monitor and report on violations of international humanitarian and human rights law", drawing on the expertise of member states, the UN, and civil society.<sup>18</sup> This report intends to help to inform this work, in particular by identifying the factors that drive demand for casualty recording, as well as by carefully documenting what one on-the-ground, UN-operated casualty recording system looks like.

<sup>10</sup> For detailed definitions, see Minor (2012) Section 1.2 p4 and Miceli and Olgiati (2014) 'Casualty recording' is distinguished from 'information about casualties' in this report – the latter can refer to information acquired by other means than the systematic procedure described here. This study concentrated on the recording of the direct civilian casualties of armed conflict. However, consideration should also be given to the value of recording all casualties in order to better support the uses and benefits of this data identified, and to casualty recording in situations of armed violence more broadly.

<sup>11</sup> See Minor (2012) and Minor et al (2012)

<sup>12</sup> See Minor (2012) section 2.2 p8

<sup>13</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> Examples from *ibid.* Section 2.1 p6, Miceli and Olgiati (2014), and the current study

<sup>15</sup> See <http://www.un.org/sg/rightsupfront/>

<sup>16</sup> See UN, 'Report of the Secretary-General's Internal Review Panel on United Nations Action in Sri Lanka' (Panel chaired by Charles Petrie) (2012) [http://www.un.org/News/dh/infocus/Sri\\_Lanka/The\\_Internal\\_Review\\_Panel\\_report\\_on\\_Sri\\_Lanka.pdf](http://www.un.org/News/dh/infocus/Sri_Lanka/The_Internal_Review_Panel_report_on_Sri_Lanka.pdf)

<sup>17</sup> "[I] would stress the continuing importance of casualty recording...[which] is undertaken by States, civil society, and other actors, including the United Nations, to systematically maintain a record of deaths and injuries from armed violence in order to inform advocacy with parties to conflict. An inter-agency task force will review current United Nations monitoring and reporting mechanisms on humanitarian and human rights law violations and make recommendations for the establishment of a common United Nations system to gather and analyse such information in a timely and coherent manner. Consideration will be given to the role of casualty recording in such a system." UNSC (2013) p9

<sup>18</sup> *ibid.* p17

Since June 2012, Member States, the Secretary-General<sup>19</sup>, and the Emergency Relief Coordinator<sup>20</sup> have each emphasised the need for casualties to be recorded. This builds on a growing understanding of how casualty recording can have operational benefits in the fields of protection, post-conflict recovery and peace-building, and humanitarian operations, thus directly addressing the Secretary-General's "five core challenges," which prioritise enhancing the protection of civilians in armed conflict.<sup>21</sup>

This report is part of a joint project between Oxford Research Group (ORG) and Action on Armed Violence (AOAV) to generate an overview of state and UN practice in casualty recording,<sup>22</sup> following a request for such knowledge by the Group of Friends on PoC at the 2012 UNSC Open Debate on PoC.<sup>23</sup>

ORG and AOAV advocate for casualty recording as an important contribution to PoC as members of the Every Casualty Campaign. This calls on states, in partnership with other actors, to recognise every casualty of armed violence by ensuring that all deaths are *promptly recorded, correctly identified, and publicly acknowledged*.<sup>24</sup>

This report concludes that significantly developing and advancing the UN's own practice in casualty recording would be beneficial to UN entities' implementation of their mandates and to the protection of conflict- and violence-affected populations that the UN serves. However, this report does not call for the UN to be the main or sole body that ensures the recording and acknowledgement of every casualty: it should be one actor in the global improvement of casualty recording practice.

### Who this report is for

This report is relevant to policymakers and practitioners within the UN, states, casualty recorders, and civil society organisations that support the principles of the Every Casualty Campaign, among others. Readers may be interested in different aspects of the content here. As such, a breakdown of the report is given to help to identify the sections of most use to the reader.

### Part 1: Casualties matter: UNHQ perspectives on casualty recording (p12)

#### Information demands (p12)

- Investigates whether, and what, information on casualties is useful from the perspective of UN employees based at headquarter-level. Findings identify that disaggregated information on casualties is privileged over tallies, as this offers the most significant analytical and advocacy purchase.

### Flow of information on casualties (p15)

- Comprehensive information on casualties, as produced through casualty recording, does not exist within the UN, with the exception of select UN field operations. This section articulates the availability of information on casualties at present, and whether this information is readily exchanged between UN entities and actors in the experience of respondents.

### Uses and prospective uses of information on casualties (p19)

- Defines the uses and possible uses of comprehensive information on casualties reported by UNHQ respondents. Findings focus on how such information informs analysis of conflict environments, advocacy, and operational planning and programming.

### Part 2: Case study: UNAMA HR's civilian casualty recording and its impact in Afghanistan (p23)

Given the needs and limitations identified in **Part 1**, **Part 2** provides an in-depth examination of how UN casualty recording presently functions on the ground in Afghanistan. This examination is used to inform consideration of the wider implementation of casualty recording.

### Casualty recording methodology: good practice and limitations (p25)

- As an example of UN civilian casualty recording, this section looks carefully at UNAMA HR's methodology, how it is operationalised, as well as its challenges and limitations, including: procedures and tools for incident verification; advocacy with parties to the conflict; relationships to others producing casualty data in Afghanistan; and issues around publication and legacy. Despite limitations, UNAMA HR gives an example of good practice in civilian casualty recording.

### Uses and impact of UNAMA HR's casualty recording (p36)

- UNAMA HR's data has been used to support victim assistance, humanitarian coordination, and advocacy with conflict parties, to reduce civilian casualties and harm to civilian communities. This advocacy has had clear successes, and shows that casualty recording can help contribute to saving civilian lives. This section discusses UNAMA HR's with reference to uses identified in **Part 1**.

### Explaining successes and limitations (p38)

- Factors of: context (including the national and international political context, the importance of civilian casualties to people in Afghanistan, and buy-in to the protec-

<sup>19</sup> UNSC (2012) p7

<sup>20</sup> For example, from June 2012: <https://ochanet.unocha.org/p/Documents/25%20June%20ERC%20Statement%20on%20PoC.pdf>

<sup>21</sup> See <http://www.unocha.org/what-we-do/policy/thematic-areas/protection>

<sup>22</sup> For AOAV's findings, see Miceli and Olgiati (2014)

<sup>23</sup> See <http://bit.ly/1gBE9tl> "the Council's discussions may benefit from an overview in the next Secretary-General's report of existing practices, as well as from specific recommendations on ways to ensure systemic and reliable data collection in compliance with humanitarian principles"

<sup>24</sup> See [www.everycasualty.org/campaign](http://www.everycasualty.org/campaign)

tion of civilians among conflict parties); personalities; strategy; and credibility and impartiality in methodology help explain both UNAMA HR's successes and good practice and its limitations. These factors merit careful consideration for the wider implementation of casualty recording by the UN, given the needs and realities identified in **Part 1**. This section ends with recommendations on implementation elsewhere, based on the experiences of UNAMA HR staff.

### Examples of country-level casualty information in the UN system<sup>25</sup>

UNAMA HR's civilian casualty recording has been taken as a case study because it is identified within and outside of the UN as a model of civilian casualty-recording practice.<sup>26</sup> It is also an established and well-developed system and so suited to an evaluation. ORG and AOV are working to develop an improved understanding of the range of available casualty recording practices, along with guidance for their implementation by different actors (states, UN entities, and civil society organisations). As part of this work, investigating UNAMA HR also provides benchmarks for further investigation of UN practice in casualty recording, which would support its advancement.

For this study, ORG did not conduct a systematic survey of all UN country presences to document all the contexts where casualty recording is being done. Our research has shown that few such efforts are known of at UNHQ. Nevertheless, some country-level endeavours that involve producing information about casualties are summarised here. This gives some context both to UNHQ-level perceptions and to the example of UNAMA HR's civilian casualty recording work. It also shows some of the range of different priorities under which casualty information is gathered at the country level in the UN system. This list aims to give an impression rather than a fully representative picture:

- The Human Rights component of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Iraq (UNAMI), a political mission, reports civilian casualty figures that are based on a systematic procedure using multiple sources of information.<sup>27</sup> In 2012, the Human Rights unit of the United Nations Supervision Mission in Syria (UNSMIS) started recording civilian casualties in Syria, on a model that used the expertise of some individuals involved in the UNAMA HR system. The aim was to establish a long-term mechanism to support the protection of civilians,

### Part 3: Meeting challenges to UN casualty recording (p41)

- Considering the findings of **Parts 1 and 2**, **Part 3** looks in more depth at the challenges within the UN to getting the right casualty data, assessing its quality, and reconciling different types of information, with view to considering how these could be overcome. **Part 3** also examines political challenges, and the issue of assigning responsibility for casualty recording within the UN, at HQ and at field-level.

but with the ending of UNSMIS's mandate in August 2012 it could not continue. (The UN Office for the High Commissioner of Human Rights (OHCHR) subsequently adopted different methods to acquire data and make public statements on the death toll in Syria, including commissioning the Human Rights Data Analysis Group to produce estimates based on integrating the data of different organisations and groups recording casualties.<sup>28</sup> OHCHR decided to stop commenting on Syrian casualty figures in early 2014);

- The peacekeeping mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, MONUSCO, has established a system, ITEM, which monitors human rights violations and other information including civilian casualties. The Protection of Civilians unit in the UN Mission in South Sudan has been working to establish a system to record casualties and monitor other indicators, but this is not yet operational;
- OHCHR has developed a case management database for human rights monitoring, to which a 'casualty-tracking module' has recently been added, for the recording of civilian casualty information (further to recording violations). This is currently being deployed in a small number of countries according to the priorities of national offices, though it is too early to evaluate the impact;<sup>29</sup>
- OCHA in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT) systematically records civilian casualties, which are reported in weekly Protection of Civilians reports. A searchable database was previously available on OCHA OPT's website. OCHA Colombia maintains an information system to monitor the humanitarian situation, which includes casualty information within data on events of humanitarian concern.<sup>30</sup> OCHA also managed the Libya Crisis Map in 2011, again intended for a humanitarian audience, which displayed information on casualties and a range of other data using the Ushahidi mapping platform;<sup>31</sup>

<sup>25</sup> This box is based on information gathered through interviews and desk research during this research project and ORG's previous research into casualty recording practice (Minor et al (2012))

<sup>26</sup> For example, the statement of the Russian Federation to the February 2013 Open Debate on PoC drew attention to the merits of establishing mechanisms on civilian casualties like UNAMA's <http://bit.ly/1m64w9W>

<sup>27</sup> See <http://unami.unmissions.org/Default.aspx?tabid=5397&language=en-US>

<sup>28</sup> See for example Megan Price, Jeff Klingner, and Patrick Ball, 'Preliminary Statistical Analysis of Documentation of Killings in the Syrian Arab Republic', January 2013 <https://hrdag.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/Benetch-final-SY-report.pdf>

<sup>29</sup> See **Part 1 Section 3.3** p17 for further discussion of the module to be deployed in both Human Rights units of peacekeeping and political missions and other contexts where OHCHR has a field presence.

<sup>30</sup> See <http://monitor.colombiassh.org/>

<sup>31</sup> See <http://www.ushahidi.com/>

- Within peacekeeping missions, UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO)-run Joint Operations Centers (JOC) and Joint Mission Analysis Centers (JMAC) manage situation updates (that can contain casualty information) and medium- to long-term analysis respectively, integrating various information sources. These are not specifically mandated to systematically record casualties;
- Mine action country programmes<sup>32</sup> record casualties caused by mines and explosive remnants of war (ERW) and use this data for programme planning, for example of mine and ERW risk education and victim assistance. The UN Mine Action Service (UNMAS) is planning to evaluate this data and recording practices as part of broader monitoring and evaluation of programmes;
- The killing and maiming of children in conflict is documented and reported to the Security Council in certain countries, under the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM) created by UN Security Resolution 1612 on Children and Armed Conflict.<sup>33</sup> This documentation is done to a high standard of verification but aims to

document emblematic cases rather than attempt comprehensiveness, so does not fit ORG's definition of casualty recording, but can contribute to comprehensive casualty data;

- The World Health Organisation (WHO) are working with the UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) to include attacks on healthcare workers and facilities in protection monitoring systems;
- Projects to develop or support national capacities in armed violence monitoring or injury surveillance exist in the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) and UN Development Program (UNDP).

Also reflecting ORG's previous findings on the range of approaches, purposes and benefits to casualty recording,<sup>34</sup> the range of different aims and needs in relation to casualty recording in this list was seen in our UNHQ research. The challenge for the UN is to determine how different objectives can be coordinated to ensure effective recording and analysis of civilian casualties in armed conflict (and giving consideration to situations of armed violence more broadly).



The aftermath of a car bombing in Iraq. The Human Rights unit of the UN Assistance Mission in Iraq systematically records civilian casualties. (© Aaron Keene <http://flic.kr/p/8gEkk>)

<sup>32</sup> See <http://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/>

<sup>33</sup> See <http://www.mineaction.org/programmes>

<sup>34</sup> See Minor (2012)

## METHODOLOGY AND SCOPE

Research for both parts of this study took place in late 2013 and used semi-structured interviews. **Part 1** and **Part 2** employed distinct questionnaires catered to their respective populations. Questionnaires were designed using as a basis ORG's previous work to investigate casualty-recording practice<sup>35</sup> as well as experiences from fieldwork on another, unpublished project. The distinctions between methodologies for **Part 1** and **Part 2** are discussed below.

For both parts of this study, **individuals interviewed do not represent their respective organisation's perspectives, but provide insights gained from their particular roles and experiences within their organisations. Therefore, the following analysis should not be read as representing the official positions of UN entities.**

Respondents' identities are confidential. Respondents were asked to sign informed consent forms on this basis. Interviews were recorded and transcribed for analysis with respondents' consent. Where this consent was not given, the authors made detailed notes during interviews and used these for the analysis.

Analysis for this report was supported by qualitative analysis software that enabled the structured accumulation of evidence on particular themes the authors examined. All analysis and conclusions are the responsibility of the authors alone.

Regarding terminology, throughout this report "casualty recording" and "information on casualties" are treated as distinct, but related, concepts. "Casualty recording" is a process privileging the systematic acquisition of comprehensive information on incidents in which casualties occur and individuals who have been killed/injured. "Information on casualties" can be provided without implementing casualty recording. It can come to light through various mechanisms, whether they are inconsistent, produce poor information, or whether they are ideal casualty-recording mechanisms. Where "information on casualties" is qualified by "systematic and comprehensive" it refers to casualty recording.

**Part 1** of this report draws on semi-structured interviews of 24 UN staff, working within twelve UN entities<sup>36</sup> that the authors considered might have interest or experience in casualty recording. Snowball sampling was employed to select interviews: by identifying an initial set of UN staff aware of casualty recording, the researchers requested that

they recommend colleagues to interview. **Part 1** respondents and their quotations are referred to in this report by letters (A, B, C...). Each letter represents one interview conducted.<sup>37</sup> The report **Appendix** (p48) lists the entities that respondents worked for and their sections or areas of expertise. This is to provide context only: as stated above, respondents' answers do not represent official positions.

Fields covered by the questionnaire used for **Part 1** include: the details of respondents' present role; their and their office's objectives and requirements on information on conflict environments; whether and what information on casualties from conflict was necessary for their work; the nature of their and their office's exchange of information on casualties with other UN entities; and their and their office's existing or prospective uses of information on casualties.

Individuals interviewed had specialisations in advocacy, policy, information management, or planning, and had varying engagement with information on casualties in their present roles. **Because the research had a relatively small sample, the range of interviewees' positions was intended to provide insight into the accessibility and utilisation of information on casualties across a variety of job functions, and not to represent UN entity perspectives or aspirations on the issue.** All interviewees held UN positions previously at field or headquarter level and used this experience to inform their contributions.

**Part 1** of this report investigates UN New York and Geneva headquarters alone. It is understood, however, that information exchange and availability of information on casualties varies across the UN, and predominantly exists at field-level. Despite this, there is value in understanding how information on casualties is considered at UNHQ, where policy is developed and where states come to understand and engage in response to information about conflict environments. The distinction between UNHQ and field-level presents challenges to conveying findings: as the majority of respondents in the study rely on field-based UN colleagues for information relating to a given conflict environment, it is difficult to speak of headquarter-level UN without referring to its relationship with the field. Such relationships are complex and convoluted, often uniquely affected by personalities; however, while they are touched upon, they remain outside the main scope of this report.

This report does not, and cannot, define every mechanism within the UN where information on casualties is collected,

<sup>35</sup> See 'Appendix on Survey Methodology' in Minor et al (2012)

<sup>36</sup> The UN Department for Political Affairs (DPA), Department for Peace Keeping Operations (DPKO), Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights (OHCHR), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), UNICEF, Operations and Crisis Centre (UNOCC), the Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect (OGPRtoP), the Interagency Taskforce on Syria (IATFS), Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict (CAAC). An individual from the UN Mine Action Service (UNMAS) was also interviewed, but the interview was shorter and fewer questions were asked. UNMAS is not given the same weight as the other interviews in this report and is mentioned where relevant.

<sup>37</sup> Five interviews had multiple participants.

identify every process whereby such information is exchanged, or use interviews to represent UN entity perspectives. Furthermore, while the original investigation produced rich and complex representations of each interviewee's experience and perspectives on the subject under investigation, much of this cannot be represented here due to spatial constraints.

The case study in **Part 2** is based on the analysis of semi-structured interviews and reports and commentary relevant to UNAMA HR's civilian casualty recording.

The authors conducted interviews with thirteen current and former members of staff who worked on civilian casualty recording at UNAMA HR. Interviews were conducted with both Afghan and international members of staff; those working in Kabul and regionally; and those who led the work and other staff. We spoke to three individuals in person, and the remainder by phone/Skype.<sup>38</sup> The semi-structured questionnaire asked respondents about: their role and responsibilities; their general information-gathering priorities; the purpose of the civilian casualty recording work; sharing of information and relationships with other organisations; how information was acted on and the outcomes of this; their opinions on whether a similar system could be implemented elsewhere; whether the civilian casualty recording system/techniques of UNAMA HR will be handed over to any other organisation/entity when the mission leaves; details on sources, methodology and challenges/advantages in doing the work; and details on technical systems and guidance/training for staff. Respondents were also asked to fill in an online questionnaire to collect further detail on the pieces of information recorded and definitions and categories used, which five did.

For the case study six individuals from other organisations working in Afghanistan, who interact with UNAMA HR on civilian casualties, were also interviewed.<sup>39</sup> Two of these interviews were with other organisations recording casualties in Afghanistan, the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) and the Mine Action Coordination Centre of Afghanistan (MACCA), and followed the same format as the interviews with UNAMA HR respondents, with specific questions about interactions with UNAMA HR. Others were interviewed using a semi-structured questionnaire that asked, with specific questions on UNAMA HR, about: their role and responsibilities; the objectives of their organisation and the role of casualty and other information in their work; where they get casualty information from if they used it, their assessment of this information, and how they acted on it; sharing of information and interactions with other organisations.

The authors also reviewed a number of reports and pieces of commentary relating to civilian casualties and their recording in Afghanistan, some of which are listed in the bibliography of this report and some of which were unpublished documents shared by respondents. The authors also had a number of informal conversations and email exchanges with individuals working in Afghanistan within the UN and for other organisations, which helped to inform but did not make a formal contribution to this analysis.

Though the authors have gathered external perspectives on the impact and shortcomings of UNAMA HR's work, a limitation of the case study in **Part 2** is that many of the details are based on the self-reporting of those who are or have been involved in UNAMA HR's civilian casualty recording.



The UN Palais des Nations in Geneva.  
(© United Nations Photo <http://flic.kr/p/jXbMzf>)

<sup>38</sup> The authors planned to conduct interviews and observe the civilian casualty recording system used by UNAMA HR in person in Kabul, but security concerns meant that our visit was called off.

<sup>39</sup> Unfortunately this did not include individuals from ISAF (the NATO-led international military forces in Afghanistan operating under a UN Security Council mandate), as phone interviews were not possible due to security protocol. To mitigate this, in the run-up to publication of this report ORG has conducted discussions with the Center for Civilians in Conflict, who have been conducting a case study of ISAF's civilian harm tracking based on extensive interviews. See Center for Civilians in Conflict (2014)

## PART 1: CASUALTIES MATTER: UNHQ PERSPECTIVES ON CASUALTY RECORDING

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### 1. Introduction

The findings of **Part 1** demonstrate that systematic casualty recording, as defined above (p6), does not exist within the UN, save for in select UN operations.<sup>40</sup> This study found a lack of consistency in the production of information on casualties. Rather, various UN entities produce casualty information, using varying methodologies, standards, verification, and points of information on individuals or incidents. This contrasts sharply to mechanisms such as the MRM mandated through UN Security Council Resolution 1612,<sup>41</sup> which in principle is systematised through formal guidelines on information gathering and sharing. The UN would benefit from developing basic data standards and principles for casualty recording. The experience of UNAMA HR described in **Part 2** of this report would provide valuable input to this.

### 2. Information demands

Prior to discussing information on casualties, interviewees were asked to identify the information on conflict that they considered most useful to their work. This varied in scale and depth, according to their particular objectives. Information on casualties was one amongst many points of information that all interviewees thought was useful in some way.

No claim can be made for the universal application and demand for casualty information within the UN: depending on the priorities of respondents' respective roles, casualty information could either provide support to or could drive advocacy and programming. A few interviewees who did not receive information on casualties reported that their office or organisation could benefit should this information become available.

This section discusses two kinds of information about casualties:

- **Disaggregated information** refers to information about casualties that is broken down to convey incident or individual-level detail. Disaggregated information is often published through cumulative statistics, with references to data categories that are relevant to the recording entity, such as age, sex, weapon, location, etc. Disaggregated casualty data might alternatively be published in the form of a database, whereby all details are integrated into a pre-designed schema or spreadsheet in which details about individuals and incidents are systematically codified, or as lists of incidents and names.
- **Tallies or counts** refer to simple aggregations of numbers (e.g. 1,532), without breakdown by incident, aspects of the incidents, or by the characteristics of individuals killed.

Many respondents favoured disaggregated information on casualties and the incidents in which they occur. There were both variations and consistencies in the points, or the kind, of information on casualties considered useful. This section concludes with a challenge and opportunity for UN-led casualty recording: the coordination of both shared and distinct requirements.

### 2.1 Demand for disaggregated data

“ Depending on the detail you have, the data can tell you a lot more. Q ”

Respondents reported a range of disaggregated information on casualties to be useful for different purposes. As **Chart 1** demonstrates, there was some coherence in the points of information relating to individuals and incidents. Age, sex, and location were the most common points of information required. In general, disaggregated information is compelling for a greater understanding of the impacts of conflict on civilians.

Entities concerned with accountability and advocacy to address violations require the most comprehensive information at the individual and incident-level. Respondents working for CAAC, OHCHR, and OGPrtoP called for the

<sup>40</sup> See the box on p8-9 for some examples.

<sup>41</sup> 'UN Security Council Resolution 1612' S/RES/1612 (2005) <http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N05/439/59/PDF/N0543959.pdf?OpenElement>

most information about incidents and individuals killed. The points of information required relate to their particular mandates and existing methodologies, guidelines, or frameworks. For example, the MRM and the human rights monitoring and fact-finding approaches both undertake an “emblematic case” approach: this requires comprehensive information on select incidents that are seen as representative of the situation, and which are used for advocacy. (This approach does not demand the systematic and comprehensive coverage of casualties in a given environment and does not therefore fit the definition of “casualty recording”.)

Respondent I worked in a policy and advocacy capacity, liaising between Member States, the UN, and civil society, and conveyed a need for comprehensive information on individuals and incidents, though to a lesser degree than the aforementioned entities. Information more detailed than tallies was described as useful for reporting to the Security Council, the Emergency Relief Coordinator, the Informal Experts Group on the protection of civilians, and the Secretary-General, as well as for advocating for attention to be paid to particular environments and thematic issues. More detailed information was regarded as valuable because it both conveys scale and offers analytical insight into the effects of conflict on civilians.

H and L both work on planning and operations. However, there was a clear distinction between the information on

casualties that could support their roles. H explained that casualty information, including location and number killed, was one amongst many points of information useful to understanding the impact of security incidents on humanitarian access. Comprehensive, contextual, understanding of incidents and operating environments was privileged over detailed information on casualties; however, where casualties did occur, this information was useful to understanding a particular security situation. L, on the other hand, worked on planning human rights field operations, including staff deployment. They identified that more comprehensive information on casualties could help to inform assessments of who and how many colleagues should be deployed to provide adequate coverage of the situation.

There is a notable divergence seen in **Chart 1** in the information about incidents and individual casualties demanded by individuals working in the same UN entity – this reflects the responsibilities defined by their roles. Respondents from OCHA demonstrate that minimal disaggregation is required for planning and access, whereas those working in advocacy require more comprehensive information on individuals killed and the incidents in which they died.

**Chart 1** shows the information respondents thought would be useful for their work, but not whether individuals requiring the same information could, feasibly, share with one another. This is discussed in **Part 3 Section 3** p42.

**Chart 1: Respondents’ information needs**<sup>42</sup>

| Respondent, and the office/ agency they worked within |  | A-CAAC | B-DPA | C-DPKO | D-DPKO | E-IATFS | F-OCHA | G-OCHA | H-OCHA | I-OCHA | J-OHCHR | K-OHCHR | L-OHCHR | M-OCPR/OP | N-UNDP | O-UNDP | P-UNHCR | Q-UNHCR | R-UNICEF |
|---|--|--------|-------|--------|--------|---------|--------|--------|--------|--------|---------|---------|---------|-----------|--------|--------|---------|---------|----------|
| <b>Individual harmed</b>                              | Civilian combatant status, or participation in hostilities | •      |       | •      |        |         |        | •      |        |        | •       |         | •       |           |        | •      |         |         |          |
|   | Age or child/adult   | •      |       | •      |        |         |        | •      |        | •      | •       | •       | •       |           |        | •      |         | •       |          |
|   | Community identity e.g. (ethnicity, religion, etc.)        |        | •     | •      | •      | •       |        |        |        |        |         |         | •       | •         |        |        |         | •       |          |
|   | Individual identity (e.g. name)                            | •      |       |        |        |         |        |        |        |        | •       | •       |         | •         |        |        |         |         | •        |
|   | Sex  | •      | •     | •      |        | •       |        | •      |        | •      | •       | •       | •       | •         |        | •      |         | •       |          |
| <b>Incident</b>                                       | Info for determining violation                             | •      |       |        |        |         |        |        |        |        | •       | •       | •       | •         |        |        | •       |         |          |
|   | Location   | •      | •     | •      | •      | •       | •      |        |        |        | •       | •       | •       | •         | •      | •      | •       | •       | •        |
|   | Numbers killed   |        | •     | •      | •      | •       | •      |        |        | •      | •       |         | •       | •         | •      |        | •       |         |          |
|   | Time information   |        |       | •      | •      |         | •      |        |        |        |         | •       | •       | •         |        | •      |         |         |          |
|   | Trend information  | •      |       | •      | •      |         |        | •      |        |        | •       |         |         | •         | •      |        |         |         | •        |
|   | Weapons used, how killed/injured                           | •      | •     |        | •      |         |        | •      |        | •      | •       |         | •       |           | •      |        |         |         |          |
| <b>Attacker</b>                                       | Attacker identity (group or individual)                    | •      |       | •      | •      |         |        |        |        |        | •       | •       | •       | •         | •      |        | •       |         |          |
|   | Were civilians targeted                                    | •      |       | •      |        |         | •      |        |        |        |         |         | •       | •         |        |        |         |         |          |
|   | Tactics used   | •      |       |        | •      |         |        |        |        |        | •       | •       | •       |           |        |        |         |         |          |
|   | Motivation/were there alternative military options?        | •      |       | •      | •      |         |        |        |        |        | •       |         |         | •         |        |        |         |         |          |

<sup>42</sup> This chart reflects the perspectives of respondents who work at UNHQ, rather than the information requirements of UN entities. Doing so provides insight into practical experiences, which reflects the focus of this study.

Whether all of these points of information are in fact consistently relayed to individuals at headquarter-level is discussed in **Part 1 Section 3** p15.

## 2.2 Demand for counts or tallies

“ I think the broader figures are very important because they drive a political understanding of the conflict, a sense of scale...they're the alarm signal. They give you an important sense of how dire the situation is and also the trajectory of the conflict. E

There was wide recognition that tallies<sup>43</sup> also had some value, including amongst interviewees who found disaggregated information useful. Counts were viewed as useful, in principle, to drawing attention to the realities in a conflict environment. The “alarm signal” or early warning that tallies can give was recognised as useful for encouraging responses to emergencies at the field-level. Respondents referred to their field experience, explaining that having a tally across time provides some understanding as to how the environment is changing and what might be necessary operationally. Analytically, tallies provide a means of rudimentary trend analysis to gauge a conflict’s progress or regress. At the operational level, this might feed into calculations relating to the distribution of humanitarian services or access, so long as the tallies incorporate some minimal geographical information (for example at the level of larger regions) as well provide an understanding of scale.

The same interviewees who saw value in tallies for encouraging political and operational response also noted that the case of Syria challenged this principle: tallies alone have not appeared to enable or inform consistent action by states. Ultimately, tallies were held to not have the same potential impact in advocacy or ability to inform operations as more comprehensive information.

### 2.2.1 Approximations

While the majority of interviewees were preoccupied with the verification of information on casualties, a few interviewees discussed the role of rough approximations<sup>44</sup> in their work. Such approximations were found useful by respondents C, H, and N for supporting situational awareness and to provide some direction to field-level programming. Serious reservations around these types of approximations were identified where they might be used in Secretary-General Reports and may be seized upon for political reasons. Using such approximations, it was cautioned, may be more likely to displace attention and focus from protection and assistance needs onto debate over the validity of the figures themselves, where the approximations were unverified or seen as giving a highly incomplete picture.

There are additional reservations and precautions regarding approximations. In particular, if approximations were the only information on casualties for a given conflict environment, their utility would be limited. While approximate tallies may support situational awareness, they should not support work undertaken in policy and advocacy: respondents cautioned against such application.

### 2.2.2 Demand for summarising reports

A “summarising report” gives insight into a conflict environment for a period of time, such as six months or a year. This contrasts with Situational Reports or Incident Reports (that are produced by UNDSS, JOC, and UNOCC/SitCen (Situation Center)), as well as different types of needs assessments, which may or may not include information on deaths. The term was used by a number of interviewees, and these reports were seen as useful if they included disaggregation of casualties by location, age, and sex. Individuals in operational and advocacy roles found summarising reports useful for keeping abreast of field-level developments, especially because of their integration of casualty information with contextual analysis. As discussed below however, the timing of such reports can prove challenging for individuals who require information on casualties for internal reporting purposes, where these individuals’ reporting periods and those of the summarising reports do not coincide.

## 2.3 Section Analysis

“ We might know so many have been killed in a specific place, might know gender and age, but not whether they belong to a specific group. It is a problem to get this kind of information. M

Many respondents reported that casualty information was just one important part of the contextual understandings of conflict necessary for their work, but a part that was available with little consistency and thoroughness. One challenge raised by this study is that while the required *points of information* may be shared, the *required standard of this information* diverges. The UN must consider whether UN entities, and individuals within them, could feasibly use one another’s information where the same points of information about casualties are needed.

A crucial challenge to such exchange is that while among respondents there was universal acceptance that information on casualties must be “reliable” or “credible”, these concepts were seen to vary in definition between respondents and involve subjective assessments (this is discussed further in **Part 3**).

<sup>43</sup> Tallies or counts are understood as simple aggregate numbers.

<sup>44</sup> These were referred to by respondents as evidence-based information products that have not been fully verified or that do not intend to represent total impact. They are predicated on uncertainty.

If the range of information needs within the UN is to be met, for purposes such as planning, operations, and advocacy, consideration must be given as to what information could consistently be produced to support the work of the widest audience. It would be worthwhile for individuals dealing with such information to discuss shared minimum standards, on the points of information that should always be collected, and the key principles that should underpin casualty recording. This may enable sharing to a greater degree.

### 3. Flow of information on casualties<sup>45</sup>

“Comprehensive documentation of casualties is done much less frequently than other types of monitoring. K

“It’s just that we don’t don’t receive this information. L

One of the original goals of this research was to map the formal and informal flow of information on casualties within the UN, and to identify mechanisms that undertake casualty recording. As the research progressed, it was found that information on casualties was inconsistently provided, delivered, or was ad hoc; that what was available was generally not thorough; or that individuals interviewed “just don’t receive” information on casualties and that it simply does not flow in the UN. Although the information on casualties available at UNHQ is not systematic and comprehensive, it often travels through set reporting mechanisms and channels. In addition to showing intra-UN information exchange, NGOs are also considered in this section.<sup>46</sup>

Although this research showed that casualty recording is not undertaken systematically within the UN, there were some exceptions, including: the work of UNAMA HR (see **Part 2**), OCHA OPT, and country programmes of UNMAS (for mine and ERW casualties), which were reported as known examples amongst UNHQ respondents.

Respondents also, though with uncertainty, reported that MONUSCO’s ITEM and UNAMI Human Rights undertake casualty recording. The lack of knowledge about these systems also indicates the poor state of information flow regarding casualties within the UN.<sup>47</sup> These systems may be worthwhile future case studies to support the advancement of casualty recording in the UN, especially given that different UN entities are responsible for each.

**Chart 2** shows those reported to be producing information on casualties in respondents’ experiences.<sup>48</sup>

#### 3.1 “Information doesn’t flow”

“Data about casualties would have a role in my work if we had decent data but, to be honest, I don’t think we do. I

A frequent response to questions regarding information flow – whether between UN entities at HQ or from field-level to HQ – was that it simply does not. This was a comment with general application to the UN, but specific relevance to information on casualties. There was little knowledge of whether information about casualties was being collected at all, by whom, how it was collected, and where it was hosted. This led to conjecture as to which UN entity should be responsible for recording casualties (see **Part 3 Section 5** p44).

As **Chart 2** demonstrates, respondents identified many providers of information on casualties. However, this information was not necessarily systematically conveyed to others; rather, it was provided ad hoc and often included only when deemed relevant by the entity reporting it. If casualty information was missing from reports produced by, for instance, UNOCC/SitCen, JOC, or DSS, this did not mean that deaths did not occur.

#### 3.2 Using public reports

When actively seeking out information on casualties, many interviewees reported that they referred to public reports such as the Protection of Civilians reports produced by UNAMA HR biannually,<sup>49</sup> Secretary-General reports, UNOCC/SitCen Operational Reports, humanitarian bulletins, and reports produced by NGOs.

Using public reports or statements by the Secretary-General and UNAMA HR was identified as an exercise in risk aversion, and often the findings presented were trusted. These information products were seen as easily accessible, and responsibility for the veracity of the information could be displaced onto the producers. This enabled respondents to utilise reports’ findings by citing or quoting the publishing entities, thereby mitigating risk and responsibility over the findings themselves.

<sup>45</sup> It was found that the UN Department of Safety and Security (UNDSS) was a source for information on casualties; however, no one from UNDSS was available to interview for this research. According to other respondents, casualty information is sometimes incorporated into situational reports produced by UNDSS, whose focus is on assessment and analysis for UN staff security, and on incidents that may affect staff and assets. UNDSS’s casualty information was reported to originate from official/police or media sources, rather than their own investigation and confirmation.

<sup>46</sup> If respondents did not utilise information on casualties in their present role, they often referred to colleagues who might. For example, one respondent who works in a policy capacity, expressed that colleagues at country desks might receive information on casualties and use it in internal briefings. The respondent’s understanding of policy and operations gave other insights into how casualty recording might support their work and the work of their UN entity. Nearly all of respondents discussed their previous work at field level.

<sup>47</sup> See the box on p8-9 for more information on some of these systems.

<sup>48</sup> **Chart 2** and the following discussion predominantly draw from respondents’ experiences in their present roles, with the exception of respondent O.

<sup>49</sup> See **Part 2 Section 2.2** p34-36 including **Box 9** for discussion of these reports and what they contain. For a full list of UNAMA HR’s public reports, see <http://unama.unmissions.org/Default.aspx?tabid=13941&language=en-US>

Chart 2: Respondents and the providers of the casualty information they deal with<sup>50</sup>

| Information providers      | Respondent, and the office/ agency they worked within |       |        |        |         |        |        |        |                |         |         |                  |                 |        |        |                 |                |                |
|----------------------------|---|-------|--------|--------|---------|--------|--------|--------|----------------|---------|---------|------------------|-----------------|--------|--------|-----------------|----------------|----------------|
|                            | A-CAAC  | B-DPA | C-DPKO | D-DPKO | E-IATFS | F-OCHA | G-OCHA | H-OCHA | I-OCHA         | J-OHCHR | K-OHCHR | L-OHCHR          | M-OGPRtoP       | N-UNDP | O-UNDP | P-UNHCR         | Q-UNHCR        | R-UNICEF       |
| CAD                        |   |       | ◆      |        |         |        |        |        |                |         |         |                  |                 |        |        |                 |                |                |
| CAAC                       |   |       |        |        |         | ●      |        |        |                |         |         |                  |                 |        |        |                 |                |                |
| DPA                        |   | ●     | ●      |        |         |        |        |        |                |         |         |                  | ▲               |        |        |                 |                |                |
| DPKO                       | ●   | ●     | ◆      |        |         |        |        |        |                |         |         |                  | ●               |        |        |                 |                |                |
| DSS                        |   | ●     | ◆      |        |         |        |        | ●      |                |         |         |                  |                 | ●      |        | ●               |                |                |
| IASC                       |   |       |        |        |         | ●      |        |        |                |         |         |                  |                 |        |        |                 |                |                |
| OCHA                       | ●   |       | ●      |        |         | ◆      | ◆      | ◆      | ●              |         |         |                  | ●               |        | ●      |                 |                |                |
| OHCHR                      | ●   | ◆     |        | ●      | ●       |        |        |        | ● <sup>1</sup> | ●       | ●       | ●                | ◆               |        |        |                 | ● <sup>3</sup> |                |
| Missions                   | ● <sup>1</sup>  | ●     | ●      | ■      |         |        |        |        | ● <sup>1</sup> |         |         | ● <sup>1,2</sup> | ▲               | ■      |        | ●               | ● <sup>1</sup> |                |
| JOC                        |   |       | ■      | ■      |         |        | ●      |        |                |         |         |                  |                 |        |        | ●               |                |                |
| JMAC                       |   |       | ■      | ■      |         |        |        |        |                |         |         |                  |                 |        |        |                 |                |                |
| "Partners"                 |   | ●     |        |        |         | ●      |        |        |                |         |         |                  | ● <sup>52</sup> |        |        |                 |                |                |
| MRM*                       | ● <sup>^</sup>  |       |        |        |         |        |        |        |                |         |         |                  |                 |        |        | ●               |                | ● <sup>^</sup> |
| Protection Cluster         |   |       |        |        |         | ◆◆**   | ◆◆     |        |                |         |         |                  |                 |        |        | ◆◆              |                |                |
| Secretary-Gen. Reports     | ●   | ●     |        | ●      |         | ●      |        |        |                |         | ●       |                  | ●               |        | ●      |                 | ●              |                |
| UNCT                       |   | ●     |        |        |         |        |        |        | ●              |         |         |                  |                 | ●      |        |                 |                |                |
| UNDP                       |   |       |        |        |         |        |        |        |                |         |         |                  |                 |        | ◆◆     |                 |                |                |
| UNHCR                      | ●   |       |        |        |         |        |        |        |                |         |         |                  |                 |        |        | ●               | ■              |                |
| UNICEF                     | ●   |       |        |        |         | ●      |        |        |                |         |         | ▲                |                 |        |        |                 |                |                |
| UNOCC/SitCen <sup>51</sup> | ■   | ●~    |        | ●      |         | ●~     |        |        |                |         |         | ●                | ●~              |        |        | ■ <sup>53</sup> |                |                |

**Key**

- Actual
- ▲ When possible
- Indicates either variation/inconsistency in information provided, or contingency on some action by the recipient
- ◆ Field level (if specified)

**Specific Sources**

- 1 UNAMA HR
- 2 UNAMI
- 3 OHCHR Syria tallies

\* Pulls information from UN and NGO partners compiling information on violations at the field level. This includes human rights, child protection, education, health contributors

\*\* Needs Based Assessments

~ Respondent working with UNOCC reported providing information to respondent's entity/section/department

^ MRM reports are sent from country task forces (which UNICEF always jointly lead) to CAAC, with UNICEF HQ in copy

Reported challenges to using public reports included an unclear understanding of how the information was acquired, by what methodology, and who or what organisations were involved in its production. As identified above, reporting mechanisms do not necessarily ensure that casual-

ties are consistently incorporated in their reports, meaning that respondents did not feel confident in the representation of deaths in UN reporting more generally. Q valued UNAMA HR reports not only because of the information produced, but also because they are clear about their challenges and limitations.<sup>54</sup>

“ That was a big concern, where does this information come from? I mean it comes from OCHA field offices, but how are they gathering this information? Obviously they were basing it on other sources, such as NGOs or other UN entities. G

Methodological transparency gave Q confidence in how they might use report findings. Such transparency is a key principle in effective casualty recording but does not, however, extend to most UN reporting – this is a key lesson of UNAMA HR’s experience that could be more widely applied.<sup>55</sup>

<sup>50</sup> This chart shows the reported experiences of people working at UNHQ, rather than official entity positions (reflecting the focus of this study).

<sup>51</sup> DPKO-DFS’s SitCen works within the UNOCC as well as undertaking functions separately.

<sup>52</sup> N obtains information from the Executive Team (ET), an internal mechanism that is convened for high profile crisis countries. UNDP employs and coordinates an internal mechanism whereby representatives of different bureaus of UNDP come together with the Resident Coordinator.

<sup>53</sup> P reported being able to make requests for an occasional report, but perceives UNOCC as not liking to share and that its information is for DPKO.

<sup>54</sup> These are set out in the ‘Methodology’ section of each of UNAMA HR’s public reports, and throughout each report in relation to certain types of incident.

<sup>55</sup> See **Part 2 Section 4.3** p39 and **Box 7** p33 especially for a discussion of the value of transparency to the effectiveness of UNAMA HR’s work on civilian casualties.

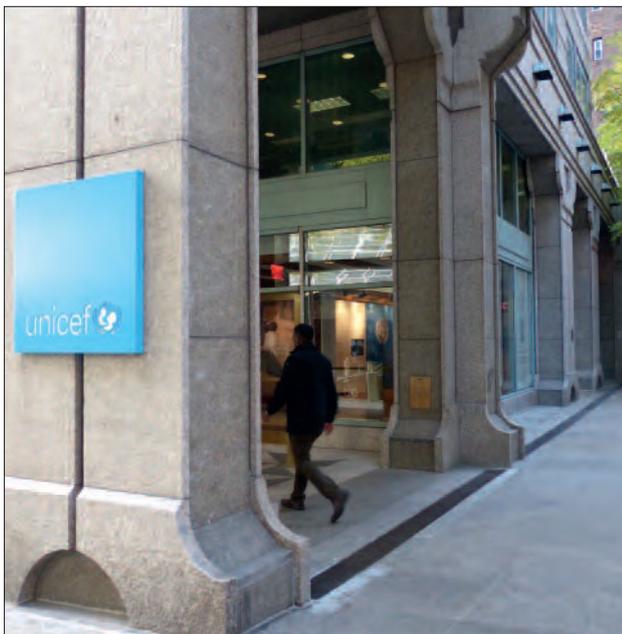
### 3.3 Formalised information flow v. direct requests

“ It’s sort of ridiculous that every six months I would be sending the same email to the field saying, can you give us the latest on these issues...it was driven by an internal information need within OCHA. But it was also a recognition that if our offices don’t have that information then it means the humanitarian coordinator in the field – the senior UN official – probably doesn’t have the info either. If he doesn’t have the information, what is he basing his advocacy on? Is he doing any advocacy at all? I

“ In the SitCen you’re not going to report on a daily basis that a person was killed here, ten people were killed here. If there’s a significant incident where 100 people were killed in an attack, we’ll report it...especially for some missions where there are daily attacks, you will report the one that is out of the norm. C

There were four reported instances of information on casualties being formally fed into UNHQ entities: within the framework of the MRM, in OHCHR, via the UNOCC/SitCen, and from mine action country programmes to UNMAS.

Participants to the MRM undertake a case-based approach on violations as per UNSC Resolution 1612, and no claim is made to document deaths of children systematically and comprehensively. As respondents R and A explained, other violations considered within the MRM are privileged, being easier to document in many cases than killing and maiming (due to the difficulty of accessing or verifying information regarding the circumstances of the killing or maiming), and because protection activities focused on other violations are prioritised.



UNICEF in New York. MRM country task forces are always jointly led by UNICEF. These document the killing and maiming of children, but not comprehensively. (© ORG)

OHCHR field-staff use an emblematic-case approach for advocacy, so comprehensive information on select and representative incidents is prioritised over casualty recording. However, a “casualty-tracking module” is currently being integrated into OHCHR’s web-based Human Rights Case Database. The database is hosted in Geneva, so information entered at field-level is automatically conveyed to UNHQ. Field presences also feed information to Geneva and New York through periodic and ad hoc reports. The module is still under development with limited deployment in OHCHR field offices, and in the Human Rights components of peacekeeping and political missions. As with other information recorded in the database, the module aims to produce data that can be used in reports of the Secretary-General and High Commissioner for Human Rights, as well as in advocacy at country level. The module currently captures only the numbers of killed and injured in specific cases. The incorporation of other details is under development. There is no interface that allows the information to be shared automatically across UN entities, but field offices can share information at their discretion.

UNOCC/SitCen receives information on casualties from its contributors only where significant incidents or changes that require attention are indicated by casualty information. Those responsible for feeding information to HQ do not achieve casualty recording. SitReps (Situation Reports) produced by field-level JOCs were discussed by respondents representing OCHA and DPKO. SitReps were reported to vary in the length of the time periods they covered, as well as in the themes they included. Respondents reported that JOCs and their SitReps are not responsible for, and simply cannot, comprehensively document and relay information on casualties.

Mine action country programmes collect information on casualties caused by mines and ERW to support their programming, and report data to UNHQ on request. Respondent S reported that one field model is for multiple agencies to report to an UNMAS coordinator who then delivers data to UNMAS HQ. This system has been piloted in five countries, and UNMAS is currently undertaking an evaluation of data collection across mine action programmes, as part of broader monitoring and evaluation. The degree to which information is otherwise shared vertically, to HQ, and laterally, to other entities was not discussed.

In contrast to directly and automatically receiving information on casualties, interviewees who required such information for the purpose of informing the Security Council or at the request of their superiors had to rely on requesting information either from the field or OHCHR. Respondents reported that agency field presences regularly reported back to UNHQ, but that even where requests for casualty information were made to colleagues in the field, there was no guarantee that this information could be acquired or relayed. Obtaining information across UN entities was problematic.

I and J both reported difficulties when requesting information on casualties from the field. They also reported that when such information is received, it is sometimes of poor quality. However, due to the demands for reporting to the Secretary-General or Security Council, the information relayed may still be used, despite its shortcomings. Incentives for investing in a capacity to produce strong material on casualties dissolve once the reporting period closes.

### 3.4 Intra-UN coordination: Clusters and missions

“ You have a lot of reports. But there are methodological differences such as definitions, which would not allow you to actually compare data because these things are not standardised. So, it’s often not possible to aggregate data from missions and/or the humanitarian community. P

The research discovered mixed opinions as to how effectively the discussion and exchange of data brought by individual entities to protection clusters<sup>56</sup> can produce coherent information on casualties for a particular conflict environment.<sup>57</sup> As respondent I explained, protection clusters often produce outputs that reflect the mandated obligations, or priorities, of the cluster lead.<sup>58</sup> Analysis of the overall protection situation is prioritised over information on casualties in particular. F explained that clusters are ideal for driving collaboration between partners at the field level. Any information on casualties that is exchanged in this forum can inform Humanitarian Bulletins, which in turn are used to inform partners at field and headquarter levels.

One of the major challenges posed within clusters is that each partner may have its own set of definitions and methodologies, making the harmonisation of information difficult, if not impossible. As P explained, the range of different data systems in place, with their own logic and tools, are necessary for cluster members’ respective programming but also pose a major impediment to aggregating information for cluster outputs. Given that the cluster system exists to facilitate inter-agency collaboration and coordination, it may be valuable for the UN to more closely examine its successes and pitfalls as a forum for information exchange. The ability of forums such as protection clusters to enable the checking and analysis of information should also be examined.

Concerns about missions’ efficacy in coordinating information on casualties reflected those regarding the cluster system’s ability to generate comprehensive and systematic information. As discussed above, JOC and JMAC entities are, in theory, candidates within missions to aggregate infor-

mation on casualties; however, they vary widely across missions, often remain understaffed and overburdened, and are not universally present where the UN is operational. Ultimately, there was generally caution regarding the ability or role of missions and clusters to undertake casualty recording through aggregation or integration to produce consistent and detailed information on casualties.



UNHCR leads the Global Protection Cluster, which supports protection clusters at country level. These address a range of issues including the protection of civilians in armed conflict. (© ORG)

### 3.5 Personal contacts

“ Depending on personal contacts, in my unit we sometimes work with individual desk officers covering certain countries from other UN organisations or researchers from NGOs. But this cooperation is often of a rather ad hoc nature; we would like to make this cooperation much more systematic. Q

Without, or in addition to, formal channels, a number of respondents reported that personal contacts in other UN entities were the means by which they acquired information on casualties. However, there were as many individuals who reported using personal contacts for information on casualties as there were individuals who explained such information was inaccessible for the same reason.

One considerable challenge to reliance on personal contacts is that individuals move out of post. Developing systemic mechanisms to depersonalise and formalise information exchange between UN entities would be far more effective than reliance on personal contacts for reports of information. Furthermore, demonstrating the credibility of casualty information acquired in this way can prove difficult. As one respondent explained, while obtaining this information from personal contacts might be possible, persuading colleagues and supervisors to use it is another matter – this is especially the case where the identities of contacts, and

<sup>56</sup> Clusters are coordinated groups of organisations, UN and non-UN, that work on particular priorities in humanitarian action during emergencies. Protection clusters, led globally by UNHCR, at a country level address a range of protection issues including the protection of civilians in armed conflict. “Protection clusters in countries where there is a peacekeeping mission contribute to the development of the mission’s protection strategy and facilitate coordination with mission’s counterparts.” See: <http://www.globalprotectioncluster.org/en/areas-of-responsibility/protection-of-civilians.html>

<sup>57</sup> See **Part 2 Section 2.2** p34 for the field example of the role of the Protection Cluster in Afghanistan and UNAMA HR’s work. Respondents saw the cluster not as a forum for detailed information exchange, but as a place useful for general discussion and for developing joint advocacy and partnerships.

<sup>58</sup> Respondents noted that this should not be the case. While this report considers the role of protection clusters in producing and providing a platform for sharing information on casualties, it is beyond its scope to provide recommendations regarding the functionality of protection clusters.

therefore processes by which information was originally acquired, remain guarded.

A second considerable challenge posed by interpersonal sharing of information on casualties rests on the implications of such sharing. Such sharing may breach internal guidelines and directives, which may privilege the confidentiality of information about incidents and individuals for the purpose of avoiding further harm.

### 3.6 Non-governmental organisations

In general, respondents saw NGOs as viable sources of information on casualties. The uses of information produced by NGOs included: corroboration, gaining situational awareness, and gaining initial insight to direct future UN-led investigation. Respondents' caveats regarding using information from NGOs revolved around bias and methodological consistency. Respondents also discussed how NGOs and their information on casualties could be trusted and used. Trust evolved in a number of ways: whether by reputation; familiarity with previous outputs; personal contacts; or understanding methodology. These qualities were relevant whether the NGOs were large international or national organisations, or local civil society groups. How the UN could use NGO data more systematically is discussed in **Part 3**.

ORG is working with NGO casualty recorders and key end-users of their information to develop standards in casualty recording, which UN entities could use as a measure by which to assess the work of NGOs. These standards are discussed in **Part 2**. The principles developed could also assist the UN's own development of standards in casualty recording.

### 3.7 Section analysis

“ Sometimes OHCHR or the mission does its own code cable. Where there is no mission or OHCHR present, sometimes the UN country team has its own figures, which in certain cases would be based on external [data]. N

Considering the varied means by which respondents obtained information on casualties, the following conclusions from this section are useful for reflecting on the wider implementation of casualty recording within the UN system:

- Information on casualties in the UN is inconsistent and obtained in both formal and informal ways. Formal mechanisms do not currently ensure systematic or comprehensive information on casualties. Discretion determined whether information on casualties was included in reports from the field, rather than obligation or mandate. This is despite the demands for this information as discussed in **Part 1 Section 2**.
- Secretary-General country reports and UNAMA HR reports were amongst the most trusted means of receiving information on casualties. However, Secretary-General reports are often problematic for individuals

who require an understanding of methodology, which is not given, and who require disaggregation.

- Intra-UN and inter-agency coordination of information on casualties was problematic for a variety of reasons; however, the principle of such coordination was supported and viewed as a strength that could be leveraged in future developments around casualty recording.
- Individuals across the UN need and demand disaggregated casualty information. Having multiple sources of information on casualties, none of whose data result from casualty recording, will produce variation in findings, prevent the methodologically sound integration and aggregation of data, and could involve the unnecessary duplication of work.

### 4. Uses and prospective uses of information on casualties

One of the goals of this research was to understand how UN actors use information on casualties. Because many respondents inconsistently received information on casualties, or did not receive it at all, much of the discussion below reflects how they would use it, if it were regularly available and to the standards they required.

The findings below should be considered in the context of respondents' and their offices' particular priorities. Respondents were specialists in advocacy, policy, information management, and operations. This shows that casualty information, where comprehensive, has wide application. The variety of UN entities to which casualty information is useful also highlights that the usage of this information should be coordinated, for example because some types of advocacy can potentially endanger humanitarian service delivery.

The uses of casualty information were differentiated between headquarter and field level. Headquarters was seen as a focal point for advocacy, informing the Security Council, member states, and the Secretary-General, whereas the field was seen as the location for using casualty information for advocacy with conflict parties, and for planning and operations.

#### 4.1 Developing analysis: Understanding the nature of conflict, trends, and situational awareness

“ You can build a more textured picture if you understand who was killed, where, when, why, and how. C

Having access to comprehensive disaggregated information on casualties was reported to be a means of gaining insight into the nature of conflict and its impact on civilians. Where such understanding is available, political and operational responses can be more effective and appropriate, through being based on evidence.

Effective response benefits from an understanding of how conflicts change across time. Systematically acquired infor-

mation on casualties was seen as one means for helping to develop this understanding. Where respondents were concerned with specific issues regarding the effects of conflict on civilians, disaggregation was reported to be useful. In the case of UNAMA HR, disaggregation was essential for understanding the effects of particular policies and tactics employed by conflict parties (see **Part 2**).

## 4.2 Advocacy

“ I really think ... the UNAMA experience explains well the usefulness of casualty recording, especially in terms of seeking change in military procedures, a change in the type of units that are deployed in certain areas, or the establishment of new procedures for the military or accountability mechanisms. K

Using information on casualties in advocacy was universally recognised as appropriate and, potentially, powerful. Respondents working in different UN entities reported different advocacy opportunities. For the purpose of this report, “advocacy” is understood as efforts to influence actors’ engagement on a particular issue.

Casualty information, and in particular information produced through casualty recording, was regarded as important to various reporting procedures, such as reports by the Secretary-General, from individual UN entities, to the Security Council, and to member states more broadly. F and I held that humanitarian bulletins and the Informal Experts Group on PoC were fundamental avenues for enabling awareness among key audiences, and provided opportunities to advocate on particular issues using casualty information.

### 4.2.1 Advocacy at HQ

“ It’s useful to have this information in the work we’re doing on explosive weapons or when we were doing advocacy around the Arms Trade Treaty. I

“ If the information you have paints an extremely bleak picture, then it makes it harder for states to sit and do nothing. I’m not saying we want them to intervene militarily, but it puts the political pressure on them...and it also allows us to help move public opinion around some of these issues as well. I

Information on casualties was seen as a significant element of information about conflict environments that could be used to draw attention to the impacts of conflict on civilians. A major concern reported was that such advocacy sometimes only goes so far. That politics play a major role in relation to action following such advocacy was not, however, viewed as a disincentive to casualty recording. Syria

and Sri Lanka were viewed as two instances where information on casualties was produced by the UN, but elicited only limited responses by States and the UN itself. Despite this, respondents felt that it was their duty to report and advocate on information that reveals the impact of conflict, including casualty information: acting strategically on credible information was seen as fundamental to work on civilian protection, even though change could not always be achieved as a result.



A woman holds a picture of family members killed in the conflict in Sri Lanka. Sri Lanka was identified as a context where UN information about casualties affected a limited response at UNHQ. (© European Commission DG ECHO <http://flic.kr/p/bjf6AF>)

Where information on casualties is comprehensive and disaggregated, producing clarity about weapons used and groups involved in violence for instance, respondents reported that casualty recording could reinforce advocacy on specific topics. For example, recent interest in the effects of explosive weapons in populated areas is bolstered by empirical demonstration of their effects.<sup>59</sup> Advocacy objectives established in principle and emboldened by fact receive strength from knowing who and what categories of persons (sex, age, etc.) are affected.

Comprehensive information on casualties was seen as enabling more sophisticated recommendations for mandates within the Security Council and on operational changes undertaken by UN entities. It was stressed that casualty information must be accurate when used in advocacy, as the potential for politicisation was a real concern. Anticipating and avoiding gridlock over quality of data at the expense of attention to the action needed for conflict-affected populations, required that information was verified and trusted. Unconfirmed approximations, in this case, were viewed as detrimental to advocacy.

### 4.2.2 Advocacy in the field

Advocacy with conflict parties, with the aim of enhancing protection, by limiting harm or further death, was seen as one of the most valuable uses of information on casualties.

<sup>59</sup> See the AOA’s work to record casualties caused by explosive weapons (<http://aoav.org.uk/explosive-violence-monitoring-project/>), referenced in UNSC (2012) p9

Respondents associated casualty recording with the activities of prevention and mediation with conflict parties.

Respondents often raised the efficacy of UNAMA HR's evidence-based advocacy with ISAF.<sup>60</sup> In particular, UNAMA HR's advocacy was viewed to have contributed to ISAF's operational and tactical changes. This effective action was seen as contingent on UNAMA HR's comprehensive and verified information about casualties (see **Part 2**).

“ *The fact was – a bit like in Syria – that we were trying to use the casualty figures to make a difference, and they were not...because countries weren't responding. They knew exactly what was happening but it didn't make a difference.* O

Experiences in Sri Lanka and Syria show how the political environment can complicate evidence-based advocacy, which does not necessarily catalyse appropriate responses from conflict parties, or encourage external actors to pressure them. Respondents reported that the diverging outcomes were explained by the fact that parties to conflict do not evenly respect and uphold their legal requirements under International Humanitarian Law (IHL) and human rights law. In addition, there are varying needs for political or popular support to reinforce their strategic objectives. Such conditions were somewhat more favourable in Afghanistan. Incentives to alter operations can hinge on factors exclusive to the presentation of evidence relating to casualties or violations more broadly. However, where casualty information is comprehensive, verified and trusted as credible, it can play a significant role in compelling action by, as respondents explained, leveraging information to make it too costly for conflict parties to ignore civilian casualties.

Field-based advocacy using casualty information was also discussed in relation to the cluster system, where agencies can identify issues of concern in order to identify advocacy or operational priorities. It was not found that the cluster system necessarily engages in casualty recording, but that it may serve as a platform for information exchange and advocacy.

#### 4.3 Accountability

Interviewees saw information on casualties as contributing to work towards justice, and accountability of perpetrators. For accountability, information requirements were much more stringent than for advocacy or operational activities. Respondents from UN entities such as CAAC, OHCHR, OGPRTOP, UNHCR, and UNICEF required information about deaths that enabled them to comprehensively understand incidents and individuals killed, patterns of such incidents, and their relationship to legal obligations found in human rights law and IHL.

Such organisations do not necessarily require systematically produced comprehensive information on deaths to show the need to pursue accountability. Interviewees from these entities reported that they “do not pretend to have the whole picture,”<sup>61</sup> and that information on deaths is used to identify whether a “specific attack is part of a pattern of wider attacks,”<sup>62</sup> without necessarily having information on every incident in which individuals are killed.

The pursuit of justice for victims and their families, whether through reparations, public acknowledgement and apology, or otherwise, was viewed as benefitting from casualty recording over a case-based approach. This is because of the need for a comprehensive approach to adequately address the rights and needs of *all* victims.

#### 4.4 Operational planning and programming

“ *It's also a question of planning. If we know that we're having high casualties in a certain area, why is that? We'll be advocating, for example, for greater attention to those areas, whether it's through peacekeepers or what have you. We'll be bearing in mind the kind of humanitarian needs that might be coming out of that...For planning it's going to be not just figures but it's going to be the history.* F

“ *Casualty data is extremely relevant for shorter-term programmatic perspectives, in the sense that it helps target early recovery programming to the affected communities or victims. In the long-term you may have transitional justice processes or truth commissions, for different reasons. Even for social issues. It's useful from a programmatic perspective.* N

Along with utilising information on casualties toward advocacy, many respondents discussed the ways that such information could support programming. A significant finding from the research is that respondents from UN entities providing services at different times, both during and after armed conflict, felt that information on casualties could provide insights useful to the design and implementation of programming.

For respondents from UNDP, information on casualties was regarded as useful for programmatic purposes, because the incidence of casualties relates closely to other humanitarian or development issues such as displacement. For L, having an understanding of deaths before deployment was regarded as a useful factor for gauging what kind of human rights deployment would be necessary for a given environment. G also explained that, at field level, information on casualties would be useful for assessing access constraints. Casualty information can also be important programmatic-

<sup>60</sup> The NATO-led international military forces in Afghanistan operating under a UN Security Council mandate.

<sup>61</sup> A

<sup>62</sup> J

cally to mine action: see for instance the example of the Mine Action Coordination Centre of Afghanistan,<sup>63</sup> who require casualty information to inform the targeting of mine clearance, risk education and survivors' assistance.

A number of respondents mentioned an internal UN recommendation that casualty figures be used as a measure of success in implementing protection of civilians mandates by peace-keeping operations, and to inform results-based budgeting. Reductions in casualties may be a reasonable measure of success in some circumstances: for example fewer casualties from mines and ERW may be a reasonable indicator for the success of mine action programmes. However, there are fundamental difficulties in assessing peace-keeping operations against conflict casualties, including the challenge of establishing causality and the multiple factors and dynamics that determine trends in civilian casualties, many of which will remain independent of UN actions. Careful consideration should be given as to whether casualty recording can really be successfully applied in this way.

#### 4.4.1 Understanding and responding to civilian need after conflict

*“ You need to design programmes that deal with the fractures in the community, you need to design programmes that deal with some of the trauma. O*

*“ Whether you are thinking about priorities for reconstruction, potential problems in return and reconciliation of refugee communities, or ensuring in constitutional reform protection for minorities or enfranchisement of various communities, this will be coloured by a sense of grievance that has come from the conflict. E*

Respondents E, N, and O reported that systematic and comprehensive information on casualties not only has relevance during conflict, but could inform post-conflict programming. Understanding the communities most affected during conflict may, in turn, provide insight into their needs following the cessation of hostilities.

Sri Lanka provided a good example of this. As respondent O explained, because many men died during the conflict, women in Tamil areas required support in reconstruction and developing their livelihoods. O argued that comprehensive and disaggregated information on casualties could have informed programmes in such a way that these women would have received support more effectively. E also saw information on casualties, where disaggregated by region and sex, as potentially useful to informing post-conflict peace-building programming. Speaking hypotheti-

cally, they saw such information as being useful for insights into the political and socio-economic policies and programmes that might be necessary.

#### 4.5 Section analysis

The key finding of this section is that disaggregated information on casualties has wide application to work around protection, human rights, and post-conflict activities. In **Part 2**, the case of UNAMA HR shows how some uses of casualty recording can work on the ground, highlighting the benefits of systematic casualty recording in practice.

The utility of casualty information extends throughout the duration of an armed conflict, including to post-conflict recovery and peace-building. Understanding how individuals died in conflict and at whose hand can be applied to activities that strive to protect the living. The needs of those who remain in post-conflict environments may also be better understood if their communities are more fully acknowledged as fractured and fragmented.

There is another fundamental implication of these findings: although minimal information may be needed for particular activities, the application of casualty information into post-conflict contexts benefits from the systematic recording of disaggregated information over the course of the armed conflict and beyond. Actors prioritising protection and human rights during conflict may see this as a burden; however, it is a worthwhile consideration towards achieving the post-conflict benefits of casualty recording, including transitional justice and development planning.



Casualty information can be important to mine action programming, for informing the planning of mine clearance, risk education and survivors' assistance. (© Thomas Sjørup <http://flic.kr/p/7tnPpi>)

## PART 2: CASE STUDY: UN CASUALTY RECORDING AND ITS IMPACT IN AFGHANISTAN

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### 1. Introduction

Following the elaboration of the state of casualty recording within the UN given in **Part 1**, as seen by individuals in UNHQ, **Part 2** gives the clearest example of how civilian casualty recording by the UN can be done in practice. The case study speaks to the discussions on uses, data credibility and sharing raised in **Part 1**, among other themes. It gives clear lessons that can be used towards addressing the scarcity of civilian casualty recording within the UN.

UNAMA HR's current civilian casualty recording is described with consideration to emerging standards for good practice in casualty recording, being developed by ORG in partnership with the International Practitioner Network of casualty recording organisations (IPN).<sup>64</sup> Intended to help practitioners improve their work and help users of their data assess its quality, these build on principles underpinning effective practice identified in previous research,<sup>65</sup> and on the call of the Every Casualty Campaign.<sup>66</sup> They should assist UN entities with assessing and using information produced by NGOs,

and in developing their own standards. The areas being identified, and basic principles associated with them, are:

1. **Organisational transparency:** Casualty recorders should disclose the purpose of their activities, and their affiliations.
2. **Definitions and inclusion/exclusion criteria:** Practitioners should publish and make clear the definitions used in their work, as well as their data's inclusion criteria.
3. **Transparent and rigorous methodology:** Recorders should show evidence of and publish a methodology, which should include: a data collection plan that involves the prompt collection of multiple sources; source evaluation criteria; and a multiple-stage checking procedure. Connection to local communities or deep knowledge of the context is vital to producing good information. Data must also be open to correction and updates.
4. **Publishing standards:** Information on casualties should be published in a format accessible to relevant communities and end users, whilst taking all necessary measures to prevent any further harm.
5. **Security standards:** Recorders should have in place appropriate security measures to protect their own staff, sources, and the information recorded.
6. **Ethical standards, including dealing with affected communities and victims as sources and end-users:** Organisations should have in place measures to avoid the re-traumatisation of victims and witnesses, and further harm to affected communities.<sup>67</sup>

As identified by UNHQ respondents, the case of UN casualty recording in Afghanistan shows that recording casualties and acting effectively on this information can help to save civilian lives. Since 2007, the Human Rights unit of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA HR) has systematically recorded the civilian casualties of the non-international armed conflict in Afghanistan, both deaths and injuries. Systematic civilian casualty recording followed by analysis of and action upon casualty data is a part of UNAMA HR's Protection of Civilians (PoC) priority area of work, which involves the broader monitoring of the impact of the conflict on human rights protection.<sup>68</sup>

“ It has an inherent value because these are humans, and I really believe so strongly that the advocacy work does make a difference – former UNAMA HR staff, on civilian casualty recording

<sup>64</sup> For an outline of this standards development process, see Salama (2013). For information on the IPN, see [www.everycasualty.org/ipn](http://www.everycasualty.org/ipn)

<sup>65</sup> See section '2.3.3 Key standards for effective recording', in Minor (2012)

<sup>66</sup> "That all casualties of armed violence should be promptly recorded, correctly identified, and publicly acknowledged." See <http://www.everycasualty.org/campaign>

<sup>67</sup> Adapted from Salama (2013)

<sup>68</sup> The other priority areas of work of UNAMA HR are Violence Against Women, Peace and Reconciliation (Transitional Justice and Impunity), and Detention (<http://unama.unmissions.org/Default.aspx?tabid=12285&language=en-US>)



Photo exhibition in Kabul by the Social Association of Afghan Justice Seekers, who campaign for prosecutions for violations and killings, committed during war in Afghanistan since the 1970s. (© Afghan Justice Seekers <http://flic.kr/p/IF3i7f>)

UNAMA HR’s action upon civilian casualty recording intends to decrease the civilian population’s suffering from the conflict, improve human rights protection, and build compliance of parties to the conflict with International Humanitarian Law, through reducing casualties and supporting programmes that can assist civilians. This is achieved through advocacy with parties to the conflict to review and revise policy and operational practices, changing their tactics

where these harm civilians. This relies on the evidence-base of detailed, systematic casualty data. UNAMA HR also shares information externally, with organisations working in Afghanistan who can use it to assist victims of the conflict.

“ Ultimately, the reason we do this is to prevent civilian deaths and injuries. Accurate, impartial and comprehensive data is crucial for advocacy with parties to the conflict, and they listen very carefully to what the United Nations says about civilian casualties. Effective, targeted advocacy with good data effectuates changes in policy and operational and tactical practice. Such change saves lives” – current UNAMA HR staff, on civilian casualty recording

This case study gives: a detailed elaboration of UNAMA HR’s casualty recording methodology, including difficulties and limitations in this work, to show how casualty recording can be done by the UN on the ground; the positive impact this work may have had for conflict-affected people in Afghanistan; and what factors might explain successes, with implications for implementation elsewhere.

“ It wasn’t about collecting data, it was about reducing the direct impact of the war on civilians – former UNAMA HR staff, on civilian casualty recording



UN map of Afghanistan showing the regional divisions used in UNAMA HR’s work. (© UNAMA GIS January 2012)

**2. UNAMA HR’s civilian casualty recording methodology: good practice and limitations**

On the authors’ assessment, UNAMA HR achieves a good standard of practice in casualty recording, despite its limitations. It is a priority in ORG’s work to document cases of casualty recording, in order to advance casualty-recording practice through making practical knowledge and principles available to other practitioners and those interested in the methodological aspects of casualty recording. This, and the need for the UN to consider this case for the broader implementation of casualty recording, is the purpose of the detailed account of methodology and key issues raised by it below.

Attention to accuracy, and building a perception that the data produced is credible, are key features of UNAMA HR’s civilian casualty recording. These sit in contrast to many of the features of UN information about casualties reported by UNHQ respondents. UNAMA HR’s methodology has developed over the lifetime of the system to reinforce these fea-

tures: taking action on data is the primary focus of UNAMA HR’s civilian casualty recording, and success in advocacy and sharing in Afghanistan depends, in turn, on the acceptance by target groups of the information presented. Methodology is driven by the goals of the work for civilians affected by the war in Afghanistan, rather than an abstract aspiration of producing good data. **The strong linking of purpose and methodology is key for the UN and other casualty recorders to consider, in order to ensure a positive impact.** Other important key features of good practice in UNAMA HR’s civilian casualty recording are its impartiality, the proactive nature of its documentation, and its outreach and connection to local communities.

For explanation, UNAMA HR’s current civilian casualty recording methodology is divided below into producing casualty data and acting upon it, summarised by **Figures 1** (p25) and **2** (p34). It is described on its own terms, but with consideration to known good practice in casualty recording, as well as to the themes brought up in **Part 1**.

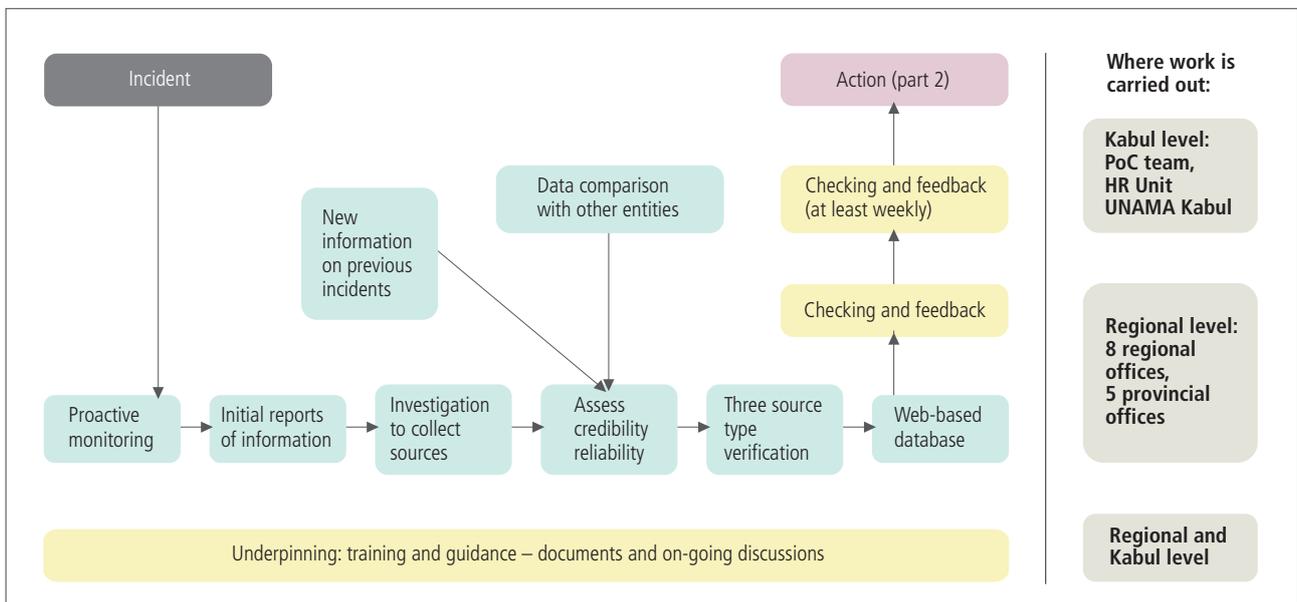
**Box 1: Structure and staffing levels**

At the time of publication, staff working on civilian casualty recording and action upon this data, which is the majority of UNAMA HR’s PoC work, included a team in Kabul of eight dedicated to PoC work only, and 47 locally based staff who cover *all* UNAMA HR priority areas of work: around five staff in each of the eight regional offices, which cover two to five provinces of Afghanistan each, and one staff in each of the five provincial offices (the map on p24 shows the regional divisions used by UNAMA for their work). The total level of staffing can fluctuate. In regional offices staff include Afghans (national staff) and UN employees from other countries (international staff). The majority of staff are national.

Afghans from the area staff the provincial offices. Because of the dynamics of the conflict in Afghanistan, UNAMA HR staff in some regions will spend the vast majority of their time documenting and verifying incidents of civilian casualties. Others will have far fewer cases of civilian deaths and injuries to document. This will also depend on the time of year, as fighting fluctuates seasonally. In regions with high numbers of civilian casualties, ensuring that there are enough staff members to record all incidents in sufficient detail can be difficult. Effective personnel management throughout the whole system was emphasised by some respondents as key to dealing with this and other challenges, such as maintaining staff morale for good quality work.

**2.1 Producing civilian casualty data**

**Figure 1: Part 1 of UNAMA HR’s methodology: Producing civilian casualty data**



The recording of civilian casualties by UNAMA HR starts with monitoring by staff in the eight regional and five provincial offices for information about conflict incidents that may have resulted in civilian casualties. Initial reports of information requiring investigation may come from secondary sources such as updates from the UNDSS, as well as engagement with local contacts and communities.

**Box 2: Security and access to information, local connection and trust**

A key advantage for UNAMA HR in its civilian casualty recording is the presence of offices across the country. Crucial to the gathering of all relevant source material are the local contacts, networks and cooperation with other organisations holding information that locally-based staff can develop, getting a fuller and more accurate picture than if investigation was conducted just from Kabul or by occasional field visits. The presence of national staff with local language and cultural knowledge is a clear advantage for accessing information and building trust in communities. As several **interviewees brought up, trust and confidence from communities as key for acquiring information.**

**The primary challenge for UNAMA HR in accessing information and ensuring good coverage is security.**

The conflict itself, and UN safety restrictions on what staff can do as a result, mean that in some areas staff find it much harder to maintain local networks and have to conduct all interviews by phone. Staff noted that this affects the quality of information, verification from on-site investigation being preferable. Security considerations, especially in areas of opposition activity or control, also limit the ability of people to safely approach UNAMA HR, though staff will try to facilitate this. Areas of the country being remote and hard to physically access also affect coverage. Due to some or all of these factors, UNAMA HR has not visited some provinces for a considerable time (though contact with sources may still be available by phone). UNAMA HR publicly acknowledges the possibility of underreporting civilian casualties:<sup>69</sup> all cases that they discover will be investigated, but some cases they will not find out about in the first place. Transparency about this fact is good practice, and helps to develop trust in data.

**The clear advantages for local access of having established offices also highlight another major challenge: the need to maintain these offices to preserve the quality and integrity of the data produced.** Ten provincial offices were recently closed due to budget cuts, making the maintenance of networks in those areas more difficult, and also making it harder

**Prompt investigation is privileged in order to ensure quality of information** (by collecting evidence before it is lost or witnesses forget), **and to take action upon it swiftly.** Because of this, monitoring is done constantly and is proactive. All information about incidents that might conceivably have caused civilian casualties is investigated.

for people to approach an accessible UNAMA HR office with a staff member from the area. These closures inevitably impact on coverage and quality of data in those areas, and perceptions of UNAMA HR's data. A continuing advantage for UNAMA HR in its civilian casualty recording is access to the mission's logistics (flights etc.) without extra cost, highlighting the benefits of locating casualty recording within a UN mission (though UNAMA HR also use other UN logistic services that they have to pay for, and try to travel by road as much as possible). Such logistics are clearly helpful for investigations to visit sites, but are needed in addition to local offices for the model that UNAMA HR uses.

Trust in UNAMA HR and its staff is potentially challenged in different ways. Staff risk being perceived as politically aligned, in part due to the divide that organisations and agencies, but also many people, make between the 'black UN' (UNAMA, the special political mission, whose mandate is to support the government of Afghanistan, and which in earlier years was overt in its alignment to international military forces and use of terminology associated with the 'Global War on Terror') and the 'blue UN' (humanitarian agencies and bodies not within the mission). The colours are those in which the UN logo appears on these respective entities' cars etc. A number of respondents reported that wariness of the 'black UN' still exists amongst some local NGOs for example, potentially affecting the work that UNAMA HR must do to build relationships. Emphasising the human rights mandate of UNAMA HR as distinct from the rest of the mission was reported to be helpful. One respondent described cases, in the very early days of setting up liaisons with international forces at a local level, of difficult discussions on how harm to civilians could be reduced being far more successful where conducted by international staff from Europe or North America (as opposed to international staff from other countries, or Afghans). This experience of prejudices also highlights the importance of understanding an environment's actors and working out how to operate politically, to build cooperation for effective casualty recording.

<sup>69</sup> See for example the note on methodology on pi of UNAMA (2013)

After learning of an incident, regional/provincial staff start investigations to gather all available source information that can verify details. **On-site investigation is prioritised, but not always possible** (see **Box 2**). The wide range of sources used includes: eyewitnesses or those directly affected (who are prioritised), including visits to hospitals to talk to survivors or families as well as medical staff; tribal elders and religious leaders; security forces and conflict parties; local authorities; others conducting investigations such as UN entities and the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC); and visits to incident sites. To obtain information in person, staff either visit districts, or victims, witnesses, elders, and community members come to UNAMA HR offices. Where this is not possible interviews are done by phone.

A distinction is made in UNAMA HR's procedure between information that requires further investigation, and source material that may be used to verify details about incidents. Media reports and other sources that have received their information second (or third, or fourth) hand, for example, cannot be used as sources. UNAMA HR implements this policy in order to enhance the accuracy and hence credibility of the data produced. The head of the PoC Unit is responsible for continually reviewing and improving methodology, and staff are encouraged to contribute. On-going improvement of methodology in this way is a good practice.

### Box 3: Others recording casualties in Afghanistan

Other organisations within and outside the UN also collect or record information about civilian casualties in Afghanistan. Within the UN system, the Mine Action Coordination Centre of Afghanistan (MACCA)<sup>70</sup> (managed by UNMAS) records the casualties of landmines and ERW. The Country Task Force on Monitoring and Reporting (CTFMR), which involves different UN bodies, gathers and triangulates information on the killing and maiming of children for the 1612 MRM on children and armed conflict.

ISAF's Civilian Casualty Mitigation Team (CCMT) undertakes civilian harm tracking. Distinct from casualty recording, this involves a conflict party systematically gathering and analysing data about their operations, and its effects on the civilian population, including deaths, injuries, property damage, and other civilian harm.<sup>71</sup> To facilitate civilian protection through dialogue, it is useful for a military's own tracking to exist alongside independent casual-

ty recording. Though investigations aim to start as promptly as possible – which may be affected by factors such as the security situation – these may take several weeks to finish, or be left open longer where information is inconclusive, as accuracy is prioritised. For the same reason, when new information becomes available this is incorporated into old cases (having undergone the same assessment procedures). The updating of records is a good practice for accurate casualty recording. UNAMA HR also makes sure to follow up on cases of injuries, as these may unfortunately become cases of deaths.



ISAF soldiers in Afghanistan. ISAF gathers data about their operations and their effects on the civilian population, including deaths and injuries. (© Kenny Holston <http://flic.kr/p/7BL0Vh>)

ty recording. The government of Afghanistan is taking steps to establish a tracking mechanism, with guidance from ISAF and following advocacy from UNAMA HR and others, creating a Civilian Casualties Tracking Team at the President's Information Coordination Centre (PICC) in 2012.<sup>72</sup> However, its capacity is currently low.<sup>73</sup> Ad-hoc commissions to investigate certain incidents of civilian casualties have also been appointed by the President for several years, and give their results publicly.

The Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC),<sup>74</sup> which is the National Human Rights Institution of Afghanistan (mandated by the constitution but independent of the government<sup>75</sup>), has recorded civilian casualties since 2007. The Afghanistan programme of the International NGO Safety Organisation (INSO)<sup>76</sup> collects data on civilian casualties as part of its security analysis and alerts for members. NGO Afghanistan Rights Monitor (ARM)<sup>77</sup> has also undertaken casualty recording but is currently dormant.

<sup>70</sup> See <http://www.macca.org.af/>

<sup>71</sup> For a detailed case study of ISAF's tracking, see Center for Civilians in Conflict (2014). The Center advocates for tracking by warring parties as complementary to casualty recording by independent bodies, as is seen in the case of Afghanistan.

<sup>72</sup> See Center for Civilians in Conflict (2013)

<sup>73</sup> See for example UNAMA (2014) p8

<sup>74</sup> See <http://www.aihrc.org.af/>

<sup>75</sup> Though attempted interference in its independence has been alleged through the procedure of appointing commissioners, which the President has control over. See for example commentary by the Afghanistan Analysts Network at <http://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/tag/aihrc>

<sup>76</sup> See <http://www.ngosafety.org/>

<sup>77</sup> See <http://www.arm.org.af/>

#### Box 4: MACCA, AIHRC, and the problem of ensuring continuity in casualty recording

ORG interviewed MACCA and AIHRC for this study. Their experiences, like those of UNAMA HR, show the challenges and value of recording casualties in Afghanistan. They also highlight the broader question of how to make casualty recording sustainable, as violence sadly continues.

MACCA's casualty data mostly comes from commissioned investigations by the Afghan Red Crescent Society (ARCS) and other mine action teams. Once obtained by MACCA, it is checked and investigated further by MACCA regional offices, then checked again and entered into a database in Kabul. These procedures are set centrally and are based on international standards. MACCA uses the Information Management System for Mine Action (IMSMA) provided by the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining.<sup>78</sup> Used by over 30 organisations worldwide, IMSMA was described as user-friendly with useful features such as GIS and training packages. Multiple sources are used in MACCA's methodology. **The approach of using a network of organisations that investigate to a standardised methodology alongside their other work is efficient for a small organisation.** It can also carry risks if the organisations in the network lose their capacity to do these investigations (for example if funding or staff are cut). The data is crucial to operational planning for prioritising areas in need of services such as mine and ERW risk education, mine clearance and survivors' assistance (e.g. prosthetic limbs and support services). Data is also used for advocacy with conflict parties to meet their obligations in clearing ERW, and is shared with the relevant government ministries and other mine-action relevant organisations for reporting, as civilian casualty reduction is considered a key indicator of progress in mine action in Afghanistan.

**For MACCA, making the transition from a UN programme of 25 years to a full national capacity on mine action that includes casualty recording is a key challenge.** One difficulty is that state organisations are currently weak and underfunded. If MACCA were shut down or its functions transferred to the government, staff (who are now all Afghan, and co-located with the government office) would be likely to leave for better-paid jobs. Another option would be for MACCA to become a government-mandated independent organisation. Given the large and complex problem of unexploded ordnance in Afghanistan, continuity of staff and the transfer of institutional knowledge to a sustainable organisation (in particular on which areas have previously been cleared of mines, but also other data and information gathering processes) are crucial. Attempts to work out a solution to this problem have gone on for several years.

This highlights the need for programmes whose relevance continues beyond the lifetime of UN involvement to develop a workable plan for their legacy.<sup>79</sup> In UNAMA HR's case, respondents reported no knowledge of plans for handover to national capacity, as UNAMA will still be in Afghanistan so long as civilian casualties from the conflict continue. **It is therefore imperative that UNAMA HR's civilian casualty recording continues to be mandated, prioritised, and adequately resourced,** given the benefits it has had for civilians in Afghanistan.

If and when UNAMA is wound down or is asked to leave, however, there will be issues of legacy to consider: information about casualties is for example relevant to identifying the fate of the missing, building a historical record as part of transitional justice, and can give relevant evidence to prosecutions for violations.<sup>80</sup> These are not currently core goals for UNAMA HR's casualty recording, though were mentioned as desirable objectives by the limited number of national staff interviewed. **If the UN takes UNAMA HR's database with it when it leaves,<sup>81</sup> this could mean that certain benefits of the work are left unrealised for the people of Afghanistan post-conflict.** In considering how a database of national importance should be treated when UN involvement comes to an end, confidentiality and promises made to sources about the use of their data, which are fundamental to UNAMA HR's integrity and ability to do their work, must be considered. However, there are also questions about who ultimately owns information on deaths and injuries from the conflict in Afghanistan, and what would serve the public good in the longer term.

**A national capacity for casualty recording exists in the Special Investigations Team at AIHRC.** AIHRC have been recording for around as long as UNAMA HR, with the objective of reducing civilian casualties and enhancing human rights protection through recommendations to conflict parties. In a model reported as somewhat similar to UNAMA HR's, AIHRC has offices across the country, with staff investigating incidents and corroborating multiple sources. Results are checked centrally. As well as discussing incidents and investigations with them, UNAMA HR has assisted AIHRC with technical support and training. However, recently cooperation has decreased especially at the central level. Some interviewees gave the opinion that AIHRC would be the natural institution to receive any handover from UNAMA HR on civilian casualty recording, but that AIHRC's good work was potentially made difficult by the spectre of attempted political interference with its independence, especially given the President's role in appointing commissioners.

<sup>78</sup> See <http://www.gichd.org/information-management/imsma-software/>

<sup>79</sup> See Miceli and Olgiati (2014) for discussion of the challenges to transferring a UNDP violence observatory to national capacity in Burundi.

<sup>80</sup> See Minor (2012)

<sup>81</sup> Which might involve steps such as the migration of data to UNHQ and further restriction of access among UN personnel.



Casualty data is crucial to operational planning for mine action in Afghanistan, including mine and ERW risk education.  
 (© CIDA-ACDI/Pedram Pirnia <http://flic.kr/p/gjA6w1>)

Most source information is collected by UNAMA HR locally, but some is also acquired in Kabul, particularly through comparing data with others. Information obtained at Kabul level is sent to the field offices for verification. **UNAMA HR never share their database, but aim to 'de-conflict' their data with other specialist programmes in the UN system such as MACCA and the CTFMR for accuracy, ensuring consistent messages from the UN system and stronger joint action.** These entities may share lists of cases with or show their databases of investigations to UNAMA HR. Material is never incorporated at face value, but assessed as any other source. It is not a case of copying data from others. Similar detailed data comparison has also been carried out with the AIHRC, and frequently still is at the local level. UNAMA HR's protocols around coordination on casualty data give one model for addressing some of the challenges to implementation and coordination raised in **Part 3**.

A key feature of UNAMA HR's civilian casualty recording is the independence of its data, but also the cooperation achieved for information sharing or review with a wide range of actors both within and outside the UN system. This has limitations: for example though cooperation with local NGOs for information was reported, some had misgivings (see **Box 2** p26) or felt that their contribution would not be valued (perhaps due to strict verification procedures). Also, at a local level especially, the data sharing relationships

built were reported to depend very much on the people involved, their relationships, and the structures they developed. Not incorporating others' data without further verification may contribute to underreporting,<sup>82</sup> but for UNAMA HR is necessary in order to maintain the integrity of the data and its credibility to key audiences. Other models – for example integrating the data of a range of actors into central system where it meets certain standards – can also work, dependent on the purpose and audiences of the data.

From the perspective of UNHQ respondents, there are major challenges regarding provision and coordination or exchange of information on casualties within the UN. Indeed, many UNHQ respondents articulated concern that OHCHR, both centrally and on the field, is generally unwilling to share information products upon request. In contrast, UNAMA HR's practices around de-conflicting and sharing information may be used as a lesson for consideration within future discussions around the challenge of making casualty information available more widely. Furthermore, it may also help to address challenges posed by the varied data qualities and requirements amongst UN entities acquiring information on casualties.

**'De-confliction' is also done with conflict parties**, as part of advocacy with them on certain incidents and to lobby for investigation, and to obtain their version of events and any further evidence. Built up over several years, the

<sup>82</sup> This is highlighted by UNAMA HR in relation to the omission of cases recorded by MACCA in areas that UNAMA HR cannot reach to perform its own verification, for example – see UNAMA (2013) p56 footnote 212.

relationship with ISAF now involves sufficient trust that incidents may be discussed in a constructive manner. UNAMA HR seeks input on every case where there is an allegation that civilian casualties have resulted from ISAF/Special Forces activities. This dialogue may result in supplementary information for UNAMA HR to review and verify, or the initiation of new investigations by ISAF. With Afghan forces, the procedure is more recently established (following increased national involvement in military operations and responsibility for security) and cooperation less developed than with ISAF. This is a limitation both for data and advocacy. It may indicate the work needed to establish such cooperation, but also the need for this type of engagement on civilian protection to become embedded in the priorities of the party in question. As mentioned in **Box 3** p27, national forces' capacity in tracking and mitigation are currently low, though the PICC recently (October 2013) appointed an advisor to the President on the protection of civilians.

UNAMA HR seeks information from opposition groups, and reviews all allegations of civilian harm brought to its attention by these groups. There is public dialogue with elements of the Taliban, who respond to UNAMA HR's public reports on civilian casualties with their own lists and public statements. These lists are analysed by UNAMA HR.<sup>83</sup> By their nature opposition groups are harder to contact. Interactions have been more indirect, either locally through known or

possible intermediaries (for example tribal elders in areas under opposition control) or through public statements. Taliban statements use a definition of 'civilian' that does not conform to International Humanitarian Law (IHL), making engagement on civilian protection within this framework more challenging.<sup>84</sup>

UNAMA HR's investigations of incidents involving ISAF include examining information provided to them directly by ISAF. This relationship is not mirrored in a systematic way with armed opposition groups, though the Taliban does sometimes publicly respond to UNAMA HR's statements about their involvement in incidents, and publishes material on their website. As a consequence, UNAMA HR's understanding of incidents involving ISAF may be more comprehensive than their understanding of those involving the armed opposition, due to the operational detail available from ISAF about their own actions, but also the supplementary information ISAF may provide about who was involved in the incident and who the casualties were. **Erratic contact with the armed opposition is a limitation for UNAMA HR, as it may create inaccuracy or incompleteness in the data, and certainly affects advocacy.** Respondents also reported that there were fewer personal dangers to witnesses who gave information on incidents involving international forces, in contrast to those involving some other parties. This may create some incompleteness in data as well.

#### **Box 5: Ethical considerations**

As a system whose purpose is to support the protection of civilians, **UNAMA HR's civilian casualty recording prioritises confidentiality, protecting sources, and ensuring that casualty recording does not do any further harm.** UNAMA HR takes steps to ensure that those they interact with do not suffer negative consequences from UNAMA HR's work. Various data security measures are put in place (see **Box 8** p34 below), and staff are trained to uphold principles of confidentiality. Information about victims and especially sources' identities are removed from any material external to UNAMA HR's confidential database.

An important aspect of ethical casualty recording is to adequately explain to sources the purpose of taking information and what will happen to it. This is also important to not creating expectations of what might result from giving information, perhaps in terms of personal compensation or access to justice. UNAMA HR's procedure in interviews involves giving explanations to try to avoid this.

Another important consideration (also brought up in ORG's previous study into casualty recording practice<sup>85</sup>) is **to not jeopardise the access of humanitarian organisations to populations in need.** Casualty recorders could potentially jeopardise access by, for example, attributing damaging information about a conflict party's actions to a particular organisation, or allowing the information to be traceable to that organisation, resulting in a conflict party blocking the organisation's relief activities to an area in retaliation. It is a crucial principle that casualty recording should do no harm, and the mandates of humanitarian organisations must be considered. This does not mean, however, that there is a simple choice between humanitarian access and data collection/advocacy, or that humanitarian organisations are never in a position to support advocacy on protection, either formally or informally, without putting their access in danger. This will be driven by the particular dynamics of the context and the type of advocacy undertaken. Indeed, the exchange of information between casualty recorders and humanitarian responders can be mutually beneficial.<sup>86</sup> See **Part 3, Section 4** p43-44 for further discussion.

<sup>83</sup> See for example 'Annex 1: UNAMA Analysis of Taliban Monthly 'War Crimes' Statements', UNAMA (2014) p72. UNAMA HR also shares its reports with the Taliban in advance of publication.

<sup>84</sup> The Taliban's definition of civilians excludes individuals such as civilian government officials and civilian police that the Taliban consider legitimate targets. See UNAMA (2014) p33. Under IHL, civilians include all people who are not directly participating in hostilities.

<sup>85</sup> See Minor (2012) p23

<sup>86</sup> Some examples of this were seen in ORG's previous research. See Minor (2012)

Following its collection, **source information is assessed for credibility (an assessment of the information given) and reliability (an assessment of the source itself).**

These involve considering factors such as a source's record as an information giver, possible biases a source might have in relation to the particular incident (including political leanings and factors that might make a source likely to exaggerate or understate, such as being involved in violence or seeking compensation for a community – some sources may have no such biases), and how well placed they are to give information in terms of proximity to or involvement in an incident, or specialist knowledge (for example, UNAMA HR uses insights from ISAF on device types when documenting Improvised Explosive Device (IED) incidents).<sup>87</sup> As a result of these assessments, more weight may be given to certain information. Assessing credibility and reliability is also attempted through interview technique, establishing step-by-step what a witness saw to try and unpick inconsistency and distinguish experiences from hearsay. Staff prioritise conducting interviews privately for this reason, though a cultural preference by witnesses for group interviews was reported. To overcome this, staff may seek to meet more informally on the edges of a group, or follow up at a later date.

**An incident is considered verified by UNAMA HR if there is corroboration from three types of sources on its key details.** This means, for example, that an incident would not be verified if it was substantiated by three sources from different security bodies. The intention of this practice is to ensure that the sources used for verification are truly independent from each other, thus increasing the likelihood

that data is accurate. Despite this extremely strict interpretation of verification, it was reported to be rare that UNAMA HR encountered conflicting accounts that could not be resolved. In these cases the procedure demands seeking further information to clarify key details. Sometimes ambiguity can be reported in certain details about an incident, but other details, such as the civilian status of casualties, must always be confirmed. If verification cannot be achieved, incidents are not reported, but remain in the database with all the source information gathered. Where information about an incident is considered credible but does not reach the 'three source type' threshold, it may be marked as unfinished but highly probable. These incidents will not appear in UNAMA HR's statistics, but can be searched for in the database and may be used to support the analysis of verified cases (in which case it would be clearly stated how).

Following the entering of information about an incident onto UNAMA HR's database (see **Box 8** p34), multiple checks on the quality and accuracy of the investigation and data are made. Regional office team leaders review all cases investigated by their staff, including provincial offices, to ensure that incidents have been investigated and verified according to procedure, and identify gaps in evidence or reasoning. The PoC staff in Kabul HQ also review all cases entered once a week, to check conclusions drawn and the proof they are based on. Before public reports, regional team leaders are required to check every case in the report period again, following which the Kabul team, in a process that takes two full weeks, re-checks all cases once more.

**UNAMA HR goes to great lengths in their procedure**

**Box 6: Cases and details that are hard to record**

**Determining the exact group that caused the casualties of an incident has sometimes been a challenge** for UNAMA HR, because of the variety of armed opposition groups in Afghanistan and because of joint operations by ISAF and Afghan national forces. As a result of this, the designations 'Pro-Government Forces' and 'Anti-Government Elements'<sup>88</sup> were developed as overarching analytic categories relevant to Afghanistan. Determining the group that caused harm in crossfire incidents is also difficult. Furthermore, these determinations are challenging because of the political pressures and dangers to witnesses who may have information about the groups involved.

**Determining civilian status can also prove challenging for UNAMA HR,** as is often the case in casualty recording. Detailed knowledge of an incident is often necessary in order to determine if a person was a civilian according to IHL. This is the definition that UNAMA HR

uses,<sup>89</sup> though conflict parties often have not, creating inconsistencies between UNAMA HR's and others' data. Where status cannot be determined, uncertainty is dealt with by not including the victim in the statistics. This could result in underreporting.

**Exact tactics or weapons used can be difficult to determine,** for example whether an IED was remote controlled, or whether a strike came from an Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (drone) or another aircraft. Clarification is sought from the conflict parties involved, and UNAMA HR uses insights from ISAF and ANSF on weapons used, for example on determining IED device type. Where incidents or aspects of them conducted by Pro-Government Forces are classified, for example as is sometimes the case with search operations, obtaining information from parties is extremely difficult and the incidents themselves often far harder to investigate. All these factors introduce some limitations to UNAMA HR's data.

<sup>87</sup> For comparison, see **Part 3 Section 3.1** p42 for a discussion of how UNHQ interviewees established credibility and trust in casualty data.

<sup>88</sup> For definitions, see UNAMA (2014) pxi

<sup>89</sup> See UNAMA (2014) pxv

**to produce data that they are confident in. This is extremely important for their advocacy, given the scrutiny of civilian casualties in Afghanistan.**

**UNAMA HR's civilian casualty recording is a system with documented and enforced procedures**, as opposed to a combination of ad hoc documentation done by different people who may have different standards: this is one reason why UNAMA HR's civilian casualty recording is an example of good practice. Many UNHQ respondents found it beneficial to understand how information on casualties is obtained as this gives them insight into how they can use such information for their particular work. **UNAMA HR's civilian casualty recording methodology is underpinned by a system of guidance and training.** One aim of this is to ensure consistency in the data produced, and guidance and training has developed in strength over the lifetime of UNAMA HR's civilian casualty recording. Checking and feedback procedures are part of this guidance. Staff are also given guidance notes, which are documents covering different aspects of how recording should be done. These have developed with the involvement of different staff in the system.<sup>90</sup> Staff are encouraged to seek advice on difficult cases, and guidance given is circulated to all. Training is given on methodology, UNAMA HR's database, and the recording's legal framework, both at HQ in Kabul and in the field. All UNAMA HR staff also meet once



An Afghan man with money he has been offered for relatives killed in a search operation. Information about such incidents is often classified. (© James Gordon <http://flic.kr/p/cmtq3f>)

a year in Kabul for training to share experiences and reinforce consistency across their work. As guidance and training cannot totally ensure consistency and quality, checking procedures give an extra step towards achieving this. Inconsistency in the data produced by different individuals, reported as an issue by some former staff, was identified as far less of a problem now, but still an issue that needed constant monitoring.

*“ I wish had these kinds of guidelines in all the work I did before in other UN offices...I've never had guidelines as detailed as we have now here in UNAMA. So they're very useful and my impression is that they do guarantee the consistency of the work all across the mission – current UNAMA HR staff*

**Staff interviewed appreciated the guidance given, especially the written guidance notes, which are highly practical and relevant.** Some international staff observed that they had not seen anything like this in other UN missions they had worked for, despite such guidance being so valuable both to new staff starting and to the institutional continuity of projects and systems set up, which can easily be started by one individual then lost when that person leaves their job.

It is a feature of the strength of UNAMA HR's civilian casualty recording system that changes in leadership and personnel have nonetheless led to improvements and evolution in the system, rather than complete overhaul or collapse. As a number of UNHQ respondents explained, turnover within mission environments often leads to losses, rather than progression. The institutionalisation of casualty recording is pragmatic and allows adaptation to changing patterns in conflict, given that its application extends over the course of a conflict and into post-conflict operations (see **Part 1 Section 4** p19). UNAMA HR's civilian casualty recording became an established part of its work – due both to leaders establishing it as an institutional priority, and to it proving its worth.

Features of strong practice in UNAMA HR's production of civilian casualty data mean that despite limitations, the views of others within Afghanistan of the system are often of professional, standardised data that can be meaningfully compared across time. This is reflected in the views of respondents in **Part 1**. It is worth noting in terms of future implementation that, though UNAMA HR's work is widely recognised both within and outside Afghanistan, **UNAMA HR developed their methodology in and with a focus on Afghanistan – the source of the procedures was not centrally set standards from the UN in Geneva and New York. The action taken on the data produced is also very much focused on Afghanistan.**

<sup>90</sup> Since UNAMA HR started recording civilian casualties in 2007, there have been three heads of the Human Rights unit, the first finishing at the end of 2007, the second in post 2008-10, under whom the system was properly established, and the third from 2010 to the present. There have also been a number of PoC team leaders, who have contributed significantly to the development of the system.

**Box 7: Inclusion criteria, framework and transparency**

UNAMA HR records civilian casualties<sup>91</sup> using **the legal framework of Inter-national Humanitarian Law (IHL) and Inter-national Human Rights Law (IHRL)**. This provides most of the definitions for the categories used by UNAMA HR in their casualty recording. UN-set standard definitions and definitions stated by UNAMA HR are also used. These are set out in UNAMA HR’s public reports, which is a good practice and allows others to more easily evaluate UNAMA HR’s data.<sup>92</sup>

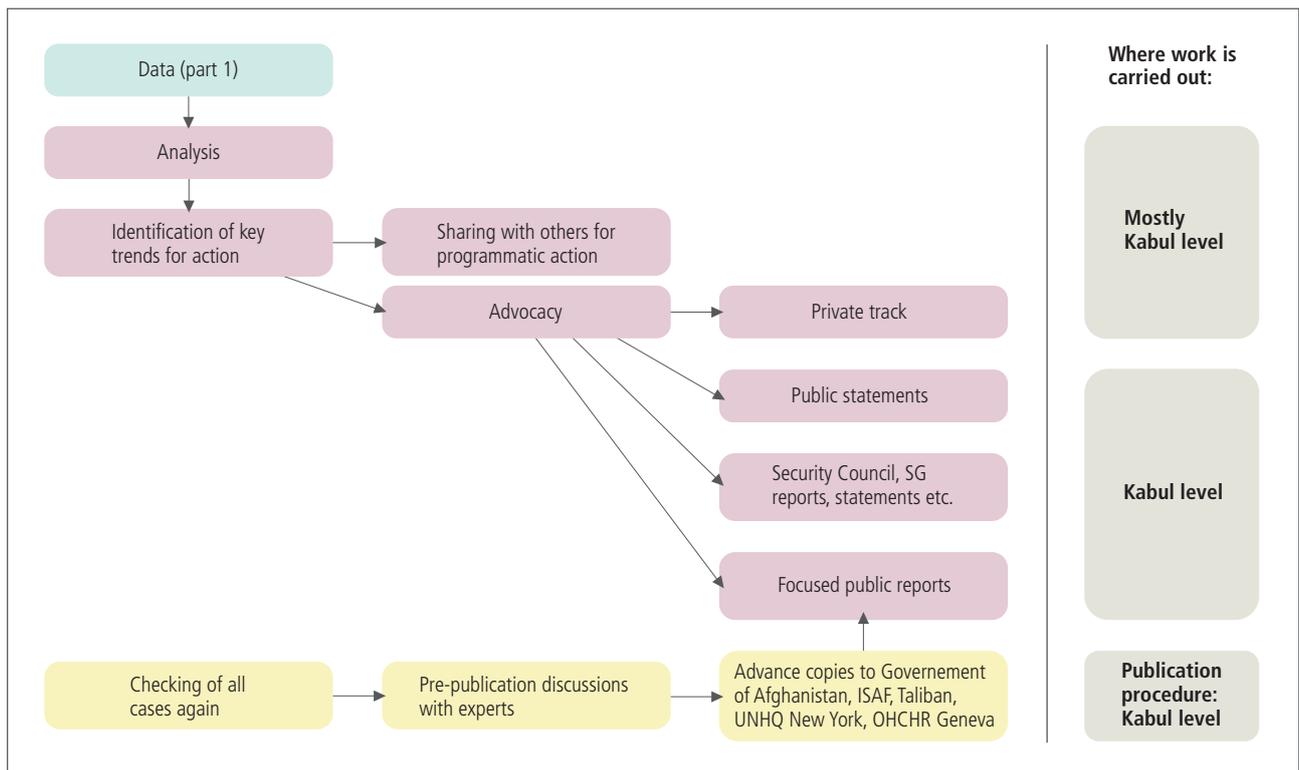
**UNAMA HR’s casualty recording is based around recording incidents**, within which information about the civilians killed or injured are recorded. The age and sex of victims are always recorded, and in most cases, the names and other identifying information about victims. ORG advocates the recording of names or identities as good practice, in order to help distinguish between victims and produce more accurate records and data, but also for the principle that individual victims should eventually be given individual recognition. It is not always possible for casualty recorders to document names however, due to operational or cultural constraints (such as the names of women, children and visitors being unknown to neighbouring families or witnesses – as respondents noted can be the case in Afghanistan). Other categories that UNAMA HR systematically records in order to enable their analysis for advocacy include the groups involved in violence, tactics and weapons used, locations. All avail-

able information in relation to an incident is recorded, either in standard categories on which analysis can be run, or in narrative, on which systematic analysis is harder. Staff are encouraged to be exact in their categorisations and limit the use of designations of ‘other’ where possible, to facilitate more useful analysis of data. UNAMA HR will draw attention to possible violations of IHL in public reports but does not have a mandate to investigate crimes. The focus of **UNAMA HR’s civilian** casualty recording has been to advocate for behavioural change according to this legal framework, responding to the concerns of the population, as this was considered more likely to achieve better protection for civilians. However, legal accountability, either through military or civilian procedures, is also advocated for where specific abuses are documented. During 2008-10 UNAMA HR’s focus on civilian casualties was shifted decisively away from violations and towards showing patterns of harm and how these should be addressed, as a strategy to bring buy-in from both humanitarians and conflict parties.

Transparency in definitions and methodology, which UNAMA HR gives in their public reports,<sup>93</sup> and their consistent application, are good practice and part of developing credibility. However, the experiences of staff interviewed show that transparency about methodology needs to be constantly pursued and messages frequently repeated to key audiences, in order to be effectively absorbed.

**2.2 Action upon civilian casualty data**

**Figure 2: Part 2: Action upon casualty data**



**Box 8: UNAMA HR's database: a crucial tool**

The database UNAMA HR now uses for civilian casualty recording is a **custom-built piece of software designed specifically to record civilian casualties in Afghanistan, and funded by OHCHR** (but distinct from OHCHR's case management database mentioned in **Part 1**). The database tool **supports the standardisation of data and data security, through features built into the system; it is also crucial for analysis**. Several interviewees emphasised the importance of good information management software to doing civilian casualty recording and acting upon it effectively. The tool was first introduced in 2009 after development in 2008 with limited resources, and has been upgraded and improved since then. Key features that make the database a useful tool are that it is user-friendly, decentralised, and it is integrated into the work of staff (rather than requiring the creation of extra tasks). Also, since it is focused on civilian casualty recording and does not include other, additional kinds of data collection, it can be kept relatively simple.

The database is web-based, which allows all offices to work simultaneously off the same copy of the database. Data entered by staff throughout Afghanistan is instantly accessible centrally, as long as there is an internet connection: **when internet is poor, communication of data is delayed, which is a limitation in Afghanistan**. For analysis, queries can be run in the database and information extracted onto spreadsheets. Data extraction onto a spreadsheet (using a tool called the PoC analyser, developed by a Human Rights Officer) facilitates work

offline, and the backup of data. Every case is attached to a separate numeric case file. All information gathered, as well as who added or deleted information, analysis, or assessment, is recorded. This **ensures a "paper trail" showing how incidents were recorded, and builds institutional memory instead of confining expertise to individuals**. There is also a 'confidential note' facility accessible to the head of the PoC team and database manager, for storing extremely sensitive evidence that nevertheless should not be lost to UNAMA HR if the person who receives it leaves.

**Standard forms requiring the entering of certain information** about victims (e.g. age and sex) and about incidents (e.g. weapons, tactics, groups involved) encourage consistency and enable analysis according to these categories. Staff must enter into a dedicated 'field' how conclusions were reached.

The database is backed up in two places every week. For security, each regional office can only access cases from their own region. **Database access is controlled by one person and personalised to staff**, determined depending on who needs to use the database for their work. In general, access is restricted to experienced and more senior staff, to minimise risks of compromising confidentiality. Only two people at Kabul HQ have 'delete' power on the database, to help minimise data loss due to intimidation. Other technical measures including encryption and defences against external infiltration or hacking are built into the database, to help keep data secure.

The core function of UNAMA HR's civilian casualty recording is to produce information and analysis that enables engagement with others to mitigate harm against civilians: advocacy with conflict parties to alter their tactics; sharing particular types of information with organisations that assist victims of conflict; and sharing information with humanitarian responders and others where UNAMA HR has documented incidents or trends are relevant to their work. Having data does not itself constitute civilian protection. Acting effectively on data is the most important stage of UNAMA HR's civilian casualty recording, and also the aspect that requires the most political skill – making it quite different to, and harder than, the first step of producing good evidence. Effective relationship building and skill in advocacy have been key to UNAMA HR's success.

Within Afghanistan, UNAMA HR's sharing of analysis of incidents or trends with partners happens either through

regularised meetings or relationships with agreed terms of reference, as part of pre-publication procedures, or ad-hoc. Requests for information currently come from a variety of entities, including OCHA, UNHCR and the Resident Co-ordinator's Office. UNAMA HR always sends on information to others where relevant. This sharing of information for operational purposes happens bilaterally at Kabul HQ level, and also either formally or informally at the local level.

Information **exchange also occurs through the Protection Cluster, in particular a Working Group on PoC, both at Kabul and sub-national levels**. The Protection Cluster was generally described as a forum for discussing issues and trends more generally, as opposed to obtaining detailed information or verification. However it was also reported to be useful as a forum for joint information analysis and triangulation between UNAMA HR and others investigating casualties. The Protection Cluster was reported

<sup>91</sup> No systematic data is collected on combatant casualties, including protected combatants, as the focus is on civilian protection – though there are also issues around the abuse of combatants in Afghanistan. Some of these are monitored by UNAMA HR under their 'Detention' priority area of work.

<sup>92</sup> See for example the 'Glossary', 'Methodology' pi, 'Legal Responsibilities of Parties to the Armed Conflict' pii and various explanatory footnotes in UNAMA (2014).

<sup>93</sup> See 'Methodology' in UNAMA (2014)

to create opportunities for bilateral cooperation within and outside the forum, including through more informal or personalised relationships. It was also described as sometimes being an effective platform for conducting or coordinating joint advocacy, though by no means the only way that such coordination would come about. Its usefulness was reported to depend very much on those running it at the time. This field experience mirrors issues raised in **Part 1**.

When doing analysis to support advocacy, UNAMA HR looks for trends in tactics or policies that cause civilian casualties. For example: the use of mortars in civilian populated areas; the abandonment of firing ranges without adequate clearing of unexploded ordnance; or the use of victim-activated IEDs. Casualty information and trends on their own will not reveal all threats to civilians. As an example, casualties may decrease in areas where opposition forces have consolidated control, but other issues relevant to civilian protection might remain, for example parallel systems of justice. Further contextual knowledge is needed to identify these issues and determine the action that needs taking to address them.

“ Anything that we publish will be so totally examined and we will be so controversial politically, I think I’ve become much more aware of the importance of being extremely accurate and extremely strict – current UNAMA HR staff

Advocacy on trends, or on individual incidents that caused civilian deaths or injuries, is pursued in both public and private tracks, used in combination and balance as part of overall strategy. The credibility and accuracy of the data, and its acceptance, is crucial: **productive dialogue needs to focus on identifying a problem of civilian harm from compelling evidence and seeking solutions for its mitigation, rather than on questioning the evidence base.**

“ We wanted the narrative to stay on civilians being harmed...it’s very straightforward, there’s no good way to bomb a village – former UNAMA HR staff

Most private advocacy has been with **international forces, with whom a relationship has been built up over several years**. This relationship includes regular engagement at the central and regional levels, developed when it became clear that a more structured, formal relationship would be beneficial. It also includes high-level dialogue. Opening and keeping a space for dialogue and channels for communication has required understanding priorities and constructing appropriate framings, gaining trust and building acceptance of data. Interactions with international forces include raising awareness on trends of concern, giving advice or recommendations, and lobbying for investigations on certain cases. Private **advocacy is also done with Afghan forces, but interaction is more recently established and limited**, resulting in fewer examples of concrete changes in behaviour.

**With armed opposition forces, dialogue is limited to exchanges of public statements or indirect or local engagement** as described above. This is an acknowledged limitation of UNAMA HR’s work. Possibilities for dialogue are made harder by issues such as the lack of approachable structures and the fragmentation of the armed opposition, but in earlier years resistance by the UN in Afghanistan to attempt such dialogue, and its own politicisation, could also have been factors. Accusations of bias persist in the public rhetoric of Taliban statements on UNAMA HR’s public reports, but UNAMA HR continues to try to find ways to develop dialogue. Working out how to create a space for dialogue and maintain it is a key consideration for effective action upon casualty recording, and one that UNAMA HR has so far been unable to solve with the armed opposition. One further reason why the relationship with international forces is now well-developed, and has been the biggest focus for UNAMA HR in its dialogue activities, is because civilian casualties caused by international forces were reported to have produced the most public outrage.

On the public side, UNAMA HR sometimes makes statements after large incidents, to call attention to actions that harm civilians and the need for conflict parties to change their conduct. **UNAMA HR’s main public advocacy tool is their twice-yearly public reports on the protection of civilians in armed conflict in Afghanistan, which feature information about civilian casualties heavily, but also other threats to civilian protection.** These have been published since 2008.<sup>96</sup> **Where dialogue with conflict parties exists, the public report is used strategically in combination with private dialogue to encourage action.** For example, where action is not being taken on a trend or issue of concern, that issue may feature prominently in the public report, which is picked up by media outlets worldwide. Before publication, data-checking takes place to ensure utmost accuracy in the reports. The reports are also reviewed by a range of parties and experts, including other UN agencies in Afghanistan where the report refers to issues relevant to their work. Advance copies are also circulated to parties to the conflict for their formal response and as part of the overall advocacy strategy, and to the UN in New York and OHCHR in Geneva for insights from a political and technical/legal perspective respectively. Any new information or corrections suggested by parties will be evaluated for incorporation.

Other analysis is shared with the UN in New York and Geneva (in procedures described as sometimes time-consuming), for example: at the time of mandate renewal, to emphasise the importance of PoC work (the Protection Cluster has a role in giving briefings in this context); for the Secretary-General’s reports on PoC or Children and Armed Conflict; when the Security Council needs information; for statements by the Secretary-General; or to the Emergency Relief Coordinator. However, **UNAMA HR’s focus is much**

**more at the local level with the conflict parties involved than with UNHQ.**

### 3. Uses and impact of UNAMA HR's casualty recording

The specific examples in this section show how UNAMA HR's data on civilian casualties has been used in practice for victim assistance, humanitarian response and the reduction of civilian casualties, showing the benefits of UNAMA HR's civilian casualty recording to conflict-affected people in Afghanistan, and the limits to these. The benefits elaborated here reflect those raised in **Part 1**.

#### 3.1 Victim assistance

Referral of victims for assistance is a key benefit of casualty recording: **without knowledge of casualties, survivors and family members cannot be assisted.** There is not a comprehensive national programme for the medical, social and livelihood assistance of victims of violence in Afghanistan,<sup>94</sup> but UNAMA HR uses its data to contribute to some initiatives. The Afghanistan Civilian Assistance Program (ACAP)<sup>95</sup> gives material assistance to families and communities who have suffered casualties and damage to their property caused by international forces. On request, UNAMA HR confirms whether certain cases of civilian casualties, as a result of which assistance was sought from ACAP, are verified according to UNAMA HR's database, so that assistance can be given. As part of their work, regional staff make individuals who they have made contact with through casual-

ty recording aware of this programme, and of other organisations that might assist them. UNAMA HR shares information about casualties with MACCA for their victim assistance activities, and with UNICEF, who are sometimes able to refer victims or families to counselling and other services. UNAMA HR has supported NGO programmes in other ways through their data, for example by sharing information on trends in IED injuries with an NGO bidding for funds to establish a hospital.



The site of a vehicle borne improvised explosive device (IED) in Kabul. (© Brenda Nipper <http://flic.kr/p/5T5tU9>)

#### Box 9: Publication, public acknowledgement, and immediate and long-term priorities

UNAMA HR orients its twice-yearly protection of civilians reports, which it has published since 2008,<sup>96</sup> to publicly highlight for most effect the key trends that need action, rather than to give a comprehensive report on all data (which would be extremely long and risk being dry). **The actual database is never shared with anyone else for reasons of confidentiality, but complete case-by-case data<sup>97</sup>** would also never be published as a matter of strategy. UNAMA HR is focused on developing concerted dialogue on what it sees as the most pressing issues for civilians. Even though UNAMA HR is confident in its work, it does not present its full incident-specific data for two reasons: firstly for security, for example to avoid the inadvertent exposure of sources that could be relatively easily traced in many rural settings; and secondly, to help ensure that staff resources and public discourse are focused on the key trends of harm identified rather than the debating of specific incidents. Somewhat greater transparency of data was not seen as undesirable (if sufficient confidentiality were retained), but the sharing of data without a specific purpose was not seen as the optimal use of limited time and resources.

For a focus on immediate action in a political environment, this is a supportable strategic decision taken by UNAMA HR to carry out its priorities. In terms of the need (at some point) for a complete public record of the harm caused by the conflict in Afghanistan, with the other functions this might have such as for transitional justice, this may be the role not of a UN mission but of a long-term, national organisation or ad-hoc body such as a truth and reconciliation commission – though arguably any entity that has casualty data should contribute.

**Publication to draw attention to the suffering of civilians in Afghanistan is part of UNAMA HR's work. The importance of this, and of feeding information back to communities, was especially emphasised by the national staff interviewed.**

However, this is done by publishing overall numbers and disaggregated trends, highlighted with reference to certain individual cases, rather than a release of all cases.

<sup>94</sup> Various actors are working to change this – see Center for Civilians in Conflict (2013) <http://civiliansinconflict.org/resources/pub/caring-for-their-own>

<sup>95</sup> See <http://www.ird.org/our-work/programs/acap>

<sup>96</sup> For a full list of all published reports, see <http://unama.unmissions.org/Default.aspx?tabid=13941&language=en-US>

<sup>97</sup> As opposed to statements on particular cases, or private discussion of particular cases with conflict parties.

### 3.2 Humanitarian response and coordination

Information about incidents of casualties can contribute to humanitarian programming through providing one aspect of knowledge about an emergency situation, as described in **Part 1**. UNAMA HR shares incident or trend information with other UN agencies where it is relevant to their work – for example, reports of incidents that could affect issues such as food security or the movement of internally displaced people are passed on to the relevant agencies for action. There is coordination with the Resident Coordinator's Office, the Protection Cluster and with UNDSS, amongst others. For this kind of cooperation, promptness in the recording and sharing of information is imperative, for example for mission planning and early warning. Operational information sharing is done bilaterally rather than through other structures due to the speed with which information needs to be passed on for humanitarian purposes.

### 3.3 Changes in conflict party policies and behaviour, reducing civilian casualties

**In Afghanistan, civilian casualties have been a matter of public concern and a high profile political issue for several years.** Around the time that UNAMA HR started its casualty recording, the government of Afghanistan and politicians, NGOs, local and international media, tribal elders, and Afghan public outrage put a large amount of pressure on conflict parties, including international forces, about the growing impact of the conflict on civilians.

“ If we could get, for example, international forces to take extra precautions in military strikes and actually avoid civilian areas where there are so many uncertainties about who's present, we felt that concrete things would happen and that would basically save lives in the future – former UNAMA HR staff

In this context, UNAMA HR, AIHRC, and NGOs documenting specific incidents (such as Human Rights Watch) were seeking to use evidence to change behaviour, particularly on the issue of international forces' airstrikes killing civilians. 2008 was a significant turning point, wherein key documentation and evidence from UNAMA HR on an airstrike in Shindand was reported by respondents to have *contributed* to changes in a tactical directive on airstrikes (along with the actions and evidence of other organisations and the willingness of ISAF itself to consider this change). UNAMA HR demonstrated publicly that ISAF's reporting on the effects of the attack was incorrect.<sup>98</sup> The policy change on airstrikes was shown by UNAMA HR's data to have subsequently reduced civilian casualties from such incidents. Other ISAF policy changes aimed at reducing civilian casualties can be attributed to similar factors, including ISAF's own casualty tracking and interaction with UNAMA HR and others' evidence-based advocacy.



A poster in Kabul listing the names of over 300 people allegedly killed by the Taliban in 2001. (© Afghan Justice Seekers, <http://flic.kr/p/j4r86h>)

Based on ORG's interviews, over the lifetime of UNAMA HR's system **international forces have become more open to the discussion of data and to PoC, with interaction moving from negative responses to data and its credibility to careful consideration of the points brought and openness about policies.** For example, in UNAMA HR's 2013 mid-year PoC report a willingness by ISAF to brief UNAMA HR on its criteria for establishing the positive identification of targets in the case of Unmanned Aerial Vehicle strikes was noted (if not yet forthcoming).<sup>99</sup> More openness will be explained by several factors, but UNAMA HR's consistently credible documentation of casualties and engagement to raise awareness of the harm caused to civilians may be one. In terms of the attitudes of opposition groups, the political Taliban feels the need to respond to UNAMA HR's reports using the language of the protection of civilians, and to make statements on measures taken to avoid and mitigate casualties.<sup>100</sup> A trend of decline in the use of Pressure Plate IEDs, which are victim-activated and indiscriminate, was reported after this was highlighted in a public report. However it is hard to establish a direct causal link here. The broader context of the unacceptability of civilian casualties to Afghans and the strategic importance of this to conflict parties should be considered, among other factors.

The following examples show the practical change that can be achieved through advocacy to the benefit of civilians: In 2012, ISAF issued a 'fragmentary order' on airstrikes stipulating that aerial-delivered munitions could only be used on civilian residences in situations of self-defence and as a last resort. This followed an airstrike on a civilian home which caused particularly high casualties in Logar province, subsequent to which UNAMA HR conducted several meetings with ISAF drawing attention to the issue, and stated that these incidents would be highlighted in the next public

<sup>98</sup> The Shindand incident was one factor amongst others, including internal changes within ISAF, which led to ISAF's establishment of civilian harm tracking. See Center for Civilians in Conflict (2014) for a full account of the mechanism and its establishment.

<sup>99</sup> UNAMA (2013) p41

<sup>100</sup> See for example UNAMA (2014) p34

report.<sup>101</sup> No similar incidents have been recorded by UNAMA since the fragmentary order was issued, showing that **changes in policy centrally can translate into real changes in actions and for civilians.**

Another example is of joint advocacy with MACCA on unexploded ordnance not cleared from old firing ranges when ISAF shut down bases, causing deaths and injuries to civilians going into those areas. Private advocacy based on MACCA and UNAMA HR's data preceded the trend's inclusion in UNAMA HR's 2013 mid-year report<sup>102</sup> and statements to the media. This has encouraged the creation of a new countrywide policy to ensure clearance following future base closures (though not bases already closed, which is problematic<sup>103</sup>). This is significant given the problem of unexploded ordnance in Afghanistan and the damage it can cause to lives and livelihoods, both through death and injury and through making certain areas inaccessible.

In terms of the actions of national forces, some successes were reported with the Afghan Local Police (ALP).<sup>104</sup> At central level, advocacy on abuses by local militias with the Ministry of Interior was reportedly well received and resulted in arrests (though accountability was not necessarily followed through to prosecution<sup>105</sup>). At the local level, staff reported successful advocacy with ALP on dangerous practices that caused casualties, such as giving lifts to family members whilst on duty.

Though these changes are focused on the reduction of civilian casualties, rather than their elimination or the end of hostilities, and though the most effective advocacy is with the conflict party that now causes the minority of harm, these changes are still highly significant to people living through conflict in Afghanistan. They also show that **casualty recording and action upon it can make a significant contribution to decreasing the suffering of civilians from conflict – it can potentially save lives.**

#### 4. Explaining successes and limitations

The following factors help explain UNAMA HR's achievements, but also some of the limitations, over the lifetime of their civilian casualty recording. These are useful to consider for the implementation of casualty recording by the UN in other contexts. This case study ends with some perspectives from interviewees on the lessons of UNAMA HR's work for UN casualty recording elsewhere, as they are a group with insights into what can make this work effective.

##### 4.1 Strategy, leadership, and alliance-building

Respondents reported UNAMA HR's **focus and purpose in casualty recording as a key factor in its successes** –

without this, data gathering could have been an ineffectual exercise through a lack of goals and planned means to achieve them. UNAMA HR's claims to success in its civilian casualties work and public profile, in turn, reportedly built confidence and support within the UN system in the work, encouraging its sustainability and continuation. This study suggests that leadership was key to the step-change to more systematic and effective casualty recording in 2008, and to the purpose-driven nature of UNAMA HR's work on civilian casualties. Good leadership was necessary to overcome political obstacles to pursuing this work, to effectively manage and motivate staff, and to develop a strategy for effective action. The system has become institutionalised as a result of both that initial leadership and the efforts of those that followed, meaning that whatever the rate of staff turnover, the system and its effectiveness can survive. **If effective casualty recording is more widely understood and supported within the UN as a priority activity for the protection of civilians, field-level leadership may more routinely take it on.**

UNAMA HR's relationship-building on the issue of civilian casualties has also been an important factor in both successes and limitations. Concentrating on developing a successful connection with international and national security forces for dialogue and structured interaction has been vital to UNAMA HR's achievements, but the lack of similar relationships with other, harder to reach conflict parties is a limitation. Alliance building and cooperation with other actors in Afghanistan has been important to generating a greater weight behind UNAMA HR's advocacy. This has involved developing joint policy positions and joint advocacy within and outside the UN; producing and publishing information that others would trust enough to use in their own work; and being able to act on others' information when they could not (for example for security reasons). Organisations working in different but complementary ways on civilian casualties in Afghanistan have been important and useful.

##### 4.2 Political context, buy-in

As mentioned above, civilian casualties are a major political issue in Afghanistan given, in part, the widespread concern among Afghan citizens about the conflict's impact on civilians. Though civilian casualties are used politically in Afghanistan against international forces and governments, and to build political capital domestically, interviewees reported that political will exists in the Afghan government to address the issue, and **there is buy-in to the concept of the protection of civilians among many conflict parties.** Reasons for this include the government and armed opposition's needs for the support of civilians in Afghanistan for their objectives in the conflict; similarly, international forces re-

<sup>101</sup> For UNAMA HR's own commentary on this, see UNAMA, 'Afghanistan: Mid-Year Report 2012, Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict in Afghanistan' (2012) [http://unama.unmissions.org/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=-\\_vDVBQY10A%3d&tabid=12254&language=en-US](http://unama.unmissions.org/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=-_vDVBQY10A%3d&tabid=12254&language=en-US)

<sup>102</sup> See UNAMA (2013)

<sup>103</sup> See UNAMA (2014) p66

<sup>104</sup> These are local defence militias rather than a police service. Disconcerting trends of abuse and casualties are associated with the ALP.

<sup>105</sup> See UNAMA (2014) p52

quire support from their home-country publics and politicians. Apart from instrumental considerations, genuine concern for civilian life is also important. Buy-in and willingness were likely major factors in UNAMA HR's contributions to change through advocacy. Some openness to protection and to discussing issues and cases has been key – where operations are covert, action has been far harder (see **Box 6** p31). Some interviewees pointed out that UNAMA HR's advocacy being locally focused to Afghanistan and so not requiring as much support from UNHQ also decreased political complications (though the interventions and support of high-profile UN figures have been helpful, and maintaining a spotlight on the issue internationally through the media for example has been important). In other contexts, different factors and pressures may mean that success in this kind of advocacy could be much harder (as discussed in **Part 1** in relation to the cases of Syria and Sri Lanka). Political challenges to casualty recording are also discussed in **Part 3**.



A father and son on a US helicopter, following treatment for injuries from the bombing of a wedding party. (© Marshall Emerson, <http://flic.kr/p/5Dcpzt>)

Under UN Security Council Resolution 2096 (2013) on Afghanistan, UNAMA is currently responsible “to monitor the situation of civilians, to coordinate efforts to ensure their protection, to promote accountability” with the support of OHCHR and in cooperation with the government, and international and local NGOs, as part of its human rights work.<sup>106</sup> **The resolution also recognises the importance of monitoring and reporting to the UNSC on the situation of civilians, particularly civilian casualties, and mentions UNAMA HR’s public reports on PoC, which was seen as supportive and useful by respondents.**<sup>107</sup> Mandate language on “monitoring the situation of civilians in armed conflict” has been present since 2007.<sup>108</sup> The impression from interviewees was that the inclusion of language on ‘monitoring’ and ‘protection’ was useful, but not a critical enabling factor for casualty recording. It was noted that language on ‘monitoring’ is

often present in mandates without specification of what this should mean, how it should be carried out or with what resources. This can either allow individuals to take the initiative, or means that monitoring does not happen.

As mentioned above, UNAMA HR’s methodology and tools were developed at the local level. At the time of setting up systems in 2008, tools and centrally set guidance available from OHCHR were seen as not adequately developed for the purpose in their specificity and usability, nor sufficiently focused on needs in the field. The advantages of local development include being able to tailor information gathering procedures and priorities to the context. There are also potential risks, such as that data produced to a local methodology would not find traction outside of that context, for example in advocacy at UNHQ level, if it was not produced to centrally set standards. This has not however been a challenge for UNAMA HR, as the perceptions of UNHQ respondents show.

### 4.3 Credibility of data, and impartiality

As highlighted throughout this case study, doing systematic and good-quality civilian casualty recording, showing clearly that this was what was being done, and thus gaining acceptance of data to move conversations beyond a dispute about information towards action to help civilians, has been a crucial part of UNAMA HR’s strategy in advocacy and information sharing. Credibility of data is earned as a perception of target audiences: it is earned through UNAMA HR’s demonstration of methodological rigour, but not through UNAMA HR conforming to a specific set of criteria defined in advance by these target audiences. Common standards within the UN for casualty recording may make this more easily replicable.

High levels of staff motivation on civilian casualty recording were reported in our research, partly due to the impact that staff could see from their work. For national staff, it was also a matter of investment in the future of their communities. Staff commitment, as in any organisation, helps ensure quality of work. The knowledge that impact depended on the quality of data produced, and that it would be heavily scrutinised, was also reported to encourage accuracy in documentation. Incentivising quality work is key.

“ The fact that our reports are made public regularly and the fact that they have such a big impact politically and in the media, that also keeps everyone very motivated – current UNAMA HR staff

Underpinning some of the factors brought up in this section is the issue of impartiality. Showing impartiality helps build confidence in data, and was crucial to building relationships for dialogue.<sup>109</sup> **Whatever body pursues advo-**

<sup>106</sup> S/RES/2096 (2013) Afghanistan [http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/2096\(2013\)](http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/2096(2013)) p9 paragraph 7c

<sup>107</sup> *ibid.* p6

<sup>108</sup> S/RES/1746 (2007) Afghanistan <http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N07/280/47/PDF/N0728047.pdf?OpenElement> p2

<sup>109</sup> The importance of impartiality in casualty recording was also noted in ORG’s previous research. See Minor (2012) section 2.3.3

**cacy on casualty recording for protection must be in a position to reach out to all relevant parties without being linked to any of them**, or trust and dialogue will be hard to develop. Both data collection through primary sources and advocacy can be challenging if an organisation is not, or is not seen to be, impartial by key audiences (broader perceptions may not be as important). For UNAMA HR, perceptions of UNAMA's closeness to international forces and to the government may have hampered alliances and, among other factors, obstructed the building of a dialogue with opposition forces.

#### 4.4 Perspectives on implementing casualty recording elsewhere

The key lessons that interviewees drew from UNAMA HR's work, in terms of how the experience could be useful to implementing casualty recording other contexts, were:

- Casualty recording is valuable: good data is needed for an effective response, towards protecting civilians.
- The general principles and basic structure of UNAMA HR's civilian casualty recording methodology are widely applicable to many contexts, even if particular tools, categories and certain procedures could not be exactly transplanted elsewhere. Key factors in success such as staff commitment and adherence to procedure also need investment. The experience nevertheless gives valuable lessons on how to do this work.
- Three elements are essential to do casualty recording and make it useful to the protection and assistance of civilians:
  - A standardised or pre-developed methodology (but one which has the capacity to be adapted to context, and updated and improved over time), with the tools to carry it out, including a good information management system (database) that can assist data quality and analysis;
  - Adequate resources to carry out the work to the necessary standard (which may vary between contexts), and political support for the casualty recording system within the UN, to implement the system and support advocacy. In Afghanistan, casualty recording developed because of the need for more comprehensive and systematic evidence than that obtainable from documenting emblematic cases (the approach that UNAMA HR's casualty recording grew out of). The fact that UNAMA already had a large Human Rights section with local offices, which could be deployed to this priority alongside other work following programme reorganisation and the initial addition of some staff, was a clear advantage in making this happen. In other contexts, the available capacity for recording might be elsewhere, or need to be drawn from a combination of sources. Locating the responsibility to record is discussed in **Part 3**;
  - A purpose for the system, so that data is produced, analysed and used practically, and crucially a plan to

achieve this purpose – including ensuring adequate resources and capacity to put data to use.

- Some interviewees reported that no structured sharing of their expertise and lessons-learned, which could support the implementation of casualty recording elsewhere, had been achieved. Existing mechanisms for sharing best practices, and other UN processes to review how information about casualties is handled within the UN system, should fully utilise the expertise of current and former UNAMA HR staff.

There are several challenging aspects to effectively recording casualties in Afghanistan: security issues, the inaccessibility of certain areas, and difficulties engaging with opposition forces, amongst others. Despite the advantages that UNAMA HR has had in recording casualties, this does not mean that it has been easy or that its success was guaranteed. However, **one of the reasons why this report does not recommend that UNAMA HR's system should be directly replicated elsewhere is the question of scaling up this work**. As detailed above, UNAMA HR's procedure of verification is strict, and prioritises on-the-ground investigation. In other contexts, higher numbers of civilian casualties and the lack of capacity to investigate these all on the ground could demand a slightly different model, using different ways of getting sources or a different standard of confirmation (for example by dropping the 'three source type verification' requirement in favour of lesser corroboration). This speaks to the concept of a range in casualty recording practice:<sup>110</sup> the same levels of detail and confirmation may not always be possible, but casualty recording can still produce data that is useful. The challenge for the UN, as for any casualty recorder in any given set of circumstances, is to show the value and gain acceptance of the data produced, through demonstrating accuracy and credibility. For this, common standards for casualty recording would be highly beneficial.



In contexts such as Syria, where the number of casualties is high and access is severely restricted, different procedures for casualty recording may be needed. ORG's report *Stolen Futures* describes the work of civil society casualty recorders in Syria <http://ref.ec/sf> (© Freedom House <http://flic.kr/p/dmibTK>)

<sup>110</sup> See Minor (2012) Section 2

## PART 3: MEETING CHALLENGES TO UN CASUALTY RECORDING

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### 1. Introduction

The final part of this report analyses key challenges and limitations to UN entities, in relation to casualty recording and information on casualties, identified from both our UNHQ-focused and UNAMA HR case-study research, with conclusions for advancing the implementation and use of casualty recording by the UN.

Universal challenges to systematic casualty recording include *capacity* and *access* constraints. With regard to the former, UNHQ respondents widely regarded casualty recording at field-level to be resource intensive, though UNAMA HR respondents emphasised how existing capacity was used to achieve casualty recording, and that the system was good *value* given its results. Access constraints were identified as a challenge to casualty recording by both UNHQ and UNAMA HR respondents, but as the UNAMA HR case shows, effective casualty recording can still be done in spite of such limitations.<sup>111</sup>

### 2. Comprehensive or emblematic-case approach

“ The way we address gathering data on casualties is as a part of our general human rights monitoring and fact-finding work. It’s one of the types of information that we obtain, when we can, to have a clearer picture of the situation and also to strengthen our advocacy with the presentation of data. It’s about violations. K

“ With the general information that we have we can get a sense of what’s happening in a place, but I think casualty recording will definitely add value there. L

There was a divide amongst UNHQ interviewees as to whether an approach that highlights cases of casualties taken to be emblematic of a situation, as undertaken by OHCHR and the MRM, is sufficient for mobilising responses to the impact of conflict, in comparison to comprehensive documentation on casualties. Interviewees raised both approaches as useful to advocacy.

As discussed in **Part 1**, respondents from entities such as OHCHR and CAAC, while working on select cases thoroughly for accountability purposes, also use and see value in comprehensive information on casualties for advocacy. Although these respondents did not feel they needed systematic and comprehensive information on deaths to fulfil their organisational mandates, they felt that it could reinforce activities to meet their objectives. In contrast, F, G, and I reported that comprehensive and systematic information on casualties was necessary for thematic and country-level reporting and advocacy – if good information were regularly available, this would be extremely useful to keeping the Security Council, Member States, Secretary-General and the humanitarian system better informed of developments in the field. Q, who works on developing eligibility guidelines for refugees, also felt that comprehensive information supported their work.

In UNAMA HR, casualty recording was developed to support evidence-based advocacy oriented at mitigating harm to civilians. Although UNAMA HR began its work using an emblematic-case approach, this was deemed insufficient for the purpose, and it was decided that more comprehensive data was necessary. This example suggests some circumstances under which comprehensive casualty recording might be required for advocacy to reduce civilian casualties: when there is high public and political scrutiny of levels of casualties; or when there is a need for information about patterns of harm, as opposed to individual incidents, to show the use and impact of certain weapons or tactics.

#### 2.1 Section analysis and recommendation

Context, function and audience are key in determining whether emblematic cases or comprehensive casualty information is preferable for advocacy. Individuals and UN entities might determine that their particular purposes can be met with one or the other approach. However, there are considerations that favour a comprehensive approach and the implementation of casualty recording. As **Part 1** demonstrates, comprehensive casualty information is in demand for various purposes, advocacy one amongst them. As such, attention should be paid to the notion of “One UN,” which, as this research suggests, will reveal multiple uses of comprehensive information on casualties, which can then be shared with various end-users. In any case,

<sup>111</sup> Respondents discussed “access” generically. The authors acknowledge that there are different challenges and degrees of access constraints, as well as ways in which these can be overcome (for example by effectively building contacts and networks).

taking a comprehensive approach does not preclude advocacy on emblematic-cases, which could be taken from individual records in a larger dataset. Potentially, a comprehensive approach to recording casualties could enhance emblematic-case advocacy, by offering a larger pool from which representative cases could be drawn.

### 3. Obtaining satisfactory data

“ There are not as many listings on killing and maiming, because even when incidents are reported it is far harder to know if the information has truly been verified, under what circumstances, and it is reliable. A

“ Because they rely on personnel, obviously, out in the field to collect information and because I've seen huge differences in how they are collected, at DPA, we are very cognisant of the limitations and importance of numbers in our work. B

Obtaining satisfactory data was a major challenge posed by the majority of UNHQ respondents. If information on casualties is doubted, unclear, or results from methodologically unsound practice, then using it for various activities may be impossible or problematic. This assessment was reflected in the views of UNAMA HR respondents.

#### 3.1 Achieving reliability, credibility, and trust in data

“ If it's not credible, then it also has effects. If you're going to put that [information] out you want to make sure that it is credible, because that's what happened in Darfur where it wasn't credible and that, to a certain extent, influenced the way they dealt with Sri Lanka - it was informed by the experience in Darfur. O

UNHQ respondents consistently reported reliability and credibility as qualities that information on casualties must have in order to be used. However, there were no formal definitions of these given by respondents that were known to be applicable across UN entities.<sup>112</sup> Important factors shaping perceptions of reliability and credibility included: whether respondents trusted individuals or organisations at field level; whether they knew the process by which information was produced and had confidence that that process was adhered to; or whether, over time, they came to understand that a data-provider, whether UN or NGO, provided material consistently and, if double-checked internally, gave information representative of reality on the ground.



Children play with the remnants of a bomb in Darfur. Darfur was reported as a context in which the casualty information the UN was quoting was not seen as credible. (© UN Photo/Albert Gonzalez Farran <http://bit.ly/1eeBCTI>)

Checks on information produced externally were frequently employed by UN entities: whether by checking with field staff about the reputation of a non-UN entity producing casualty information; or, where possible, by corroborating information with the media or internally with colleagues at field-level. Checking procedures varied across organisations according to internal data requirements and the uses of the information. For example, for organisations with stringent checking procedures, such as OHCHR, respondents reported that credible information came from a systematic approach of gathering information through triangulation<sup>113</sup> and primary-source interviews. Where information is acquired through secondary or tertiary sources, then credibility is affected. Respondent A (working at CAAC) reported using such “imperfect information”, under the label of “non-verified information,” for the purpose of understanding the broader background to particular incidents. Such data could not be used to fulfil objectives contingent on verified information.

“ Partners send us regular monthly reports. We obviously question where they got their information, whether they saw the victims themselves. A

“ There are instances when we can be slightly less rigorous with our sources. If we have relative clarity and we know that their work has been successfully verified over a long period of time, we may take the set of cases and not need to have each one verified, especially if there are a large number and they follow a familiar pattern. We might do this if we know about their level of experience and out reach, and that their partners know what we require. A

<sup>112</sup> Widely recognised criteria for assessing reliability and credibility of sources and information in individual cases do however exist in the field of human rights documentation – see for example OHCHR (2001)

<sup>113</sup> Essentially, using three different sources to corroborate information.

As was touched on in **Part 1**, one person may regard a piece of information or its source to be reliable and credible, whilst another may not. This was particularly the case where NGOs were concerned, but was also found within the UN. From their field experience, one respondent observed that individuals working within UN entities do not necessarily consistently observe and apply standardised information-gathering and analysis practices. C and D also reported that field-level JOCs are not systematised and produce and report information differently, including information on casualties.

Ultimately, there is a need for reliability and credibility to be defined and implemented formally, rather than remaining intuited, subjective, or contextual. This can be developed as part of a UN process to develop basic standards and principles for casualty recording. The development of standards in casualty recording within the UN should take into account existing guidelines and other initiatives working to standardise different types of incident reporting, such as on the monitoring, analysis and reporting arrangements (MARA) on conflict-related sexual violence, and WHO/ UNHCR work on attacks against healthcare facilities and personnel. Doing so may provide opportunity for cross-UN information exchange, so that UN entities can more effectively use each other's information.

### 3.2 Varied data requirements and harmonisation

“Casualties are very sensitive because there's no certainty on numbers – it's rare to know for sure a specific number has been killed in a given country. M

From our UNHQ research, variation between UN entities in what they require in information about casualties is seen to range from the details needed about individuals and incidents (e.g. sex, ethnicity, location, etc.) to the methodologies, definitions, and verification processes used in obtaining information. This variation has implications for information exchange within the UN and meeting organisational needs.

For example, the OGPRTOP requires information on casualties according to its Analysis Framework.<sup>114</sup> The Office remains largely dependent on other UN entities for information; however, the details about incidents and individuals that respondents reported requiring are inconsistently and rarely provided (see **Chart 1** for details p13). As a result, respondent M described infrequently obtaining the data needed to fulfil their mandated obligations. While the Office aspires to develop an analytical capacity to produce assessments and advocacy towards preventing genocide, respondents reported that it depends predominantly on entities such as UNOCC and Mission SitCen's reports, which are not designed to convey comprehensive or systematic information on casualties.

Quality requirements are also a challenge. As an example, OHCHR's stringent verification requirements mean that any information they receive from others through a collaborative or integrative process requires further investigation and checking before it can be used to fulfil their particular objectives.

Given disparate information requirements, the integration of findings to develop more comprehensive information might be plausible in theory, but, as P explains, there are clear challenges to integrating or aggregating and analysing information comprehensively in practice:

“Somebody would talk about casualties, and you don't know if are they talking about injured persons, or attempted attacks; differences in methodology, verification and typology will not allow you to actually compare data, because these things are not standardised. So, it's very difficult to get systematised data from missions and the humanitarian community. P

In the UNAMA HR example, information is generally shared within the UN in Afghanistan on the level of analysis of incidents or trends, which can include disaggregation by age, sex, weapon type etc. The issue of having different definitions and criteria to other entities was not raised as an obstacle to this. This may be partly because UNAMA HR is known as the main producer of casualty information, and their processes and criteria are well known within Afghanistan and are considered credible, making sharing easier.

### 3.3 Section analysis and recommendation

Obtaining satisfactory information on casualties was articulated as a major challenge to a number of UNHQ respondents. UN actors who engage in casualty recording should consider how to achieve successful sharing to benefit different UN entities, given varying requirements regarding verification and details about those killed. Dialogue between UN entities, at HQ and field-level, about methodology and standards, would assist agreement on common concepts of credibility and reliability, with advantages for the widest usability of casualty information at field and HQ-level.

## 4. Political challenges in casualty recording and the use of data

Casualty figures have the propensity towards being instrumentalised by various actors. The politics of numbers manifests in several ways: whether casualty information is rejected flatly or dismissed as inaccurate if it does not represent a palatable finding; whether it is used in politically divisive ways, such as support for military engagement; or whether support for recording is dismissed by member states because it is seen as a potential avenue for their incrimination.

<sup>114</sup> See [http://www.un.org/en/preventgenocide/adviser/pdf/osapg\\_analysis\\_framework.pdf](http://www.un.org/en/preventgenocide/adviser/pdf/osapg_analysis_framework.pdf)

In the UNAMA HR case, in terms of casualties in Afghanistan becoming a political tool or issue between Member States, the context was a different one to, for example, cases of alleged mass violations of human rights by a government against its citizens and debate over what intervention there should be. Where political dynamics are different locally and internationally, a question for the UN is whether receptiveness to advocacy on civilian casualties could be developed amongst conflict parties through sensitisation where it is not present, and if so how.



Opposition fighters in Syria. Syria was identified as a context in which casualty figures have not appeared to have enabled or informed consistent action by states. (© Rami Alhames, <http://flic.kr/p/dxR4yE>)

There are also political and coordination challenges between UN entities. In particular, tensions exist between UN entities working in accountability, advocacy, humanitarian, and political capacities regarding how casualty information should be used.

For example, UN humanitarians who may have casualty information can be less inclined to share it with those pursuing advocacy on political or accountability issues. As F and H explained, the major concern in such a situation is that certain types of advocacy might adversely affect humanitarian operations and the security of humanitarian workers and beneficiaries. The level of concern can depend on the type of information involved, for example whether it includes evidence of violations that implicate those that control a territory, or more general information about trends of harm. It can also depend on the type of advocacy that others might perform using the information, and if this was seen as likely to result in retaliation as opposed to positive engagement on protection. Finally, concern would be greater if conflict parties might be able to trace information back to humanitarians of the people they served. If for example UN humanitarians are the only actors in a given environment, anonymity becomes implausible: it may be obvious that they are providing information on casualties.

“ The question of does feeding information implicate humanitarians is always an issue. The problem is if you’re the only organisation out there, then it’s kind of obvious who would be privy to that information. F

Respondents also reported tensions between different tracks of UN advocacy: political dialogue and accountability. Entities such as DPA or Missions pursuing political dialogue concurrent to accusations related to accountability were regarded as potentially mutually disadvantageous and even counterproductive. These challenges, however, are not exclusive to casualty information.

In UNAMA HR, overcoming such intra-UN tensions has been attempted through building cooperation and alliances on civilian casualties, focused on respect for the mandates of different agencies and organisations in Afghanistan, and the complementarity of roles in relation to civilian protection and assistance. Under one phase of leadership, the work was stated to be operating under a humanitarian framework, to facilitate cooperation and insulate the work from a range of political challenges. Current UNAMA HR respondents stated the imperative of working together: success in this may again be largely dependent on the political role of civilian casualties in the context, and the personalities involved.

#### 4.1 Section analysis and recommendations

Respondents saw the purposeful recording of casualties and making this information available to Member States, the UN, and public as a necessary service. Mitigating the political challenges at state-level requires sensitisation to the issue, but also developing models that encourage trust in data. As the UNAMA HR experience demonstrates, this means being forthcoming with methodologies deployed, as well as limitations to information produced. However, it also may require engaging colleagues across the UN and humanitarian sphere as to how such information can be used without potentially harming operations.

Mitigating this may require developing guidance notes on information sharing and collaboration, as well as by ensuring consultation with humanitarians when information is used publicly for advocacy with conflict parties or at the international level. Due to the demonstrated impact casualty recording can have towards the fulfilment of civilians’ rights, this necessary caution should not be a cause for casualty recording to be undermined: effective ways of working through these challenges exist.

#### 5. Locating the responsibility to record

Although many respondents to this study considered casualty information useful, there was variation in perspectives on its implementation. This section addresses some of the alternatives for the UN in relation to advancing its use of casualty recording. That the UN should develop a more consistent and systematic approach to casualty recording is the key recommendation of this report. This report does not aim to provide a decision on whether one particular entity should be responsible for the UN’s casualty recording, and if so, which one. It presents the complexity in respondents’ comments on the issue, and discusses the pros and cons of alternative options for implementation.

As this report is focused on UN practice in casualty recording and UN use of casualty data, this section focuses on the potential solutions most useful to the demands and objectives identified in **Part 1**, and concentrates on the actions of UN entities. While the majority of respondents held that the UN, as an impartial voice during conflict, could feasibly have a role in casualty recording, C and J shared the perspective that casualty recording should be a national process, involving both state and independent institutions:

“ Part of what the UN can do is support local capacity. Because this is another thing about the UN, especially missions – you are expected by the local population to provide government-like services and then it makes it very hard to transition. I think the biggest contribution the UN can do is actually to build the local capacity to do it, instead of duplicating. C

States have the responsibility to record casualties. However, in conflict environments, and in particular where a state is involved in the conflict, recording casualties may prove problematic due to either capacity issues (hospitals and police, which normally serve this function, might not be able to) or because casualties become politically relevant and sensitive, so that state-produced casualty data is questioned or transparently biased. Conflict environments diverge, and the role of state institutions in recording casualties during and post-conflict will vary.<sup>115</sup> That the UN should facilitate national processes is sensible and ideal for transition. However, where the UN can impartially engage in casualty recording during conflict it may often provide greater value than a state-run mechanism. The following discussion concentrates on how the UN could fulfil such a role.

## 5.1 Models for implementation on the ground

### 5.1.1 UN: One entity

UNAMA HR is an example of a system run and owned by one entity on the ground. This has the advantage that UNAMA HR is in control of the quality of its data, and does not depend for consistent coverage on the contributions of others that it has no authority over. A potential disadvantage of such a model is information not being adequately coordinated and shared with others to whom it might be useful. UNAMA HR has made this a priority. In other contexts, the goals and terms of this would have to be structured and set.

UNHQ respondents were divided over whether, for a “one entity” approach at field level, a particular UN entity should be mandated to carry out casualty recording in every context, or whether this should be decided case by case, predicated on field-level capacity. An obvious challenge posed

by a context-based approach is the diversity of experiences across UN entities and actors, which could affect the methodologies employed and standards used. This challenge should be taken into consideration in future discussions, and also shows the advantages of developing common UN standards and tools for casualty recording.

### 5.1.2 UN: Integrative model

Another model for field implementation brought up in this study is for one body to gather and integrate information on casualties produced by UN (and potentially non-UN) entities in a conflict environment, and then further process this information in order to produce comprehensive and systematic data on casualties. Without certain measures relating to standardising data quality and the methodologies employed by data providers, such a system would merely report information collected by various groups with different standards: this would risk producing information that is either false or of low credibility. For such a system to generate consistent and good quality, disaggregated data, a number of considerations are essential, including: central criteria and standards for information collection; agreements such as on frequency of data gathering by those reporting casualties and incidents (i.e. whether they will attempt to record all incidents or not); and further corroboration and quality checks by coordinators.

### 5.1.3 Using the work of non-governmental organisations

NGOs often record casualties.<sup>116</sup> They may not be present in every conflict; however, where operational they often have good access, sometimes superior to the UN. NGOs can also face challenges in their efforts to both record and act on casualty information. These can include: capacity and financial limitations; the ability to effectively inform others of their findings; and access to policymakers to leverage information and effect change.

UNHQ respondents often used information on casualties produced by NGOs. Extending the use of NGO data by the UN could be especially helpful to the UN where there is an insufficient on-the-ground presence. Many of the issues that affected respondents’ ability to use information produced by other UN entities (such as credibility and reliability, and information and verification requirements) were also reported in relation to information produced by NGOs.<sup>117</sup> For consistent and beneficial working relationships to exist between the UN and NGOs, trust building and clarity about methodologies are necessary. Clearer standards and protocols should be developed to support this.

Importantly, however, the political context in which respondents might present NGO data (and the likelihood of its acceptance there) was identified as the key obstacle to its

<sup>115</sup> Some respondents questioned whether any state would record the casualties of armed conflict objectively. Miceli and Olgiati (2014) analyses states’ capacities and efforts towards recording casualties in both armed conflict and non-conflict environments, and the benefits reported for populations.

<sup>116</sup> See the International Practitioner Network of casualty recorders [www.everycasualty.org/ipn](http://www.everycasualty.org/ipn) and ORG’s Stolen Futures, on Syria <http://ref.ec/sf>

<sup>117</sup> ORG’s process to develop standards in casualty recording aims to assist casualty recorders and the users of their data overcome some of the issues described here. See **Part 2** p23 and Salama (2013)

use – not the data’s objective strength or accuracy. For example, Member States at the UNSC may be less able to reject as ‘biased’ data that is labelled as UN-produced or verified, even if NGO-produced data is superior.

Whichever model for implementation on the ground is adopted, consideration should be given to capacities for the collection and assessment of data in the design of methodologies and systems. Creating requirements that cannot be met (in terms of the level of detail or confirmation that must be achieved for example) will result in poor data and ineffective work.

## 5.2 Prospective candidates for a responsible entity

“ Well with civilian casualties, I don't know of any piece of the UN that has taken this on consistently and is established as the one for this. Human Rights is one possibility. OCHA is another. G

“ We see it as very much a part of our work, and the creation of the module in the new version of the database responds to a need to facilitate this work rather than have it done in a more ad hoc way. We see casualty recording as part of looking at the human rights situation in conflict, we see it as a natural part of the work we do. K

Whether casualty recording within the UN must be the responsibility of one particular UN entity was a point of debate and discussion. There were pros and cons to this notion. One of the benefits of locating responsibility and authority for recording casualties was that individuals who wanted to understand the effects of conflict in terms of deaths could refer to a focal point. A common expectation was that if one entity were made responsible, guidelines and methodologies, in addition to actual recording, must be more consistently designed and deployed. As an example of what is ideal, respondents referred to UNHCR’s guidelines on documenting refugees. These enabled respondents to trust UNHCR’s information both at face value as well as technically. There was confidence in UNAMA HR for similar reasons.

A major concern with regard to locating casualty recording in any particular entity was that it would be shaped by that entity’s wider mandate, goals, and capabilities. While OHCHR and OCHA were the two most frequently discussed potential focal points for casualty recording, both presented particular challenges.

### 5.2.1 On OHCHR

Casualty recording was seen as relevant to OHCHR’s work on violations and accountability, in addition to its advocacy relating to the impacts of conflict on civilians. As K explained, incorporating a “casualty-tracking module”

into their online database system is perceived as a first step<sup>118</sup> towards OHCHR systematising the recording of casualties, both in the Human Rights units of peacekeeping and political missions that report up to OHCHR, and in other contexts where OHCHR has a field presence. It was also noted that civilian casualty recording, where understood to fall under human rights and IHL monitoring, would fall under OHCHR’s mandate – though this is not by any means the only way in which casualty recording can be considered.

Despite this, there was a concern amongst respondents around the capacity of OHCHR to undertake this work in areas where they have a minimal or no presence. Concerns were raised about environments where only a Human Rights Advisor is present, rather than a field office. Furthermore, concerns were raised about OHCHR’s capacity and flexibility to deploy increased capacity in response to emergencies, as well as whether they would be able to get access to environments where civilians may be dying as a result of conflict.

Another concern, fundamental to the Rights Up Front initiative and Sri Lanka follow-up, is that OHCHR’s presence in New York is small, and influence upon the Security Council and Secretary-General could be strengthened, in particular on issues relating to PoC. A number of respondents did report that OHCHR’s access to the Security Council and Secretary-General has recently become more regular and systematic, as part of the Rights Up Front process. Also as part of Rights Up Front, OHCHR is undertaking a review of UN information management with respect to violations. Furthermore, OHCHR has been tasked to lead the monitoring of violations and civilian casualties from UNHQ, where the UN is unable to do so on the ground. The specific form that this will take is not yet clear. Multiple respondents to this study remained cautious around whether or not OHCHR would make data available to other UN entities. This was largely based on previous experiences where OHCHR has been guarded with the information they acquire from the field.

A further challenge posed related to OHCHR’s relationship to the Human Rights Council. The Council was recognised by UNHQ respondents as highly politicised. This presents a challenge to OHCHR advocacy activities, where these may produce tensions with the positions of Member States in this body.

A strength of OHCHR is that they have well-defined methodologies that could inform future casualty recording.<sup>119</sup> Such technical knowledge is an advantage and OHCHR’s work is generally trusted for this reason.

### 5.2.2 On OCHA

OCHA was also mentioned as an UN entity that could be responsible for recording casualties. From the perspective

<sup>118</sup> See Part 1 Section 3.3 p17 for further discussion of the module.

<sup>119</sup> See for example OHCHR (2001), which is currently being revised.

of respondent I, casualty recording by OCHA would rely on an integrative approach, requiring partners to contribute information to OCHA field staff operating in a coordinating function. Conversely, OHCHR's approach would involve human rights staff seeking out information, as well as receiving inputs from both UN entities and NGOs, which they would verify.

One of the major challenges for an OCHA-led casualty recording process relates to methodology. While the majority of respondents in **Part 1** emphasised the value in methodological consistency and transparency, OCHA has minimal experience in casualty recording to date and so would require building up guidelines and procedures from the ground-up. This is distinct from OHCHR, which has a formalised practice that could provide support to a casualty-recording methodology. If OCHA were to depend on an integrative approach, the issues of harmonisation raised above would likely be encountered. OCHA would require consistency in reporting by other UN entities and non-UN partners. It could be a challenge for OCHA to demand this of others, and to monitor whether standards were being met – strong partnerships and a sense of shared objectives and buy-in to achieving good quality casualty recording would be needed.

Benefits of an OCHA-led approach include its field presence; its access to the Security Council and Secretary-General, in particular around PoC; and its experience and capacity to distribute information. Although this study has not examined OCHA OPT (which was seen as an exceptional case for OCHA) and OCHA's Libya Crisis Map project, these cases present opportunities for lessons learned that could, in turn, shape any future methodologies.

Ultimately, both OHCHR- and OCHA-led casualty recording provide a host of challenges that should be dealt with before either entity could assume authority over recording casualties. Making determinations as to whether a single UN entity should be responsible on a context-by-context basis is a realistic alternative option.

### Final thought

Oxford Research Group views states as having the ultimate responsibility to record and acknowledge the deaths of individuals within their territory, or in territories where the state conducts military operations. However, there are challenges posed by state-led casualty recording in conflict zones, primarily relating to the political sensitivity of casualty recording, but also to factors such as capacity and reach.

Being able to scrutinise accurate information on the casualties of conflict is necessary for a host of reasons. Some of these may be unpalatable to states, and may disincentivise effective casualty recording by them. Casualty recording by non-state entities can have advantages over state-run mechanisms where the capacity or will to record is lacking, and should operate either alongside or in some cases in place of them.

The UN can play a role here. Although the UN should not replace states as ultimately responsible for promptly recording, correctly identifying and publicly acknowledging casualties, this report has shown that advancing casualty-recording practice within the UN could contribute to the work of multiple UN entities. Improved UN casualty recording could, as a result, benefit the conflict-affected people that the UN serves – as the work of UNAMA HR has done in Afghanistan.

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## APPENDIX: ABOUT UNHQ RESPONDENTS

| Respondent | No. of interviewees in interview | UN Entity working within | Section and/or expertise of interviewees  |
|------------|----------------------------------|--------------------------|---|
| A          | Three                            | CAAC                     | Office of the Special Representative on Children and Armed Conflict, MRM                      |
| B          | One                              | DPA                      | Policy and Mediation Division   |
| C          | One                              | DPKO                     | Situation Centre/UNOCC  |
| D          | One                              | DPKO                     | Protection of Civilians, Policy and Best Practices  |
| E          | One                              | IATFS                    | Planning, coordination  |
| F          | Two                              | OCHA                     | Policy Advice and Planning Section  |
| G          | One                              | OCHA                     | Policy Advice and Planning Section  |
| H          | One                              | OCHA                     | Policy Advice and Planning Section, humanitarian access                                       |
| I          | One                              | OCHA                     | Policy Branch, advocacy   |
| J          | One                              | OHCHR                    | Intergovernmental and Outreach Section  |
| K          | Two                              | OHCHR                    | Methodology, Education, and Training Section  |
| L          | One                              | OHCHR                    | Field Operations and Technical Cooperation Division   |
| M          | Two                              | OGPRtoP                  | Office on the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide and the Responsibility to Protect |
| N          | One                              | UNDP                     | Crisis Prevention and Recovery  |
| O          | One                              | UNDP                     | Crisis Prevention and Recovery  |
| P          | One                              | UNHCR                    | Division of International Protection  |
| Q          | One                              | UNHCR                    | Protection Information Unit   |
| R          | One                              | UNICEF                   | Child Protection in Emergencies, Programme Division, MRM                                      |
| S          | One                              | UNMAS                    | Monitoring and evaluation   |

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Elizabeth Minor is the Senior Research Officer of the Every Casualty programme at Oxford Research Group. She was the principal researcher on a two-year study by ORG to investigate practice in casualty recording worldwide, examining the methodologies used and challenges faced in the field of recording conflict deaths, through a global survey concentrating on civil society based recorders. She was the lead author and editor of the collection 'Good Practice in Casualty Recording', and author of the policy paper 'Towards the Recording of Every Casualty', which were produced from this study.

### Thanks to

All those who gave their time to participate in this study and review this paper (some anonymously and all very generously), for the valuable information they provided about their work, and their useful comments and support.

Action on Armed Violence, with whom this joint project was developed.

Kate Hofstra, Communications Officer of the Every Casualty programme, who provided support during the analysis phase of the research.

### Note on quotes

All the quotes given in this paper are from survey participants, used with their permission. This does not mean that these individuals or their organisations endorse this paper, whose content remains entirely the responsibility of Oxford Research Group.

### Cover photo

The son of an Afghan National Police member stands in the window of a bombed out building in Kandahar. UN civilian casualty recording in Afghanistan is examined in this report (© Kenny Holston <http://flic.kr/p/7PEs4C>)

### Funding

The Every Casualty programme is funded by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the ifa (Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen) with means of the German Federal Foreign Office. Funding support for this study was also provided by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

### Design and print

Tutaev Design

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