

ISAF works hard to avoid harming civilians, but accidents and mistakes happen. When they do, civilian casualties are the most tragic consequence.

## WHAT IS THE PROBLEM?

---

President Karzai has expressed serious concern at the rising death toll among civilians as ISAF battles the Taliban and Afghan civilians are staging angry protests. Recently, Brig. Richard E. Nugee, the chief spokesman for NATO forces in Afghanistan, acknowledged "the single thing that we have done wrong and we are striving extremely hard to improve on (in 2007) is killing innocent civilians."

NATO's mission in Afghanistan cannot succeed without the trust and support of the Afghan people. To win that trust, ISAF should take specific steps to dignify and help civilians caught in the crossfire. This demonstration of humanity is one every NATO country should embrace – and, in Afghanistan's war of perception, it's a lesson the enemy has already learned.

## WHAT SHOULD NATO COUNTRIES DO?

---

The Post Operations Humanitarian Relief Fund (POHRF) was created in late 2006, with monies to help communities damaged by ISAF combat operations. The goal of the program, rightly, is to make amends for unintended harm.

**Every** NATO country working in Afghanistan should be giving at least 1 million Euro to this Fund. Only seven countries have donated to this critical effort. The United States is the most recent donor with a \$2 million gift. No matter the operations undertaken by a NATO member state in Afghanistan – from reconstruction to combat – the welfare of the Afghan people is a team effort. Dignifying losses among the population must be a collective goal.

Next, the Relief Fund is currently designed to provide large-scale rebuilding aid to communities. The Fund must now expand to include immediate assistance to civilians in the form of in-kind and, when appropriate and safe, monetary condolences. Commanders on the ground should be given funds and a mechanism to disperse them to civilians injured and the families of those killed. This in no way suggests legal liability. Rather, it provides the kind of help that is most urgent and necessary for the Afghan people following harm by ISAF's bullets and bombs.

By helping Afghan civilians in this way, NATO can appropriately demonstrate humanity while moving forward its strategic interest of gaining local population support. This solution does not require military involvement, only funding.

**Afghanistan will be won – or lost – one civilian at a time.**



Campaign for Innocent Victims in Conflict is a Washington, DC-based nonprofit organization advocating on behalf of civilians harmed by military operations in combat. [www.civicworldwide.org](http://www.civicworldwide.org)