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## US, ISAF acknowledge airstrikes killed Afghan civilians

5/11/2012



US-led forces have admitted that a number of Afghan civilians were killed in airstrikes conducted last week in southern and northwestern Afghanistan.

NATO's International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) and US forces issued a joint statement on Friday confirming the deaths of civilians on May 4 in the southern province of Helmand and on May 6 in the northwestern province of Badghis, AFP reported.

"The coalition takes full responsibility for these tragic and regrettable incidents, and we will meet with the family members of those who died or were injured to express our sincere condolences," the statement said.

"If our investigation finds someone responsible, appropriate action will be taken to hold them accountable," the statement added.

According to Afghan officials, 21 people, including women and children, were killed in two airstrikes last week.

The Helmand governor's office said that on May 4, six members of a family, including two boys, three girls and a woman, were killed in an airstrike conducted after ISAF checkpoints came under attack in the Sangin district.

In the incident in Badghis province, 15 civilians, also including women and children, were killed on May 6, according to MP Qazi Abdul Rahim.

On Monday, Afghan President Hamid Karzai summoned NATO's military commander and the US ambassador to warn that civilian deaths threaten the newly signed US-Afghanistan strategic pact.

Karzai told the ISAF commander, General John Allen, and US Ambassador Ryan Crocker that if Afghan lives were not protected, the deal would "lose its meaning."

On May 1, Karzai and US President Barack Obama signed the Strategic Partnership Agreement, which extends the US presence in Afghanistan to another decade beyond 2014.

US-led troops have been fighting in Afghanistan since 2001. Their initial offensive removed the Taliban from power, but insecurity continues to rise across the country despite the presence of about 130,000 foreign forces.

The United Nations announced on February 4 that 2011 was the deadliest year on record for Afghan civilians. The death toll rose eight percent compared to the year before and was roughly double the figure for 2007.

Overall, 3,021 civilians died in violence related to the war and 4,507 were injured in 2011. Of the deaths, the UN attributed 77 percent to militant attacks and 14 percent to US-led foreign troops and Afghan forces. Nine percent of the cases were classified as unknown.