

## Flash Update 9 – Fighting, displacement and civilian casualties in Southern Afghanistan (18 November 2020)

### KEY HIGHLIGHTS

- Heavy fighting continues in southern Afghanistan across Hilmand, Kandahar and Uruzgan provinces, affecting thousands of people.
- Assessment teams are continuing their work to gauge the humanitarian impact of the situation. To date, 15,236 IDPs have been verified as needing humanitarian assistance in Hilmand, 9,872 IDPs in Uruzgan and 3,500 IDPs in Kandahar provinces, with assessments ongoing.
- Partners have mobilised assistance to 13,970 IDPs in Hilmand. This includes food, NFIs, WASH items and cash with accompanying COVID-19 prevention support. In Kandahar, partners have provided food, emergency shelter and NFIs, WASH items and cash to 3,073 IDPs, while plans are underway to deploy additional assessment teams in Uruzgan.

### SITUATION OVERVIEW:

**Hilmand:** Fighting that started on 11 October between the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) and a non-state armed group (NSAG) continues in Sur Gudar (located between Nahr-e-Saraj district and Lashkargah city), Bolan in Lashkargah city and Loy Kalay in Nawa-e-Barakzai district. Military operations are also ongoing in Jarnamo area of Nawa district. The security situation remains volatile. The road between Lashkargah and Nawa-e-Barakzai; the Lashkargah-Kandahar highway and the roads connecting Lashkargah to Nawa-e-Barakzai, Nad-e-Ali/Marja and Nahr-e-Saraj also remain closed due to the presence of NSAG checkpoints, IEDs and culvert damage. People continue to use alternate routes in NSAG-controlled areas to avoid IEDs. While the phone network has been restored in Lashkargah city, several districts across the province continues to face network challenges with limited coverage and this is still challenging the smooth flow of information.

**Kandahar:** Military operations and airstrikes are ongoing in the north and the southwest of Kandahar with a focus on Maywand, Zharey and Panjwai districts. Telephone networks mostly remain down and the key roads between Kandahar city and Arghandab, Panjwai and Zharey districts are closed due to the presence of IEDs – especially in Arghandab – and many culverts being destroyed. People are still unable to use these roads and are instead using alternative routes. Demining efforts, led by ANSF Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) teams, are currently underway in affected areas.

**Uruzgan:** Sporadic armed clashes are still being reported, with military operations and airstrikes ongoing in Dehrawud and Gizab districts. All of the major routes between Tirinkot, Dehrawud and Gizab are currently closed due to the presence of IEDs and destroyed culverts. People are using alternative routes through NSAG-controlled areas for movement. Telephone lines remain down in Gizab and Dehrawud districts, affecting the flow of information.

### HUMANITARIAN IMPACT:

**Hilmand:** No new displacement has been reported in Hilmand since 5 November. As of 18 November, some 15,236 IDPs have been verified as needing humanitarian assistance. Humanitarian partners report that IDPs residing in Lashkargah need items to protect them from the winter, particularly warm clothes for children. Reports of increased IED incidents in Lashkargah continue to be of grave concern for humanitarian organisations operating in the area. Three health facilities remain closed, while ten

others are reportedly partially open, although this is yet to be confirmed. The closure of health clinics due to insecurity is directly affecting more than 87,000 people, with thousands more indirectly affected by limited services at health facilities that are only partially open.

**Kandahar:** Initial reports suggest that in excess of 16,000 people have been displaced into Kandahar city and Dand district, as well as gradual displacement from Maywand, Zharey and Panjwai districts, however this is yet to be confirmed. To date 3,500 IDPs have been verified as needing humanitarian assistance. The presence of IEDs and ongoing clashes continue to threaten civilian movements as well as the humanitarian response in Kandahar. As of 18 November, the five Mobile Health Teams (MHTs) in Maywand and Zharey districts remain temporarily suspended, depriving some 20,000 people of essential health services.

**Uruzgan:** As of 18 November, humanitarian assessment teams have verified 9,872 IDPs as needing humanitarian assistance, with assessments still ongoing. Some humanitarian partners operating in Dehrawud and Gizab districts have temporarily suspended their activities due to active fighting and the presence of IEDs. The suspension will leave people unable to access WASH, protection and shelter support, or receive key COVID-19 prevention messages that promote virus mitigation measures. As previously reported, a health facility able to serve 30,000 people remains closed due to ongoing clashes.

## **COORDINATION AND RESPONSE:**

OCHA is closely coordinating with the Government to provide assistance to IDPs based on need, ensure efficient information flows and avoid duplication of efforts.

Among the 15,236 verified IDPs in Hilmand, humanitarian partners have provided assistance to 13,970 people as of 18 November. IDPs received food, NFIs, WASH items and multi-purpose cash with accompanying COVID-19 prevention support. IDPs also received water through water tankering. Assistance for the remaining 1,266 verified IDPs will be coordinated with clusters. Assessments – which had previously been suspended since 4 November due to verification issues – resumed on 15 November with several assessments carried out in different parts of Lashkargah. Finally, local authorities recently announced that the 215<sup>th</sup> Afghan National Army (ANA) Commando Corps independently distributed food baskets to 400 IDP households in Lashkargah.

In Kandahar, staff from four humanitarian partners have been deployed to Dand and Kandahar districts to assess IDP needs. As of 18 November, 3,500 IDPs have been verified as being in need of assistance, with assessments ongoing. OCHA coordinated the humanitarian response to 3,073 IDPs, while support for the remaining 427 verified IDPs will be coordinated with clusters over the coming days. Partners have provided food, emergency shelter and NFIs, WASH items, cash and water through water tankering. Between 12 and 18 November, the 205<sup>th</sup> ANA Commando Corps independently assisted 100 IDP households with food baskets in Kandahar, according to local authorities.

In Uruzgan, 9,872 IDPs have so far been identified as having humanitarian needs as of 18 November, with assessments ongoing in Tirinkot and Dehrawud districts. OCHA will begin coordinating the response for the verified IDPs together with clusters over the coming days once the assessment reports have been finalised and shared. This is expected to happen by the end of the week.

**The next update will be issued as the situation changes.**