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Civilians killed in Afghan blast

A suicide attack in a public bathhouse in southern Afghanistan has killed at least 16 civilians and a police commander, officials have said.

More than 20 others were injured in the blast, which occurred on Friday in the town of Spin Boldak in Kandahar province, on the border with Pakistan.

"A suicide bomber blew up explosives strapped to his chest at a public bath in Spin Boldak," General Abdul Razaq, a border police official, said.

Zalmai Ayoubi, a spokesman for the governor, said the target of the attack had been a border police commander who was inside the bathhouse at the time of the attack.

"This brutal and inhumane act was the work of the enemies of Islam and humanity," he said.

There was no immediate claim of responsibility for the blast.

The south has traditionally been the Taliban's stronghold but suicide attacks targeting civilians in public places are relatively rare.

Violent year

Also on Friday, NATO announced that one of its service members was killed in a roadside bombing in southern Afghanistan.

The attacks come after the end of the bloodiest year of a war that has now dragged on for more than nine years.

The United Nations has said 2,412 civilians were killed and 3,803 wounded between January and October last year, a 20 percent increase on 2009.

A record 711 foreign troops were killed in 2010, according to monitoring website www.iCasualties.com, compared to 521 for 2009.

Afghan security forces have been hit even harder than foreign troops. A total of 1,292 Afghan police and 821 Afghan soldiers were killed in 2010, according to the Afghan government.