



# Briefing Notes

## Group 62 - Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

07 September 2020

### Afghanistan

#### COVID-19 pandemic

All of the 34 provinces are reporting infections. Kabul continues to be the most severely affected, followed by Herat, Balkh, Kandahar and Nangarhar (as of 02 September 2020). Various COVID-19 model scenarios indicate that the pandemic has not yet reached its peak in Afghanistan. Although fewer COVID-19 cases are reported in Afghanistan according to the Ministry of Health, a further increase in infections is feared, as a second wave is sweeping across many countries. Although nationwide measures to contain the virus are still officially in force, they are often ignored and not consistently enforced by the authorities.

#### Exchange of prisoners

According to the Afghan government, all imprisoned Taliban have been released, as the Taliban had requested. The only exceptions are those few persons against whose release international protests had been received (see BN of 17 August 2020). However, there are plans to transfer seven of these persons to Doha (Qatar). In return, the Taliban are said to have released six of 20 special military forces. Since the Afghan government has met one of the Taliban's essential demands, it is now calling for the speedy start of peace talks.

#### Attacks, fighting, civilian victims

According to research by the New York Times, 45 pro-government forces and 27 civilians died in security incidents in various provinces between 28 August and 3 September 2020, mostly in attacks by the Taliban.

### Belarus

#### Continuing protests against President Lukashenko

On 06 September 2020, for the fifth Sunday in a row, further protest rallies against President Lukashenko were held. More than 100,000 people gathered nationwide. In Minsk there were several tens of thousands of people. Security forces again used violence against protesters and arrested at least 20 of them in Minsk. On 05 September 2020 students and women had gathered for different rallies. According to news agencies dozens of students were arrested. The leading opposition politician Olga Kovalkova fled to Poland after being pressured by the authorities.

### Bolivia

#### Suit filed against former president Morales

Bolivia's Attorney General is suing former President Evo Morales for crimes against humanity in the International Criminal Court in The Hague. It said in a statement that Morales was responsible for the deaths of more than 40 people because he had called on his supporters to set up roadblocks. This had prevented the supply of oxygen to

patients suffering from the corona disease. Morales, who had resigned in 2019 after mass protests (see BN of 11 November 2019) and is currently living in Argentina, is already under investigation in his home country for terrorism and the financing of terrorist activities (see BN of 13 July 2020).

## China

### **Hong Kong: Arrests during protests**

During a protest for free elections and against the security law on 06 September 2020, the police reportedly arrested 289 people, most of them for illegal assembly. Among those arrested were democracy activists Figo Chan and Leung Kwok-hung. Head of government Carrie Lam had postponed the parliamentary elections scheduled for the same day by one year, officially due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Critics accuse the government of trying to prevent possible gains of the democratic camp.

### **Hong Kong: COVID-19 pandemic**

In early September 2020, mass testing for COVID-19 began, which is scheduled to last about one to two weeks and also involve medical personnel from mainland China. Hong Kong's approximately 7.5 million inhabitants were called upon to take the test free of charge. Representatives of the democracy movement called for a boycott. They fear that the tests will be used to collect large amounts of personal data and to establish a genetic database of the Hong Kong population, but there is no evidence for this allegation.

### **Inner Mongolia: Mongolian restricted as language of instruction**

Shortly before the start of the new school year in early September 2020, the education authorities in the Autonomous Region of Inner Mongolia (IMAR) instructed the teachers of primary and secondary schools to use Han Chinese as the language of instruction in future. This affects those schools that have been using Mongolian as their main language of instruction. In the new school year, language and literature will be taught only in Han Chinese, and in the following two school years the subjects of politics and history will be added. The remaining subjects may be taught in Mongolian in the future as well. The Mongolian population rejects this regulation. Thousands of Mongolian students followed calls to boycott classes as of 01 September 2020. In Hohhot, Tongliao, Ordos and other places there were protest rallies, some of which resulted in violent clashes with security forces. An unknown number of people were arrested. The authorities are searching for hundreds of organizers and participants in these protests. Bainu, a popular Mongolian-language social media platform, was closed.

About 17% (4.2 million) of the population of Inner Mongolia are Mongolians. Critics see the measure as part of a central Chinese policy to assimilate the Mongolian minority to the Han Chinese majority. Similar regulations are already in effect in Tibet and Xinjiang.

## Colombia

### **Deployment of US special forces approved**

According to media reports, President Iván Duque authorised the resumption of the internally controversial deployment of the US Special Security Force Assistance Brigade on 27 August 20. The activities of this brigade had been suspended by the courts in July 2020 due to concerns about effective parliamentary control. This special US unit is said to consist of around 50 military personnel to support the Colombian government in operations against drug trafficking by providing training and advisory activities. Critics fear that armed escalations with Venezuela cannot be ruled out during operations in the border area with the neighbouring country. It was only in mid-August 2020 that President Duque announced that he would cooperate more closely with the US in implementing a new programme called *Colombia crece* (Colombia is growing) (see BN of 31 August 2020).

## **Egypt**

### **Leader of the Muslim Brotherhood arrested**

According to Egyptian security authorities, the leader of the Muslim Brotherhood, Mahmoud Ezzat, was arrested during a house search in Cairo in the week of 24-28 August 2020. The judicial authorities hold Ezzat responsible for the establishment of a violent wing within the Muslim Brotherhood and a series of attacks in Egypt. For seven years he had been on the run from the Egyptian authorities, who had assumed that Ezzat had absconded abroad.

### **Human rights activist given prison sentence in absentia**

A Cairo court sentenced the human rights activist and founder of the Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies (CIHRS), Bahey Eldin Hassan, in absentia to 15 years in prison on 25 August 2020. The activist, who has been living in exile since 2014, was accused of publishing false news and insulting the judicial authorities. In his frequent meetings with representatives of international organizations and governments, Hassan has been criticizing the poor state of human rights in his home country, holding the Egyptian government under Head of State Abd al-Fattah al-Sisi responsible.

## **Ethiopia**

### **Regional elections in Tigray**

On 09 September 2020 elections for the regional parliament will take place in the northern regional state of Tigray. The vote is highly controversial, as the National Electoral Board of Ethiopia (NEBE) has postponed the nationwide parliamentary elections planned for August 2020 indefinitely, for the time being, due to the COVID-19 pandemic (see BN of 06 April 2020). The government said that the elections were unconstitutional and would not be recognised. Hard-liners are calling for a military intervention in Tigray, the regional government responded by announcing that any attempt to prevent the election would be considered a declaration of war.

The Tigray represent only about six percent of the Ethiopia's population. After the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) took power in 1991, they held a disproportionately high number of high-ranking positions in government, the military and the economy. However, under Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, an Oromo, who has been in office since April 2018, numerous positions were filled by members of other ethnic groups and several former officials were imprisoned for abuse of power and corruption. Quite a few Tigray therefore complain of ethnic persecution. This is one of the reasons why especially secessionist forces are gaining influence in Tigray. First election results are expected for 13 September 2020, but it is considered certain that the ruling Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) will remain the strongest party, although it has faced serious competition in Tigray, especially from parties demanding full autonomy.

## **India**

### **Effects of the COVID-19 pandemic**

According to an evaluation of the World Food Programme (WFP) of 26 August 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic has led to the most serious economic downturn in four decades. The unemployment rate rose in May 2020 as a result of the nationwide curfew. It is estimated that over 110 million people have lost their sources of income. For those affected, the loss of wages has had a serious impact on food and health care. The employment rate has improved slightly since the end of May 2020 with the gradual easing of the restrictions. The government has announced measures to stimulate the economy.

In addition, natural disasters caused by the summer monsoon, particularly flooding in Assam, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Kerala, Karnataka and Maharashtra, have severely affected millions of people in terms of shelter, access to food and health care.

Since 01 September 2020, the fourth stage of relaxation of restrictions has come into effect despite the continuing increase in the number of infections. Restrictions on travel between the states have been lifted and public transport in the major cities has been put back into operation.

Since 07 September 2020, India ranks second in the world for positively tested corona cases, only topped by the US.

## **Iran**

### **AI report on torture of prisoners**

A new report by Amnesty International (AI) dated 02 September 2020 documents the use of severe torture on political prisoners arrested during the November 2019 protests. 7,000 men, women and children were arrested in a very short time during the drastic crackdown on the nationwide protests, the report says. It also criticized violent arrests, the disappearance of victims, the prevention of all contact with the outside world and the systematic denial of legal assistance to victims during interrogations.

### **Journalist sentenced to prison**

The business journalist and award winner Mohammad Mosaed was sentenced to four years and nine months in prison. He is known for his revelations of corruption in Iran. According to reports, his criticism of the measures taken against the COVID-19 pandemic was a further reason for his conviction. Recently, Mosaed was awarded this year's prize by the US-based Committee to Protect Journalists in July 2020. In May 2020, he was honoured with the Freedom of Speech Award of Deutsche Welle for his reporting in the times of COVID-19.

### **Murder of a 14-year-old teenager punished by nine-year prison sentence**

On 28 August 2020, the local judicial authority of the province of Gilan in northern Iran announced that the father of 14-year-old Romina, who wanted to marry a man 15 years older, had been sentenced to 9 years in prison for killing his daughter. Because her father did not want to consent to the marriage, the teenager had run away from home. The father decapitated the daughter with a sickle on 21 May 2020, after security forces had returned her to the family. The criminal court classified the act as honour killing, which under Iranian criminal law carries a penalty of up to ten years. The murder caused a great stir in Iranian society and led to a change in the law, which the Council of Guardians finally classified as compatible with the constitution on 08 June 2020, a decision that took a decade. It is considered a child protection law that shall prevent such honour killings. Even though criticism has been levelled at the law by various Iranian welfare organisations and lawyers who hold that it does not go far enough, the critics also consider it a politically courageous step to prevent honour killings, violence against children, prostitution and economic exploitation. The full text of the act has not yet been published.

## **Lebanon**

### **Formation of government**

On 31 August 2020 the political parties in parliament agreed on the former ambassador to Germany, Mustapha Adib, as the country's new prime minister. Adib has been repeatedly appointed to important posts in recent years and is regarded as the man of the establishment in Lebanese politics, therefore public opinion seems to assume that no real change is to be expected in this respect. In his inaugural speech he promised efficient governance by a government of experts. On the same day, many commentators pointed out that this statement did not differ substantially from the inaugural speech of his predecessor Diab.

After eight months of negotiations, the previous government's cabinet consisted of 30 ministries (for comparison: there are 128 parliamentary seats). A reduction in size is a general public demand.

### **Meeting between Haniya and Nasrallah**

The changing geopolitical relations between Israel and several Arab states have led to considerable concern among Palestinian organizations. The two radical Islamic groups Hamas, which dominates the Gaza Strip, and Hezbollah, which controls Lebanon's politics and state apparatus to a considerable extent and de facto has its own army in Lebanon, are particularly affected thereby. This led to a first meeting of the leaders of both groups in southern Lebanon on 06 September 2020. No specific agreements were reached. On this occasion, the unity of the groups was emphasized and Haniya stressed that Hamas now had weapons that could reach Tel Aviv.

## **Macron visit to Lebanon**

On 04 September 2020 French President Macron visited Lebanon for the second time since the explosion in the port of Beirut on 04 August 2020. In the run-up to the visit, the French Embassy had already published a series of demands on the Lebanese political representatives which they would have to comply with to allow the convention of a donor conference chaired by France at the end of October 2020. These demands included the drawing up of a response plan to the COVID-19 pandemic and full and transparent cooperation with the UN and aid organisations, with the first priority being to supply the population and to distribute supplies in a transparent manner. Other demands included cooperation with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the implementation of reforms that the IMF has long been calling for, legislation to control capital movements, and demands in the energy sector. The list is exceptionally comprehensive. During his visit to Beirut, Macron clearly stated that he expected Mustapha Adib to form a new cabinet within about two weeks.

## **Mali**

### **Negotiations on a transitional period**

On 05 September 2020, talks about the transition to a civilian government started in Bamako and in the regional capitals throughout the country. Hundreds of representatives of the military junta, political parties and civil society are taking part. Further talks are to take place soon.

### **Keita flies abroad**

Ousted President Keita flew to the United Arab Emirates (UAE) on 05 September 2020 for medical treatment. His state of health is unclear. He was hospitalized in Bamako after he was released from prison by the military junta that deposed him.

### **Armed conflicts**

On 05 September 2020, two French soldiers were killed and one injured in the Tessalit region in the north, when a bomb exploded and hit their vehicle.

On 03 September 2020, at least ten Malian soldiers were killed in an attack by an armed group in Guire, near the border with Mauritania. It is the most serious attack on the military since the coup on 18 August 2020.

French forces killed one civilian and wounded two others on 02 September 2020, about 50 km from the town of Gao in the north-east. According to the French Army, this was an accident. The soldiers tried to make a bus approaching a military convoy slow down by firing warning shots.

## **Montenegro**

### **Change of government possible**

According to current media reports, the opposition narrowly won the parliamentary elections held on 30 August 2020. The ruling Democratic Party of Socialists (DPS) of state and party leader Milo Djukanovic lost its absolute majority despite winning around 35% of the votes (equivalent to 30 seats) and its traditional coalition partners winning 10 seats. In contrast, the opposition coalition called "For the Future of Montenegro", led by the Democratic Front (DF), which received around 33% of the votes, in alliance with the pro-Western "Democrats" and the civil movement "Black on White", together won 41 of the 81 seats in parliament and thus a majority of the mandates. For the first time in thirty years, a democratic change of government and the replacement of the DPS government could therefore take place, the media said. According to the official electoral authority, voter turnout was just under 77%. From an EU point of view, it is important that significant opposition forces will not question the will to join the EU and the country's membership in NATO. Nebojsa Medojevic, the long-standing opposition politician of the alliance "For the Future of Montenegro", had told ARD Studio Vienna that the reasons for the potential change of power were the high level of corruption, Djukanovic's alleged links to organized crime and the one-sided dependence of the country's economy on tourism. According to media reports, the change of mood in the country is, among other things, due to the open partisanship of the Serbian Orthodox Church (SOC) in the election campaign; for several months its followers have repeatedly taken to the streets against the law on freedom of religion passed in December 2019 (see BN of 13 January 2020 and 10 February 2020). Furthermore, the election

result was both an expression of the gradual erosion of a patronage-based and corrupt order in the state and power apparatus and Montenegro's civil society's desire for change, it was said.

## **Niger**

### **Extrajudicial killings of dozens of civilians by soldiers**

On 04 September 2020 Abdoulaye Seydou, President of the non-governmental organization (NGO) Pan-African Network for Peace, Democracy and Development, reported that investigations of the National Human Rights Commission had revealed that soldiers of the Niger's army had executed unarmed civilians in March/April 2020 in the fight against the Islamists in the western region of Tillaberi. At least 71 bodies had been found in six mass graves. The National Human Rights Commission, of which the aforementioned NGO is also a member, initiated the investigations after Amnesty International (AI), among others, had reported that 102 civilians were missing in the Tillaberi region after an army operation in the same region between 27 March and 2 April 2020.

## **Nigeria**

### **COVID-19 pandemic**

On 05 September 2020 the airports of Abuja and Lagos resumed regular international air traffic. However, airlines from countries to which Nigerian airlines are not allowed to fly have not received permission to resume flights to and from Nigeria from this date. In Germany this affects Lufthansa. Nigeria had suspended international air traffic for non-essential flights on 23 March 2020 as a measure to combat the COVID-19 pandemic.

Effective from 04 September 2020, the duration of the night-time curfew, which was previously in force throughout the country, was shortened from 10pm to 4am to midnight to 4am.

## **North Macedonia**

### **Zoran Zaev returns to power**

According to media reports, a month and a half after the parliamentary elections, parliament approved the new government alliance between the Social Democrats (SDSM) and the largest party of the Albanian minority, the DUI, by a narrow majority. Which meant that former prime minister and Social Democrat Zoran Zaev has once again assumed the office of the head of government, so the reports say. On 30 August 2020, 62 members of the 120-member parliament had voted for the new government coalition. Zaev had announced a "period of order, justice and discipline". He was quoted as saying that he wants to concentrate on reviving the economy and fighting the COVID-19 pandemic as well as corruption. He also announced one billion euros of new foreign investment, a 40% increase in the minimum wage and pensions, and further judicial reforms.

## **Pakistan**

### **Effects of the COVID-19 pandemic**

In a press release dated 19 July 2020, the non-governmental organisation Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) announced the results of its survey on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. 94% of the respondents felt that wages in particular had been negatively affected. More than half feared that religious minorities are discriminated against in the distribution of aid or access to health care, and around 70% felt that women had become increasingly vulnerable to domestic violence.

Sindh province remains the most affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, followed by Punjab and Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa. In addition, the summer monsoon brought heavy rains that caused flooding in large parts of the country, further aggravating the already tense socio-economic situation and claiming a number of lives. According to the Edhi Foundation, there were cases of cholera, dengue fever and typhoid in the metropolis of Karachi. Humanitarian aid is being provided.

### **Persecution of Ahmadis**

According to a press release of the Ahmadiyya community in Germany, an Ahmadi was killed in Peshawar, capital of the Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa province, on 12 August 2020, after a smear campaign had been launched against him and his family. Furthermore, two attacks on Ahmadis in the province of Punjab are reported.

A report by the international Ahmadiyya community published in July 2020 not only sheds light on the persecution of the Ahmadis in Pakistan, but also addresses their global persecution resulting from Islamic extremism.

### **TV journalist killed in Balochistan**

A female presenter of Pakistani state television was presumably killed by her husband in Balochistan province on 06 September 2020. Pakistan is one of the most dangerous countries for journalists. On the index on press freedom compiled by Reporters Without Borders (RSF) Pakistan ranks 145th among 180 countries in 2020. According to the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), at least 61 Pakistani journalists have been killed since 1992. In the report on gender equality published annually by the World Economic Forum, Pakistan has one of the poorest rankings in all categories.

As recently as November 2019, a journalist in Lahore, Punjab, was also presumed to have been killed by her husband shortly before the planned publication date of the first issue of her own newspaper.

## **Russian Federation**

### **Prison sentences against Jehovah's Witnesses**

A court in the Siberian city of Kemerovo sentenced Jehovah's Witnesses Sergei Britwin and Vadim Levchuk to four years in prison each on 02 September 2020. The court found them guilty of membership in an extremist organization. In April 2017, the Supreme Court had classified the organization of Jehovah's Witnesses as extremist and outlawed it.

## **Rwanda**

### **Critic of President Kagame arrested**

On 31 August 2020 the Rwandan public prosecutor's office announced the arrest of Paul Rusesabagina, who is considered a critic of President Paul Kagame. He is accused of terrorism, murder and arson. The arrest had been possible by international cooperation, the announcement said. However, family members accuse Rwandan authorities of having abducted Rusesabagina from Dubai, where he had been a few days before. He is said to be a co-founder of the opposition party Mouvement Rwandais pour le Changement Democratique (MRCD) and founder of the opposition Parti Democratique au Rwanda (PDR-Ihumure). As leader of the armed MRCD wing, the Front de Liberation Nationale (FLN), he is said to be responsible for attacks on Rwanda from the neighbouring DR Congo. The former hotel manager became famous because he is said to have saved more than 1,200 people from the Rwandan genocide in a hotel he ran in 1994.

## **Serbia/ Kosovo**

### **Agreement on economic relations signed**

On 04 September 2020 the President of Serbia, Aleksandar Vučić, and the Prime Minister of Kosovo, Avdullah Hoti, separately signed a political declaration of intent on the normalisation of economic relations between their two countries in Washington. The legally non-binding agreement had been brokered by the US government. Specifically, it deals with the commitment of both sides to implement cross-border transport projects, to join the "mini-Schengen zone" in the Western Balkans and to cooperate in the use of the Gazivode/Ujmani reservoir for electricity and water supplies. The agreements also included that Serbia would refrain from seeking the withdrawal of recognition of Kosovo from other countries for one year, while Kosovo would refrain from applying for admission to international organizations during the same period. The opposition in Kosovo criticised the agreement with regard to Serbia's failure to recognise Kosovo and the plans concerning the Gazivode/Ujmani reservoir. On 07

September 2020 Vučić and Hoti will meet again for negotiations, this time in Brussels at the invitation of the EU. The meeting will focus on political issues.

## **Somalia**

### **Fighting in Mudug**

On 04 September 2020, fighting broke out between al-Shabaab and villagers of Shabeelow village, Mudug region. Several people were killed on both sides. The militia group tried to force the villagers to hand over their weapons and livestock.

### **Air raid**

Six members of al-Shabaab were killed in a US AFRICOM air strike near the village of Dar as-Salam in the Lower Shabelle region on 24 August 2020. Three others were injured.

Between January and August 2020 US AFRICOM flew 46 air strikes in Somalia.

## **Sudan**

### **Peace treaty signed**

The Sudanese transitional government and the Revolutionary Front, an association of five rebel groups, signed a peace agreement on 31 August 2020. This is intended to put a definitive end to 17 years of civil war in the regions of Darfur, South Kordofan and Blue Nile. The agreement was signed in Juba, where negotiations mediated by South Sudan had been ongoing since last year.

The Juba Peace Agreement provides, among other things, for the participation of the rebels in power, the return of displaced persons and judicial procedures to address the crimes committed during the conflict, which according to UN figures has claimed 300,000 lives and forced 2.5 million people to flee their homes. Immediately prior to this, the parties also signed several accompanying protocols, in which arrangements were made for the dissolution of the rebel groups and their integration into the regular army, greater autonomy for the southern states of South Kordofan and Blue Nile, property rights to land, the distribution of natural resources, reparations and compensation. It is doubtful, whether the peace agreed thereby will last, especially in Darfur. Recently, the number of armed attacks by militias on villagers has risen sharply in Darfur, with tens of thousands of people fleeing. Nor have all the rebel groups signed the agreement yet, including the wing of the largest Darfur rebel movement, the Sudan Liberation Movement (SLM), under the leadership of Abdul Wahid al-Nur.

## **Syria**

### **Israeli air strikes**

According to its own statements, the Syrian army repulsed an Israeli missile attack against an air force base on 03 September 2020. An Israeli fighter plane fired several rockets, most of which were intercepted by the Syrian air defence. According to reports by the pro-opposition Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, the attack was directed against a government airbase in the central Syrian province of Homs. Israel was probably responsible for the attack. According to the Observatory, Israel had already flown several other air raids in Syria in the same week. For example, the Israeli army had attacked several military bases in the south of Damascus on 31 August 2020, killing eleven people, it said. The victims had been one civilian, three government soldiers and seven members of pro-Iranian militias.

### **COVID-19 pandemic**

The UN Under Secretary on Humanitarian Affairs warned on 27 August 2020 that the government-released official infection figures might be much lower than the actual number of cases. The increasing number of admissions to Syrian health facilities, death notices and funerals indicated that the official figures of 2,500 infections and 100 deaths due to the virus could not be true, he said. Germany and Belgium, currently chairing the UN Security Council

for Humanitarian Affairs in Syria, issued a joint statement saying that the spread of COVID-19 in the country is increasing exponentially.

## **Tunisia**

### **Parliament elects new government into office**

On 02 September 2020 the Tunisian parliament approved the government formed by the Prime Minister, Hichem Mechichi, who has been in office since July 2020, by 134 of 217 votes. Mechichi primarily selected civil servants, university lecturers and executives from the private sector to form the new government. Mechichi's predecessor, Elyes Fakhfak, had resigned on 15 July 2020, for lack of a parliamentary majority (see BN of 20 and 27 July 2020).

### **Suspected Islamists killed after knife attack on police officers**

The Tunisian security authorities shot dead three allegedly militant Islamists after they had attacked two policemen with a knife in Sousse. One policeman was killed and the other seriously injured in the knife attack. No one has yet claimed responsibility for the incident.

In recent years, there have been several attacks, which the IS had claimed.

## **Turkey**

### **Lawyer dies after hunger strike**

The Turkish lawyer Ebru Timtik, who was convicted on charges of terrorism, died of heart failure in an Istanbul hospital on 27 August 2020 following a hunger strike of 238 days, as was announced by her law firm. According to supporters, Timtik was among a total of 18 lawyers who were sentenced to long prison terms on charges of membership of a terrorist organization. In 2019 a court in Istanbul had sentenced Timtik to more than 13 years imprisonment for being linked to the left-wing extremist DHKP-C party, which is classified as a terrorist organisation in Turkey. In October 2019, the sentence against her and her co-defendants was confirmed. On 02 January 2020 she went on hunger strike in order to force a trial that she could accept as fair.

### **Lawyer released from prison**

On 03 September 2020, the Supreme Court of Turkey ordered the release of the lawyer Aytac Ünsal, who had started a hunger strike in prison, because his further imprisonment would endanger his life. He has been on hunger strike for 213 days and had started it almost simultaneously with lawyer Ebru Timtik, who died on 27 August 2020. He had been sentenced to over ten years in prison for membership of a terrorist organisation last year together with Timtik.

### **Temporary broadcasting ban for news channel**

According to the Turkish Regulatory Authority for Broadcasting (RTÜK), the news channel Tele1 has to interrupt its programme for five days starting from 03 September 2020, because it had been critical of Turkish President Erdoğan and the religious authority Diyanet. The reason given for this was a violation of the principle that broadcasts should not stir up hatred and hostility. RTÜK said that this was based on two television programmes in which an Islamic scholar accused the Turkish President and the religious authority of politicising mosques and of establishing a theocracy. The religious authority had responded by filing a complaint. The broadcasting ban was confirmed by a court.

### **Protective measures against COVID-19**

After the Turkish Health Minister's declaration on 03 September 2020 that Turkey is experiencing the second peak of the first coronavirus wave, the Ministry of the Interior announced new measures to contain the pandemic. Accordingly, as of 04 September 2020, weddings must be limited to small celebrations, engagement ceremonies and other festivities will be banned for the time being.

## Venezuela

### **Amnesty for 110 political prisoners**

On 31 August 2020, the Maduro government announced an amnesty for 110 imprisoned opposition members, a very rare occurrence in the last 20 years. However, no significant actors of the Guaidó-related opposition are among those pardoned. The majority of them are members of the opposition groups that are critical of the boycott of the parliamentary elections in December 2020 or (no longer) rule out a cooperation with the PSUV. Commentators from various international media are of the opinion that this gambit serves above all to further divide the opposition and to persuade some groups to participate in the parliamentary elections in order to legitimise them.

## Yemen

### **STC withdraws from power sharing agreement, fighting continues**

On 25 August 2020 the Southern Transitional Council (STC) announced its withdrawal from a power-sharing agreement with the Yemeni government that had been agreed in July 2020 (see BN of 03 July 2020). The agreement was concluded after months of fighting between the two parties, who are nominally on the same side in the fight against the Houthi rebels. The STC cited, among other things, the collapse of public services and attacks by the Yemeni government on STC forces in the Abyan governorate as reasons for the withdrawal.

### **Human rights groups demand the release of imprisoned civilians**

Several human rights groups called for the release of arbitrarily detained and abducted persons on 02 September 2020. Hundreds of people are detained in official and unofficial detention centres run by various warring parties throughout the country on the basis of political views, political activism, professional activity or religious affiliation, they said. Attention was also drawn to the lack of medical care and the potential threat of COVID-19 in prisons.

## Zimbabwe

### **Opposition members released from prison**

On 02 September 2020 the High Court in Harare granted the release from pre-trial detention on bail of opposition politician Jacob Ngarivhume and journalist Hopewell Chin'ono in two separate proceedings. Ngarivhume's bail amounts around EUR 510, Chin'ono's around EUR 100. Both must hand in their passports, report to the police three times a week and are not allowed to tweet. Ngarivhume and Chin'ono were arrested in Harare on 20 July 2020. They are accused of inciting the population to participate in public violence during protests that had been planned for 31 July 2020 (see BN of 27 July 2020).

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