

Beat: News

Somalia: Türk decries steep rise in civilian casualties

amid surge in Al-Shabaab attacks

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GENEVA (14 November 2022) – A steep rise in civilian casualties in Somalia, due largely to attacks by the Al-Shabaab armed group, has exacerbated an already grim human rights and humanitarian situation for the people of Somalia, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk said Monday.

According to the latest UN figures, at least 613 civilians have been killed and 948 injured so far this year – the highest number since 2017 and more than a 30 percent rise from last year. Most of the casualties, 315 killed and 686 injured, have been due to Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs), at least 94 percent of which were attributed to Al-Shabaab. Other casualties have been caused by State security forces, clan militia and other unidentified actors.

“This year has brought an abrupt halt to a general decline in deaths and injuries documented since 2017,” said Türk. “I am deeply concerned that more Somalis continue to lose their lives on a daily basis.”

“All parties to the conflict must uphold their obligations under international humanitarian law and ensure that civilians are protected. This also includes armed elements engaged alongside the Government in the conflict against Al-Shabaab, as well as international forces.”

“I call on the Government of Somalia to take all necessary steps – in cooperation with the international community – to strengthen the protection of civilians, in line with international human rights norms and standards and international humanitarian law,” the High Commissioner added.

Other casualties have resulted from Al-Shabaab suicide bombings, the most recent of which was on 29 October near the Ministry of Education in the capital Mogadishu, and left at least 121 people dead and 333 injured, according to Somalia’s Ministry of Health. Most of the casualties were civilians. An earlier Al-Shabaab attack on Mogadishu’s Hayat Hotel on 21 August killed at least 22 civilians and injured 30.

In addition to the deliberate targeting of civilians, latest information gathered by the United Nations Human Rights Office indicates that in recent months Al-Shabaab has destroyed numerous wells and poisoned another in the Hiraan region, at a time when Somalis are facing extreme hardship due to drought in many parts of the country. Al-Shabaab also destroyed part of the riverbank of the Shabelle river, houses, a bridge, the disabling telecommunication antennas and 11 schools.

“Such wanton destruction is reprehensible, particularly given the difficult humanitarian situation, with the consecutive failure of five rainy seasons and large-scale displacement in the country,” Türk said.

“Deliberately targeting civilians and destroying, as such, objects indispensable to the civilian population constitute war crimes under international law. They must stop.”

The UN Human Rights Chief also stressed the crucial need for accountability for gross violations of international human rights law and serious violations of international humanitarian law – key to prevent the fuelling of vicious cycles of violence.

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