

Casualty recording is the process of systematically recording deaths – both of civilians and combatants – in armed conflict. Timely and effective casualty recording provides information not only about how many were killed but who was killed, where, when, and how.¹

The international community is increasingly recognising the importance of casualty recording data to support the protection of civilians in conflict, monitor compliance with IHL, and improve effectiveness of humanitarian relief. This has been reflected in the UN Secretary General's annual report on the protection of civilians, in statements by member states at the Security Council, the 2015 ICRC Quadrennial, and at the World Humanitarian Summit. However, despite the essential function casualty recording provides in fulfilling so many human rights and humanitarian objectives, it is still far from being routinely implemented.

Why casualty recording matters

Casualty recording is a powerful and underused tool in supporting states' and UN existing commitments, including:

Protection of Civilians and Responsibility to Protect:

Casualty recording provides the necessary data to support evidence-based advocacy with conflict parties on behalf of civilians. It documents demographic information about those killed, including their combat status and cause of death. It identifies tactics and weapons that are killing civilians, and provides early warning of crimes against humanity. In recognition of this, the UN Secretary-General has stated that casualty recording "*can clarify the causes of harm to civilians as well as the actions needed to end such harm and prevent its recurrence*".²

Women, Peace and Security: Gender-disaggregated casualty recording is essential for comprehensive monitoring, analysis and reporting on conflict-related gender and sexual violence (see UNSCR 1960, 1325, 1889, 2122). It can also be used to make humanitarian protection from such threats more effective.

Children and Armed Conflict: Age-disaggregated casualty recording provides vital information on children affected by armed conflict that can be used by parties to conflict to reduce their impact on children. It also enables humanitarian actors to provide better protection and responses, and provides evidence to support the implementation of UNSCR [1612](#) on Children and Armed Conflict, particularly in relation to the grave violations of "**killing and maiming of children**" and "**attacks on schools and hospitals**".

IHL Compliance and Accountability: Casualty recording identifies specific armed violence threats to civilians, allowing parties to conflict to amend strategies and tactics where needed to ensure full compliance with IHL. Where relevant, casualty information supports criminal prosecutions by providing information on victims and perpetrators for further investigations of war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Disarmament and arms control: Properly detailed casualty data provides a sound evidentiary base to highlight the unintended and unacceptable harm to civilians caused by the use of certain weapons, including cluster munitions, anti-personnel landmines and explosive weapons in populated areas.

Transitional Justice and Memorialisation: The analysis of casualty records contributes to truth and reconciliation commissions by revealing patterns of systematic harm, while personal, identifying information on victims at the level of named individuals is essential for dignified and meaningful memorialisation.

Rights of victims and survivors: Casualty recording is a necessary step in fulfilling victims' rights, including the Right to Know and the Right to Reparation. Casualty recording ends the uncertainty suffered by families of disappeared persons, and allows victims to receive appropriate recognition and compensation from the state.

Sustainable Development Goal 16: The target of SDG 16 is to significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere. Casualty recording provides essential data required by [indicator 16.1.2](#) - "**conflict-related deaths per 100,000 population, by sex, age and cause**".

¹ Casualty recording is distinct from "casualty tracking," which is an emerging practice carried out exclusively by military actors to track the effects of their operations on the civilian population for the purpose of updating their procedures.

² Report of the Secretary-General on the protection of civilians in armed conflict 2012, S/2012/376

Developments to date

Since 2012, the UN Secretary General has repeatedly called for more systematic data collection, analysis and reporting of civilian harm, including civilian casualties, in his annual Protection of Civilians reports. He has explicitly called for UN actors to “*work together to establish a common United Nations system to systematically record civilian casualties*” as part of broader monitoring of violations.³ The Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator has also stressed “*the need for more systematic recording of civilian casualties*” which “*can confirm the causes of harm to civilians and the actions needed to end such harm*”.⁴ Between 2012 and 2018, at least 28 states⁵ have spoken out during the annual Protection of Civilians Open Debate in recognition of the need for, and benefits of, casualty recording.

In his [report for the World Humanitarian Summit in 2016](#), the UN Secretary-General urged that “*Tools must be in place to systematically track, collate, analyse, report and, where necessary, investigate ... civilian casualties*”. A sample commitment to “*record, track and analyze civilian casualties in the conduct of their military operations*” was included under [Core Commitment 2](#) of the Agenda for Humanity.

In November 2016, ECW’s ‘[Standards for Casualty Recording](#)’ were launched at the ICRC’s headquarters in Geneva at a public meeting hosted by the ICRC’s Deputy President Mme Christine Beerli. The Standards were developed following extensive consultation with casualty recorders, national and international NGOs, and other partners, including the ICRC, OCHA, and OHCHR. They are the first public, standardised, objective criteria for effective and transparent casualty recording.

Casualty recording is currently not routinely mandated within UN peacekeeping, peace-building and political missions despite the growing recognition, as evidenced above, that this would create a practical tool to support better protection of civilians in conflict, more effective humanitarian responses, and a greater prospect of long-term accountability.

Recommendations

During Third Committee, delegations should:

- ☉ **Reference casualty recording** in their Open Debate interventions as a critical tool for protecting civilians in armed conflict, ensuring effective humanitarian planning and response, monitoring compliance with IHL, supporting accountability, and delivering commitments on SDG 16.1;
- ☉ **Endorse the UN Secretary-General’s recommendation** that “*United Nations actors should work together to establish a common United Nations system to systematically record civilian casualties as part of broader efforts to monitor and report on violations of international humanitarian and human rights law, drawing on good practice and expertise from within the United Nations, Member States and civil society*”. (S/2015/453, para.67)

Beyond Third Committee, states should:

- ☉ **Encourage, bilaterally and multilaterally, all states to recognise the importance of casualty recording** in ensuring the protection of civilians in conflict;
- ☉ **Promote casualty recording** in all relevant fora, including the Security Council, C34 Special Committee, GA First Committee, and the Human Rights Council;
- ☉ **Call for the incorporation of explicit requirements for casualty recording**, including lines of responsibility and resource allocations, into the mandate of all UN peacekeeping, political and peace-building missions, and as a condition of any future military intervention authorised by the UNSC under Chapter VII.
- ☉ **Undertake casualty recording** in line with current best practice standards;
- ☉ **Support civil society casualty recording**, including by ensuring the safety of casualty recorders, journalists, witnesses and other sources of casualty information.

Every Casualty Worldwide (ECW) is an independent research and advocacy organisation which calls on states, in partnership with other actors, to ensure that all casualties of armed violence are promptly recorded, correctly identified and publicly acknowledged. ECW works with casualty recorders worldwide to support and develop best practice in the field, including internationally recognised Standards for Casualty Recording. ECW is a UK Registered Charity No. 1166974. Company Limited by Guarantee Registered No. 09082055. www.everycasualty.org

3 Reports of the Secretary-General on the protection of civilians in armed conflict, 2013 (S/2013/689), 2015 (S/2015/682)

4 UNSC Protection of Civilians Open Debate, 2012 (S/PV.6790)

5 Including Australia, Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Costa Rica, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Indonesia, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Jordan, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Mali, the Netherlands, Norway, Panama, Portugal, Slovenia, South Africa, Sweden, Switzerland, Thailand, the United Kingdom, and Uruguay, either individually or as a joint statement on behalf of the Group of Friends on the Protection of Civilians, the Human Security Network, or the Nordic Group. See www.securitycouncilreport.org for records.