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## **AFGHANISTAN FACING ITS WORST HUMANITARIAN CRISIS SINCE WAR BEGAN, RED CROSS SAYS**

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The crisis in Afghanistan has escalated to a new level of urgency, the outgoing head of the International Red Cross said Sunday, citing a record number of civilian casualties and evacuations of war wounded.

In an interview with The Telegraph, Jean-Nicolas Marti said the drawdown of NATO forces has led to a rise in fighting.

The Red Cross says the number of civilian casualties in Afghanistan hit a record high for the seventh consecutive year in 2015, with more than 11,000 innocent men, women and children killed or wounded, Reuters reports.

Marti told The Telegraph that in 2015, the number of war wounded grew by 30 percent from the year before. At least 600 war wounded have been evacuated in the first three months of 2016 alone, and the total is expected to exceed the 2015 figure before the summer fighting season begins, the newspaper added.

The ICRC would never call for a military operation, Marti said. But before they pull out altogether, I do think they should think twice about that.

The Red Cross has urged peace talks in Afghanistan, but the Taliban have said that they will come to the negotiating table only after western forces leave the country.

Around 10,000 NATO troops remain in Afghanistan and have promised to stay until the country is stabilized.

Meanwhile, Afghans make up the second largest group of refugees and migrants arriving in Europe

behind Syrians, as an estimated one million people have been displaced in the conflict, Reuters reports.

Afghan civilians also have had a harder time getting access to health care, as attacks against medical facilities and staff have jumped 50 percent in the last year, Reuters reports.

Even if NATO said at the end of 2014, 'Mission accomplished,' that schools have opened, women have their rights back, it doesn't look to be the case a year and a half afterwards, Marti said.

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Kaynak/Source: