

NGO INSECURITY IN AFGHANISTAN

**Afghanistan NGO Safety Office
(ANSO) and CARE**

May 2005



Summary

Insecurity continues to be a serious issue in Afghanistan. This short report highlights the specific problem of NGO insecurity, as defined by the threat against NGO staff operating in the field. NGOs operate in all provinces of Afghanistan, including in areas where there is minimal UN or Government presence. Yet the unprecedented number of NGO fatalities has made it more difficult to reach those in need. This report includes statistics on NGO fatalities in 2003, 2004, and the first five months of 2005, as well as the result of a survey of over 50 NGOs on how insecurity affects their operations.

I. NGO Insecurity

On May 1st, authorities found the bodies of three women in Baghlan province, at least one of whom was apparently killed because she worked for an NGO. This attack is part of a larger pattern of attacks against NGO staff in Afghanistan. In 2003, 12 NGO staff were killed in Afghanistan. In 2004 that figure doubled to 24 NGO fatalities. During the past 5 months, five more NGO staff have been killed in Afghanistan. General insecurity continues to be a serious problem. This report is the first in a series of summary briefing papers that illustrates one aspect of this widespread insecurity – the serious and ongoing problem of NGO insecurity in Afghanistan.

NGO insecurity can be defined as the threat against NGO staff operating in the field. This threat impedes the ability of NGOs to gain access to beneficiaries, to deliver humanitarian aid, and to implement urgently needed reconstruction and development projects. In Afghanistan, the specific targeting of NGO staff by armed elements – in addition to the general situation of insecurity – has created an environment in certain areas of the country (especially in the southern, southeastern and eastern regions) where many NGOs are either unable to operate, or are constrained in their operations.

Though comparative statistics are not readily available, the NGO fatality rate in Afghanistan is believed to be higher than in almost any other conflict or post-conflict setting. For instance, in 2003, the last year for which comparative statistics are available, the highest number of NGO fatalities occurred in Afghanistan, followed by Angola (6), Somalia (4) and Liberia (4).¹

Attacks against NGOs were also more geographically widespread in 2004 as compared to 2003. In 2003, fatal attacks were all confined to the southern and eastern parts of the country – especially the land bordering Pakistan's Northwest Frontier Province, where the insurgency is most entrenched. In 2004, fatal attacks against NGO staff spread to provinces in the north and in the west of Afghanistan as well; this trend has continued in 2005.²

Beyond the direct impacts of humanitarian aid worker deaths, a dangerous trend is developing in which NGOs are forced to curtail projects or operate in fewer districts due to violence. This reduction in access to beneficiaries makes it more difficult for NGOs to ensure they are reaching those most in need, and potentially leads to certain areas

¹ "Chronology of Humanitarian Aid Workers Killed, 1997 – 2003", compiled by Dennis King (15 January 2004), available at <http://vranet.com/Govt1027/Docs/chron1997-2003.html>

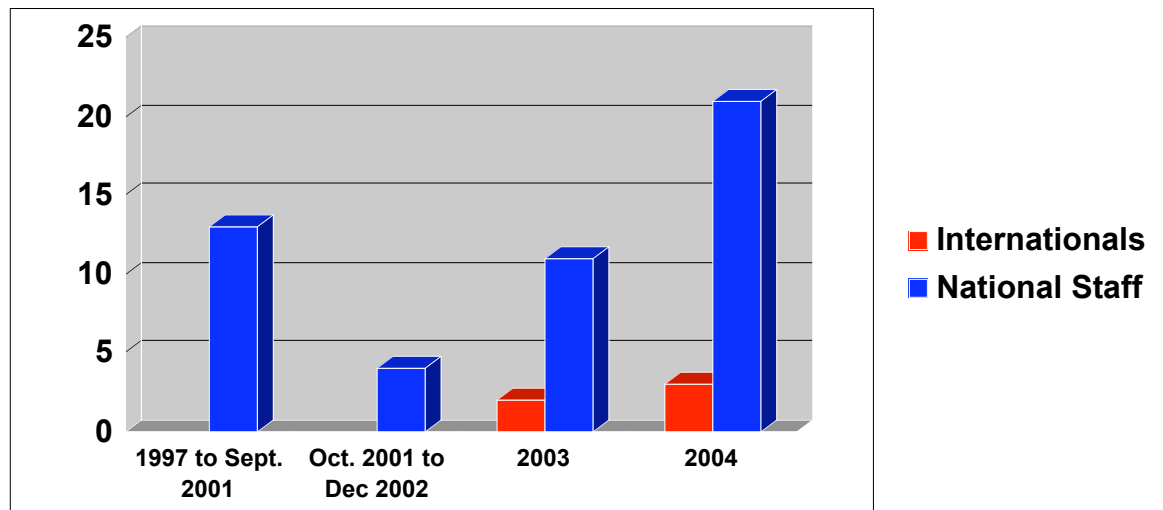
² This pattern is not limited to attacks on NGOs – for instance, 13 staff of the Joint Electoral Management Body were killed across the country in 2004.

receiving less humanitarian and development assistance, so critically needed across Afghanistan.

II. Fatality Statistics

All humanitarian personnel face similar threats. However, these briefing papers will focus specifically on NGO insecurity (including the ICRC), as opposed to attacks against UN staff, election workers, or private reconstruction contractors. The statistics below only include NGO and ICRC staff, both national and international.

NGO STAFF FATALITIES, 1997-2004³



NGO STAFF FATALITIES IN 2003

<u>Date</u>	<u>Province</u>	<u>Number of Fatalities</u>
27 March	Kandahar	1 killed
3 May	Wardak	1 killed
22 July	Farah	1 killed
7 August	Helmand	1 killed
13 August	Ghazni	2 killed
8 September	Ghazni	4 killed
24 September	Helmand	2 killed

Total number of NGO staff killed = 12

³ Fatalities for the period 1997 to September 2001 cover the entire country, including areas under the control of the Taliban, the Northern Alliance, and others. The average number of fatalities per year during this period was 2.6.

NGO STAFF FATALITIES IN 2004

<u>Date</u>	<u>Province</u>	<u>Number of Fatalities</u>
14 February	Farah	4 killed
25 February	Kabul	5 killed
7 March	Zabul	1 killed
18 May	Balkh	1 killed
23 May	Samangan	2 killed
2 June	Badghis	5 killed
9 June	Herat	1 killed
3 August	Paktia	2 killed
28 November	Nimroz	2 killed
5 December	Kabul	1 killed

Total number of NGO staff killed = 24

NGO STAFF FATALITIES TO DATE IN 2005

<u>Date</u>	<u>Province</u>	<u>Number of Fatalities</u>
23 February	Helmand	2 killed
8 March	Farah	2 killed
1 May	Baghlan	1 killed ⁴

Total number of NGO staff killed to date= 5

III. Survey on NGO Insecurity

Below are the results from a survey conducted jointly by ANSO and CARE in February 2005 to gauge NGO perceptions regarding whether the security situation had improved or deteriorated during the past year. The survey also asked NGO staff to explain what factors contributed to the improvement or deterioration of the security situation. Finally, the survey sought to gauge the impact of NGO insecurity, by asking whether security concerns had led NGOs to withdraw from certain areas, or otherwise modify or curtail projects.

Altogether, 57 respondents from 52 separate NGOs (operating across Afghanistan) responded to the survey.⁵

1. Do you believe that the overall security situation in Afghanistan has improved, deteriorated or stayed the same over the past year?

Improved: 42% Deteriorated: 25% Stayed the Same: 28% No Answer: 5%

2. Has the security situation in areas where your organization works improved, deteriorated or stayed the same over the past year?

⁴ At this time, there is still some question as to the NGO affiliation of the women killed on May 1st in Baghlan. Based on present information, it seems that at least one of the women killed worked for an NGO.

⁵ Other reconstruction actors also responded, though the data above is restricted to NGO responses.

Improved: 35% Deteriorated: 26% Stayed the Same: 35% No Answer: 4%

The survey painted a mixed picture in terms of NGO security perceptions. Whereas 42% of NGO respondents believed the overall security situation improved over the course of the past year, 53% believed that the situation either remained the same (28%) or deteriorated (25%). Asked about security specifically in their areas of operation, only 35% of NGO respondents believed that the situation improved, while 35% reported that the situation has remained the same, and 26% reported that the situation deteriorated.

3. What factors do you believe have contributed to this change in the security situation?

Major factors that have led to an improvement in the security situation:⁶

Role of Afghan National Army, Afghan National Police, the International Security Assistance Force or the Coalition Forces: 26%
The existence of an elected government: 25%
Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration efforts: 12%
Overall economic development: 5%

Major factors that have led to a deterioration in the security situation:

Security concerns surrounding the Presidential election: 21%
Poppy eradication: 12%
Worsening perception of NGOs: 11%
Increase in criminal activity: 7%
Blurring of the lines between military and humanitarian actors: 5%

The factors which NGOs identified as contributing to the *improvement* of the security situation give cause for optimism, at least in the long-term. The growth of the Afghan National Army (ANA) and the Afghan National Police (ANP) were the top reasons given for improvements in security. The success of ANA and ANP, and the continuation of the Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) process are all essential for improved security. Similarly, the existence of an elected government was perceived as a step forward toward increased security.

The factors which NGOs identified as contributing to the *deterioration* of the security situation point to potentially difficult months ahead, however. Despite the relative success of the Presidential election, the upcoming Parliamentary elections are likely to exacerbate tensions and foster unrest. Similarly, there will be a greater focus on poppy eradication in the Spring than there was in the Winter, when the Survey was conducted. Already there are reports of violent demonstrations and clashes between farmers and eradication teams, including violent clashes in early April near Maiwand, in Kandahar. DDR, though beneficial in the long-run, could also lead to greater instability in the short term, as it threatens to upset local power structures. Finally, the relatively negative view of NGOs amongst the public continues to be a matter of serious concern.

⁶ The figures do not add to 100%, as not all NGOs responded to this question, and of those that did respond, there were a large number of different factors mentioned

4. Have there been any attacks against the staff of your NGO over the past year?

Yes: 30% No: 68% No Answer: 2%

5. Has the security situation over the past year led to your organization operating in fewer districts than originally planned?

Yes: 35% No: 61% No Answer: 4%

6. Has the security situation over the past year led to a curtailment or modification of planned projects?

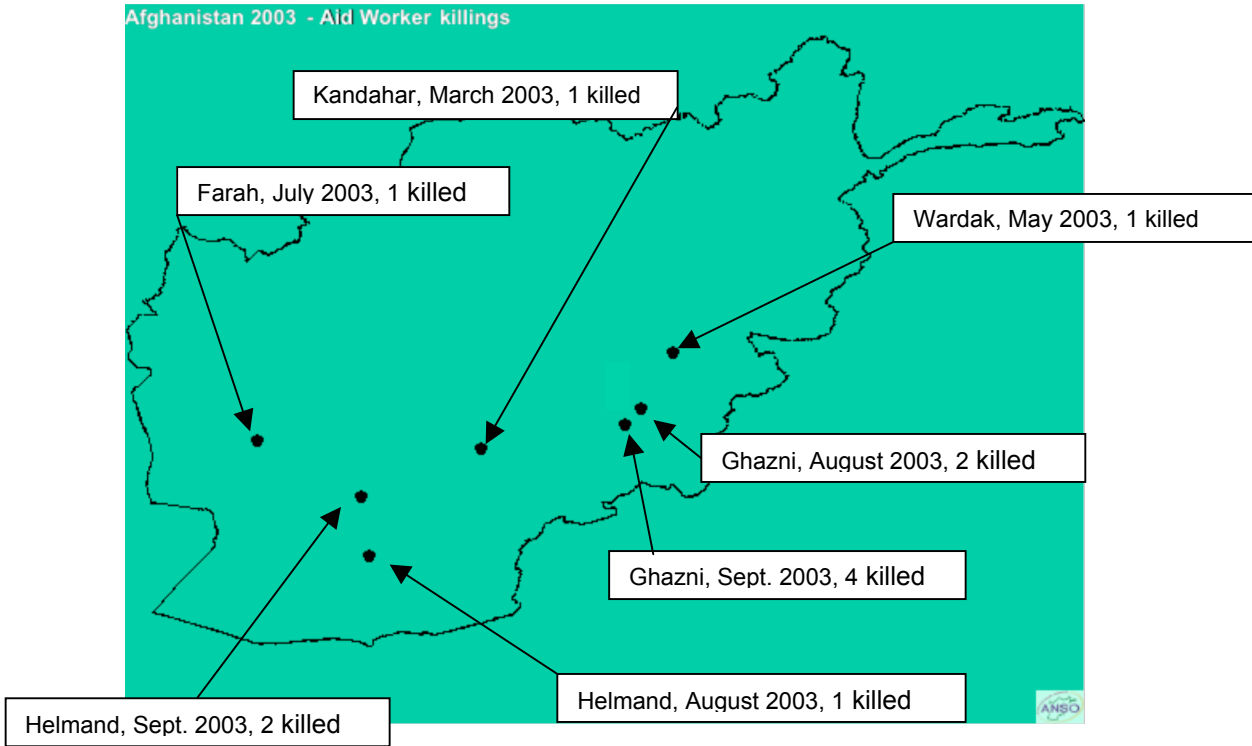
Yes: 44% No: 52% No Answer: 4%

NGOs operate across Afghanistan, providing critical aid and assistance to millions of Afghans. Insecurity – especially increased NGO insecurity – impedes the delivery of critical aid and development assistance to areas where it is most needed. In Afghanistan, if the trends indicated above continue, NGO insecurity could contribute to large swathes of the country remaining chronically under-developed.

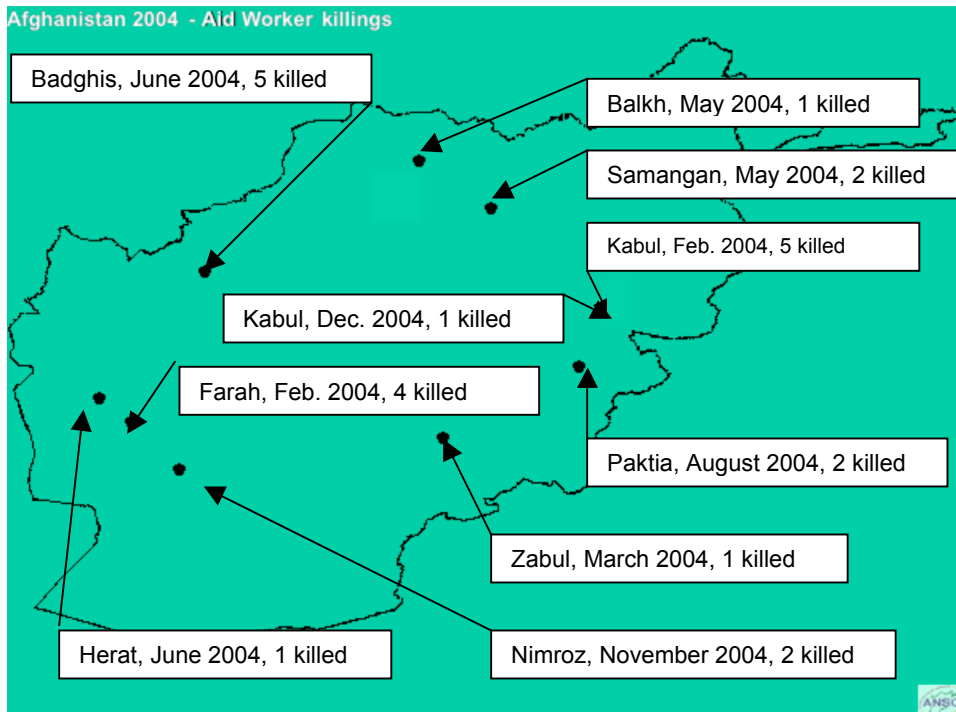
Of those areas where NGOs do operate, **44% of respondents reported curtailing or modifying projects due to security concerns over the past year, while 35% of respondents reported operating in fewer districts than planned.** This trend could lead to a vicious cycle in which increased insecurity reduces humanitarian access, resulting in an unequal distribution of humanitarian, reconstruction and development aid. This result could then lead to greater unrest and even worse insecurity for ordinary Afghans.

IV. Explanatory Maps, 2003 – 2004 (see following page)

MAP: NGO STAFF FATALITIES IN 2003



MAP: NGO STAFF FATALITIES IN 2004



V. CONCLUSION

NGO insecurity is a problem which affects not only NGOs, but could also impact millions of beneficiaries across Afghanistan. Given the unprecedented number of attacks against NGO staff over the past two years – a trend which shows no signs of abating in 2005 – it is a testament to NGOs in Afghanistan that they continue to operate across the country. The sacrifices that NGO staff have made should not be ignored, nor should the consequences of continued NGO insecurity.

NGO insecurity is linked to wider, prevalent insecurity across Afghanistan. Unless and until this wider insecurity is addressed, NGO staff will continue to be a target, making it difficult to reach all of those in need.