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Kabul Bomb Blast Has Killed at Least 90 People. We Need to Know Their Names

By Amy Goodman & Denis Moynihan

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A suicide bomb blast in Kabul, Afghanistan killed at least 90 people and injured over 450. Hidden in a tanker truck, the bomb is likely one of the largest ever set off in Kabul. It left a crater 13 feet deep, and broke windows over a mile away. Among those killed were two media workers, Aziz Navin of the 24-hour Afghan cable news channel TOLONews, and Mohammed Nazir, a driver for the BBC. The death toll continues to climb as additional bodies are found, and some who were injured succumb to their wounds. Details of those killed are sparse. While the Manchester bombing nine days earlier garnered wall-to-wall coverage on the corporate news networks, with in-depth biographies of the victims, Kabul, with a death toll over four times as high, with hundreds injured, gets mentioned only in brief reports, the dead and injured listed as numbers rather than names.

“It was 8:30 in the morning, and I was in my office. ... It shook the building. I thought it was an earthquake. And then there was a huge blast,” Lotfullah Najafizada, news director for TOLONews, said on the “Democracy Now!” news hour. “What happened today is definitely a tragic and a huge attack,” he said, describing the victims as “civilians, working-class people.”

Lotfullah recounted how they found their co-worker Aziz Navin on Wednesday morning: “We had to go and find his dead body among over 50 dead bodies, which were at two hospitals, by noon. And most of the bodies were burned to death. And some bodies, you could just see a few body parts available, beyond recognition. It was a very, very tragic and barbaric attack.”

TOLOnews was attacked last year, in January 2016. Seven colleagues were targeted and killed while riding together in a van. Led by Lotfullah, the TOLO team debated whether to give up their jobs to avoid future attacks. “We talked to all of our colleagues, and over 90 percent of them were under immense family pressures to quit their jobs. But over 90 percent of them, in the same time, decided to stay and told us that now we should continue firmly and continue with even greater dedication and commitment,” he said.

The Kabul attack on Wednesday took place in what is considered one of the city’s safest neighborhoods, with many embassies, security checkpoints, gates and blast walls. Nevertheless, the size of the bomb and its detonation at a crowded intersection during the morning rush hour inflicted massive casualties, almost all of them civilians. Each of these deaths is tragic. We ought to know not only the number of those killed, but also their names, their life stories.

The reporting on the May 22 bomb attack at the Ariana Grande concert in Manchester, England, was immediate and comprehensive. As names were released, print, TV and online news outlets offered an extensive biography of each victim. The Manchester Evening News launched a fundraising webpage that has raised almost \$3 million for the families of those killed and for the wounded in that bombing. These are appropriate responses to be sure. Without the wall-to-wall coverage of the Kabul attack, there is no comparable outpouring of compassion for its victims. War should never be normalized; it should never become routine. We need to see the images. Only then will war become unacceptable, intolerable.

Aziz Navin was walking to work at TOLOnews, where he provided IT support. He was 22 years old. We know from his Facebook profile that he was an avid photographer, and a fan of the Liverpool Football Club. He was a student at the American University of Afghanistan, and also worked as a systems administrator at a Kabul-based web hosting company, NavinHost. TOLOnews co-workers attended his funeral, the same day of the bombing, and also posted a story about him, with moving images from the funeral.

The other media worker killed, Mohammed Nazir, was remembered by a BBC colleague, Waheed Massoud, who wrote, “Mohammed Nazir was young. He was the father of four children and the only breadwinner in his family. He had a gentle smile and a warm personality.”

Late reports suggest the Kabul bombing was committed by the Haqqani network, an Afghan insurgent group, with help from the Pakistani intelligence services, the ISI. We may never know who is to blame, nor, sadly, are we likely to learn the names and the life stories of the victims. Aziz Navin’s favorite quote, posted on his Facebook page, was: “Be the change you wish to see in the world.”

