



Briefing Notes

Group 62 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

10 May 2021

Afghanistan

Floods

The Afghan authorities have informed that on 03.05.21, heavy rains and flash floods hit several provinces across the country (Herat, Ghor, Daikundi, Samangan). At least 37 people, among them women and children, died and hundreds of houses were destroyed; 405 families across the country were displaced from their homes. Herat and Ghor provinces were particularly affected, the authorities said. In Herat, 24 people were killed, and countless houses destroyed. In Ghor, ten people died, 160 houses were destroyed and about 900 people were displaced, the authorities reported.

Attacks on civilians

In Zabul and Parwan provinces, 13 civilians were killed and 42 others injured in two bombing attacks targeting vehicles on 10.05.21. On 09.05.21, a car bomb (and two other bombs) exploded in front of a girls' school, killing at least 60 people and injuring 150 in a predominantly Shia Hazara neighbourhood of Kabul. The school is located in the Dasht-e Barchi area, which is mainly inhabited by people of the Hazara ethnic group. On 05.05.21, one individual was killed and at least three others injured in an attack on a bus carrying health ministry staff in the Kalakan district north of Kabul. No-one has claimed responsibility for the attacks on 09.05.21 and 05.05.21. On 06.05.21, the explosion of a mine injured four civilians in Kunduz city.

Taliban activities

On 04.05.21, hundreds of people fled their homes following a large-scale Taliban offensive in Helmand province. Only shortly before, the Afghan army had taken over various bases in the province from the US army after their withdrawal. On 05.05.21, the Taliban issued a press release accusing the media in the country of reporting one-sidedly in favour of the government and threatened with consequences. One day later, a journalist was shot dead by unknown individuals in the city of Kandahar.

Observers see a deliberate divide-and-rule strategy at work among the Taliban, who have sent invitations for private talks to various regional warlords and rulers. Apparently, the aim is to isolate President Ghani.

Emigration of Pamir nomads to Kyrgyzstan

On 04.05.21, it was reported that 44 people from the Pamir region in Badakhshan province have emigrated to Kyrgyzstan and taken up citizenship there. These are mainly young people who do not see a future for themselves in Afghanistan. Apparently, another 106 people from the region had previously taken Kyrgyz citizenship.

Women

A public US intelligence report dated 04.05.21 predicts that under future Taliban rule, women's rights in the country will suffer a severe setback. On 06.05.21, Human Rights Watch (HRW) warned that health care for

women and girls in Afghanistan will deteriorate due to a lack of donations. This is a consequence of the withdrawal of international troops and the unclear situation in the country, HRW said.

Albania

Parliamentary committee set up to examine removal of President Meta

After the parliamentary election held on 25.04.21 (cf. BN of 03.05.21), the polarisation in Albania's politics has been continuing. Media report that on 07.05.21 the parliament (still in its old composition and largely boycotted by the opposition as it has been since 2019) voted by 97 votes to six (one abstention) in favour of setting up a committee to investigate the removal from office of President Ilir Meta. The ruling Socialist Party (PS) accuses Meta of violating the equality of political competition and the constitutional impartiality of the state president. Meta's spokesman said that the President would 'not recognize any unconstitutional and illegal activity of the current one-party parliament or the decisions of other puppet institutions of this kleptocratic regime'.

This is the second attempt to oust Meta; the first one had been discontinued after a year of investigations. The procedure had been initiated by the PS after Meta's ultimately failed attempt to postpone the local elections of 30.06.19 (cf. BN of 01.07.19) and then to have them declared invalid.

Algeria

New protests - number of detainees increases significantly

Large numbers of people are continuing to protest in the streets of Algeria, demanding comprehensive reforms and a change of leadership.

The police are increasingly cracking down on the unsanctioned demonstrations. There are now 74 opposition activists in prison, their number has almost doubled since March. Several released prisoners report violence, torture, and sexual abuse during detention.

230 firefighters have been arrested when demonstrating in uniform; they now face treason charges.

New laws announced - long prison sentences foreseen

On 09.05.21 representatives of the interior ministry announced a new law intended to clarify the provisions set out in the constitution. In the future, each notification of a rally must name those responsible, among others. So far, the protest movement has been operating without leadership.

On 05.05.21, justice minister Belkacem Zeghmati announced that up to 20 years imprisonment can be imposed for election interference. The offences include destroying or removing the ballot box, violating election rules, or disrupting the voting process.

Angola

Luanda: Restriction of freedom of movement

As of 10.05.21, strict restrictions on entering and leaving Luanda will come into force, several agencies have reported with reference to a press conference given by state minister Adão de Almeida. According to his statement, only authorised persons, especially business people, health and security staff and sick people, will be allowed to cross the borders of the capital province until 08.06.21. Business people also need proof of a negative Covid test and a letter from their employer. The reason for the restrictions is the increase in new COVID-19 infections, most of which have been registered in Luanda. The Johns Hopkins University has informed that on 06.05.21, a record level of 392 cases were registered in one day. So far, a total of 28,740 cases and 633 deaths have been registered; over 450,000 vaccine doses have been administered.

At the same time, a ban on entry from Brazil and India came into force. Angolan nationals and people with residence permits are exempt, but they are obliged to go into quarantine for seven days. In general, air travellers to Angola need to be tested both before and after the flight and have to fill out a form with details of their whereabouts.

Belarus

Prison sentences for opposition members

On 04.05.21, a court in the Belarusian city of Gomel sentenced four confidants of opposition politician Svetlana Tikhanovskaya to at least six years in prison each. The court found them guilty of organising mass unrest and planning to occupy administrative buildings in Gomel. The convicts had been part of the campaign team of presidential candidate Tikhanovskaya; they had been arrested shortly before the presidential election held on 09.08.20 whose outcome led to nationwide protests.

Burkina Faso

Deadly attacks; internally displaced people

On 03.05.21, unidentified individuals killed at least 25 people in an attack on the village of Kodyel (Foutouri commune, Est region). Eleven of the attackers were killed by members of the Volontaires pour la défense de la patrie (VDP). On 08.05.21, unidentified individuals killed three people in an attack in the commune of Tin-Akoff (Sahel region).

On 07.05.21 UNHCR reported that 45 people were killed, and more than 17,500 people internally displaced by attacks in the previous ten days. In total, more than 1.14 million people were displaced by the violence in about two years.

Burundi

Influx of refugees returning to Burundi

Media report of massive returns of Burundians to their home country who had fled to Tanzania and Rwanda in the wake of riots during the presidential election in May 2015. A joint repatriation programme of the governments of Burundi, Tanzania and UNHCR had already been launched in 2017. Last year, Rwanda also joined in. Since 2017, up to 145,000 people have been supported to return to Burundi.

Tanzania is particularly interested in a timely repatriation and has appealed to Burundian refugees to return. In the past, there have been repeated reports of grievances in Tanzanian refugee camps and of involuntary repatriations (cf. BN of 19.04.21).

Cambodia

COVID-19 pandemic

At the end of March 2021, there had been only few COVID-19 cases, but in the past two weeks their number has risen dramatically. The health system is poorly equipped and cannot cope with an increase in severe cases. The actual extent of the pandemic in the densely populated city of Phnom Penh is completely unclear.

Chad

End of fighting announced

On 09.05.21, the army announced victory in a battle with rebellious groups from the north of the country that lasted for several weeks. The deployed army units have returned to the capital.

156 militants of the Front pour l'alternance et la concorde au Tchad (FACT) were arrested. The FACT has not yet commented on the end of the violent clashes.

China

Hong Kong: Further prison sentence for democracy activist Joshua Wong

On 06.05.21, democracy activist Joshua Wong was sentenced to a further ten months in prison for taking part in an unauthorised demonstration; he has already been detained and sentenced several times (cf. BN of 19.04.21). On 04.06.20, he had participated in an unauthorised candlelit vigil to commemorate the 1989 crackdown on pro-democracy protests in Beijing; the vigil had been banned because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

On 06.05.21, district councillors Tiffany Yuen Ka-wai, Jannelle Rosalynne Leung and Lester Shum were also sentenced to between four and six months imprisonment for participating in the same event.

Colombia

More violence at protest rallies

Anti-government protests are continuing despite President Iván Duque's renunciation of a planned tax reform (cf. BN of 03.05.21) and the resignation of finance minister Alberto Carrasquilla. Especially the cities of Bogotá and Cali have been the scene of violent riots and clashes between police and protesters. The national ombudsman's office has informed that at least 24 people have lost their lives, eleven of them due to violence used by the security forces. More than 370 people are said to be missing. The protests are now generally directed against President Duque's government. The President has invited the leading protest figures for talks to be held on 10.05.21.

DR Congo

Ebola outbreak declared over

On 03.05.21, both the Congolese health ministry and the WHO stated that the latest Ebola epidemic in the DR Congo was already overcome three months after the first recorded Ebola case was reported in the town of Butembo in North Kivu province. Since the latest Ebola outbreak on 07.02.21, the WHO has registered a total of eleven confirmed Ebola cases, one probable case and six deaths in the four health zones of North Kivu province. The WHO has assured the government of continued cooperation in combating current public health problems such as the infectious diseases cholera, measles, and the coronavirus SARS-CoV-2.

El Salvador

Removal of the constitutional judges

On 01.05.21, the newly elected parliament removed the judges of the Constitutional Chamber of the Supreme Court and the Attorney General in its first session. The reasons given were alleged private interests of the lawyers and obstruction of the government's health policy by the Chamber. President Nayib Bukele's party Nuevas Ideas holds the majority in parliament. Last year, the Constitutional Chamber had blocked several decrees by Bukele to combat the COVID-19 pandemic. Opposition and human rights organisations view the removals as an attempted coup d'état and a violation of the rule of law. The judges concerned refuse to vacate their posts.

Gambia

Opposition movement "3 Years Jotna": criminal proceedings suspended

On 04.05.21, the justice minister and attorney general Dawda Jallow informed in a press statement that criminal proceedings were suspended against the leading figures of the civil society protest movement "3 Years Jotna", which was meanwhile banned (cf. BN. of 15.02.21). In view of the upcoming presidential elections scheduled for the end of 2021, the decision to suspend proceedings was not only motivated by humanitarian considerations, but also by the intention to promote the peace and reconciliation process in the political sphere, the statement said. In response to the dismissal of the criminal cases, the opposition movement stated that both the (new)

indictments and the (new) dismissal of the criminal cases were clearly politically motivated and constituted an abuse of power, the lawyer and leader of the protest movement Yankuba Darboe said.

India

Kashmir: COVID-19 pandemic

On 06.05.21, the health authority in the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir issued a ban prohibiting hospital staff from talking to the media about the conditions in the facilities. Besides, ventilators and oxygen will no longer be allowed to be given to private individuals or non-governmental organisations. The situation due to the COVID-19 pandemic remains tense, as is the case in the whole of India (cf. BN of 03.05.21). Hospitals are overcrowded; also, there is a shortage of oxygen and medicines.

On 05.05.21, a prominent 77-year-old activist and advocate for an autonomous Kashmir died from the Corona virus in a hospital in the city of Jammu. He had previously been imprisoned for several years.

Indonesia

Escalation

The troubled region of West Papua is heading for a new escalation in the struggle for independence. On 07.05.21, about 400 soldiers from Infantry Battalion 315/Garuda (Pasukan Setan/Troops of Satan) were sent to the region after Brigadier General Gusti Putu Danny Karya Nugrahavor was killed about a week ago. President Widodo has classified as terrorist organisations both the Organisation for a Free Papua (Organisasi Papua Merdeka/ OPM) and the West Papua National Liberation Army (Tentara Pembebasan Nasional Papua Barat/ TPNPB). The TPNPB has claimed responsibility for the deadly attack on the intelligence general. Gusti Putu Danny had formerly been a member of the elite Kopassus unit, which has been blamed for many crimes against indigenous Papuans for decades. The independence movement is heavily persecuted; even showing the West Papuan Morning Star flag can lead to several years of imprisonment.

Iran

COVID-19 pandemic

The Tehran municipality has excluded Afghan street cleaners from the vaccination campaign because they do not have Iranian ID cards. In eleven cities including Tehran, Isfahan, Shiraz, Yazd and Qazvin, students in grades nine and twelve have protested against the final in-person examinations scheduled despite the pandemic, demanding that the corresponding decision by the education ministry be withdrawn. On 05.05.21, police used force against protesting students in the city of Yazd, arresting numerous protesters.

Criticism of situation in Tehran women's prison

The husband of imprisoned human rights activist Nasrin Sotudeh has criticised the structural deficiencies and catastrophic hygienic conditions of Qarchak prison. Inmates had already protested against these conditions in the past. Sotudeh, who has been sentenced to 38 years imprisonment and 148 lashes, is even blocked from seeing her children because of the poor state of the prison, her husband said.

LGBTQI member murdered

Foreign media report that a 20-year-old homosexual man was murdered by male members of his family in the city of Ahvaz (Khuzestan). The crime was committed on 04.05.21 after his sexual identity was stated on the document for temporary exemption from military service (kart-e mo'afiyat) and thus confirmed to his family.

Guardian Council decides on additional rules for candidates for the presidential elections

The Guardian Council has issued additional rules for the registration of candidates for the presidential elections scheduled for 18 June. The prerequisites include at least four years of work experience in either government, judiciary, parliament or the military. Further requirements are a university degree at master's level or a similar

degree and an age limit (40-75 years). In Iran, the Guardian Council screens potential candidates for ideological strength and makes a pre-selection.

Kenya

Two killed in suspected al-Shabaab attack along Kenya-Somalia border

On 03.05.21 two people were killed and one was seriously injured in the border area between Kenya and Somalia when their vehicle drove over an explosive device believed to have been planted by al-Shabaab fighters on the same day.

The attack occurred a few kilometres from the village of Ishakani in Kenya's coastal district of Lamu, just on the border with Somalia. It is the second attack in two months against vehicles used to supply a construction site where Kenya is building a fence and trenches along the Somali border. The aim is to prevent extremists, criminals, and illegal immigrants from crossing the border.

Kosovo

Investigation after threat against LGBTQI activist

A media report referring to police information of 04.05.21 and other sources has informed that police and the public prosecutor's office have started an investigation into the intimidation of well-known LGBTQI activist Lend Mustafa. Mustafa had posted on Facebook that he had been spat at by a young man and had received a death threat. The incident occurred at lunchtime in the central square of the capital Pristina. Mustafa said that this was not his first experience of threat and insults; however, this one has been the most humiliating so far. The report continued that despite several peaceful Pride parades, attended by top politicians, discrimination against the LGBTQI community persists. Hate speech directed against them is common on social media.

Mozambique

Possible EU military deployment in northern Mozambique

Given the continuing unstable security situation in Cabo Delgado, the EU is considering the prospect of military deployment in the coming months to support the local government troops. In response to a request from the Mozambican government for military assistance, Josep Borrell, the EU's High Representative for Foreign Affairs has commented on the possibility of sending a training mission to steady the country, similar to the EU's involvement in the Sahel.

The regional alliance of states SADC (Southern African Development Community) has also discussed the deployment of a 3,000-strong intervention force, but a final decision on the issue has not yet been reached.

After attacks on the coastal town of Palma (cf. BN of 29.03.21), about 40,000 people have fled the area; another 20,000 people are reportedly trapped in the town and surrounding villages and are being prevented from leaving the region by the security forces.

Myanmar

Ongoing fights between military and rebel group, protests

Since the military coup of 01.02.21, junta security forces have killed at least 780 people. 3,826 people are in detention, arrest warrants for 1,540 people are still outstanding.

In Chin State, fighting between the Chinland Defence Force (CDF) and the Myanmar Army (Tatmadaw) continues. Between 02.05.21 and 04.05.21, CDF fighters in Hakha reportedly killed nine Tatmadaw soldiers. On 09.05.21, CDF members burnt down a police station in Surkhua.

Fighting broke out again between the armed forces and civilians in Kani (Sagaing region) after a military truck exploded on 05.05.21. Reportedly, several people were injured on both sides.

On 07.05.21, the commander-in-chief of the Arakan National Council (ANC) announced cooperation with the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA). On the same day, the two ethnic rebel groups jointly captured another Tatmadaw base in Hpapun district (Mutraw).

Following the shooting down of a Tatmadaw helicopter by the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) on 03.05.21, the Tatmadaw flew air strikes on villages in Momauk Township. Two men were killed, and ten people were injured. KIA spokesperson Naw Bu informed that the Tatmadaw also fatally shot over 30 of their own men in the incident. In further clashes in Mohnyin, Shwegu and Momauk on 06.05.21, over 200 Tatmadaw soldiers were reportedly injured and several killed. Again, there is no information on the KIA's casualties.

An explosion in Pyay (Bago region) on 04.05.21 killed a National League for Democracy (NLD) lawmaker, three police defectors and the individual with whom the victims were taking shelter.

Between 04.05.21 and 06.05.21, unidentified individuals stabbed three local administrators who had been appointed by the military after the coup in Mandalay, Sagaing and Yangon (Rangoon) regions.

Meanwhile, strikes and protests by the population have continued, as did shootings, arrests, and torture, including of minors, by state security forces.

On 08.05.21, the junta announced that it had classified as terrorist organisation the underground National Unity Government (NUG). In addition, some 10,000 striking teachers across the country were suspended and hundreds of bank employees and over 40 education ministry staff were dismissed for refusing to work for the junta.

Niger

State of emergency extended

Due to repeated violent attacks by armed groups, Niger's parliament (Assemblée nationale) decided on 05.05.21 to extend the security emergency for eleven departments in the Tillabéri region and two departments in the Tahoua region by three months until 05.08.21, a media report says. The recent months have seen repeated attacks in these regions with numerous deaths (cf. BN of 03.05.21 and 19.04.21).

According to the media report, parliament decided on the same day to extend the health emergency for the entire country until 05.08.21. It had been introduced on 27.03.21 in response to the dangers of the COVID-19 pandemic and allows the government to take various measures for the purpose of containing the disease.

Nigeria

Abducted students released

Media report that on 05.05.21, a further 27 of the 39 students abducted on 11.03.21 in Kaduna State were released by their abductors (cf. BN of 15.03.21). Some of them had already been set free in April. Details about the releases remained largely unknown. In particular, there was no official confirmation of a ransom payment or the granting of any other consideration to the kidnappers. Media report that the kidnappers had demanded a ransom of NGN 800 million (about EUR 1 million). Since 18.03.21, the parents of the kidnap victims have been gathering every day to appeal to the government agencies to step up their efforts (cf. BN of 22.03.21). Since December 2020, there has been a whole series of abductions in connection with attacks on educational institutions in the northern states (cf. BN of 08.03.21, 22.03.21 and 26.04.21). Further kidnapping attempts were thwarted by the security forces.

Villagers killed by cattle herders

Armed Fulani herdsmen have killed 17 people, among them children, injured others and burnt down houses in attacks on villages in eastern Benue State. Reportedly, the deadly attacks occurred on 02.05.21 and 03.05.21 in several communities in Gwer-West Local Government Area. Anonymous witnesses say that the attacks were not preceded by any provocation. The attacks were confirmed by the police in Benue State.

Media report that in recent months, deadly conflicts have repeatedly occurred in Benue between settled inhabitants and Fulani herders in search of grazing grounds for their animals.

Seven police officers killed

Media report that on 07.05.21, at least seven police officers were killed in attacks on a checkpoint and two police stations in the oil-rich Rivers State in the Niger Delta.

In recent weeks, there have been a striking number of attacks, some of them deadly, on police stations in the south and south-east of the country (cf. BN of 22.03.21). President Muhammadu Buhari is coming under increasing criticism due to the deteriorating security situation throughout the country. The main causes of concern are kidnappings and attacks in the north-west and north-east of the country, in addition to the increasing number of attacks on members and facilities of the police (cf. BN of 26.04.21 and 03.05.21).

North Macedonia

Dimmed hopes for a quick start of EU accession negotiations

Media report that the delayed process of government formation in Bulgaria following the elections there has dimmed hopes that the first intergovernmental conference between the EU and North Macedonia, and hence the formal start of accession negotiations, could begin by the time of the EU summit in June/July this year. According to Gjorgi Spasov, former North Macedonian ambassador to Bulgaria, the question whether Bulgaria would lift its veto or consent to the adoption of the negotiating framework between North Macedonia and the EU was dependent on a lasting solution to the dispute with Bulgaria over historical and cultural definitions and perceptions, which had already been going on for some time (cf. BN of 14.12.20).

Pakistan

COVID 19 pandemic: measures implemented

On 08.05.21, the government implemented the measures announced to contain the COVID-19 pandemic at the end of the fasting month of Ramadan (cf. BN of 03.05.21). All shops, hotels, restaurants, and markets remain closed for nine days; only mosques are open. Tourist and pilgrimage trips are prohibited, as is travel between the provinces. Since 05.05.21, only Pakistani citizens are allowed to enter the country from Afghanistan and Iran. International air travel has been severely restricted. Hospitals have almost reached their capacity limit; the number of intensive care beds has been increased.

Palestinian Autonomous Territories/Israel

West Bank: Several dead in attacks and police operations

On 02.05.21, three Israelis were injured by gunshots from a passing vehicle. A few days later, one of the wounded succumbed to his injuries in hospital. The driver of the car with West Bank number plates has absconded. On the day following the incident, Israeli settlers attacked the nearby Palestinian village of Jaloud. Eleven Palestinians were arrested in the clashes, and four people were injured by rubber bullets. On 05.05.21, house searches were conducted as part of the manhunt for the suspect in above incident; a 16-year-old Palestinian was killed and another Palestinian injured by Israeli security forces in Odlā village, near Nablus city, after an alleged attack on the security forces with firebombs. The Israeli military said it was investigating the incident further.

On 06.05.21, Israeli security forces arrested a suspect in the incident of 02.05.21 in the West Bank town of Silwad. Local media report that the Palestinian suspect also holds US citizenship. The US Embassy has not commented on the matter, referring to data protection reasons.

The Israeli police has informed that on 07.05.21, three men from the West Bank attacked an Israeli border police checkpoint near the town of Jenin. The police and an Israeli soldier returned fire, killing two of the men and wounding the third.

East Jerusalem: Heavy protests in the wake of threatened evictions in Sheikh Jarrah

On 06.05.21, clashes broke out between Palestinian protesters and Israeli settlers. Several people were arrested. Protests have been taking place regularly for weeks (cf. BN of 12.04.21).

The clashes were triggered by the dispute over homes and land in the East Jerusalem neighbourhood of Sheikh Jarrah where numerous Palestinian families had received eviction notices. Hamas in the Gaza Strip has threatened Israel with serious consequences if the evictions in Sheikh Jarrah went ahead. The Israeli Supreme Court has postponed its decision on whether to uphold the evictions, originally expected on 09.05.21 and 10.05.21. Apparently, a new date will be set within the next 30 days.

On 07.05.21, emergency services and police reported that nearly 200 Palestinians and 17 Israeli security forces were injured during clashes in East Jerusalem. The clashes were among the largest in recent years. On 08.05.21, Palestinians and Israeli security forces clashed after prayers during Laylat al-Qadr, the holiest night for Muslims in the month of Ramadan. Violence erupted in front of the Damascus Gate in East Jerusalem; Palestinian rescue workers said that almost 100 people were injured. On 09.05.21, numerous people were again injured.

Republic of the Congo

Journalist sentenced on World Press Freedom Day

On 04.05.21 the NGO Reporters without Borders (RSF) issued a press release stating that Raymond Malonga, cartoonist and director of the satirical magazine Sel Pigment, who had been illegally arrested three months before and charged with an alleged press offence, was sentenced on 03.05.21 to a total of six months imprisonment and a fine of FCFA 30 million (approx. € 46,000, as of 10.05.21) by a court in Brazzaville (cf. BN of 15.02.21). The court unjustly found the defendant guilty of defamation in a case that does not fall under the press law. The alleged defamation centres on the wife of Jean-Dominique Okemba, who is Chairman of the National Security Council and nephew of President Denis Sassou Nguesso. RSF has repeatedly denounced the situation of press freedom in the Republic of Congo.

Somalia

Floods

Last week, heavy rains flooded various regions of Somalia. At least 25 people, among them nine children, reportedly lost their lives. In the Middle Shabelle region, an estimated 25,000 people were affected by the floods. In Jowhar, people from eight villages were forced to flee.

Attack

At least six people were killed and six others injured in a suicide attack on a police station in the Waberi district of Mogadishu on 09.05.21. So far, no-one has claimed responsibility for the attack.

South Sudan

President dissolves parliament

On 08.05.21, South Sudanese President Salva Kiir dissolved parliament. The move was in line with a peace agreement to end the civil war that had begun in 2013. The new parliament is to be formed soon; it will be expanded from 400 to 550 seats and include members from all parties to the agreement.

Syria

Chemical weapons: UN agency sees evidence of cover-up

On 07.05.21 Izumi Nakamitsu, head of the UN Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA) reported to the Security Council that staff members of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) had detected large quantities of chemical agents in a facility in Syria. The facility had already been used in the past for the production of chemical weapons.

Syria is a member of the OPCW since 2013 and insists on having destroyed or removed all chemical weapons from the country by August 2014. Nakamitsu went on record to say that the OPCW was rejecting Syria's denial

and insisted on the disclosure of all chemical weapons produced. The problems with Syria were 'alarming' both in scope and severity, Nakamitsu added. In April 2020, the organisation's members had voted to suspend Syria's rights on the body until all outstanding issues were resolved.

In April 2020, the OPCW had reported three incidents of chemical weapons use in 2017 attributable to the Syrian government. The USA believes that the Syrian government has carried out at least 50 chemical weapons attacks in its own country since 2011.

Russia has complained that the OPCW was allowing itself to be turned into a tool of Western powers and that Damascus was following 'the Chemical Weapons Convention to the best of its ability'.

Thailand

COVID-19 pandemic

Counting around 71,000 infections at the beginning of May, the country is experiencing a major setback as the number of reported cases has almost doubled in the last four weeks, with Bangkok being hit hardest. According to official figures from early May, 276 deaths are closely linked to COVID-19. With the current increase in cases, Thailand faces the loss of a second tourism season, as does Cambodia. Thailand is the most tourism-dependent country in Southeast Asia.

Turkey

Protesters arrested

On 01.05.21, more than 355 demonstrators were arrested in several Turkish provinces during the International Workers' Day rallies. They are accused of holding illegal demonstrations and of violating the lockdown which is in place to curb the number of infections.

Members of the Furkan community arrested

On 04.05.21, three mosques in Adana and Gaziantep were raided, and 76 members of the anti-government Furkan community were arrested. They had gathered for prayer in the mosques; among the arrested was the community's founder Alparslan Kuytul and his 14-year-old son. They are accused of violating the lockdown and inciting civil disobedience. Local authorities say that mosque attendance is not prohibited during the lockdown, but that the community members had planned to remain without permission in the mosques for several days to perform the itiqaf ritual. During the ritual, Muslims are allowed to retreat to their homes or to mosques for praying during the last ten days of Ramadan. Video footage of mosques being forcibly evicted by police have sparked public outrage on social media. The governor's office in Gaziantep has stated that the group was only arrested after practising civil disobedience; besides, there had been several investigations beforehand on suspicion of terrorism. A police officer who allegedly used pepper spray during the arrests was suspended, the governor's office informed. On 08.05.21, a court ordered the conditional release of the detainees.

Suspected PKK supporters arrested

On 04.05.21, nine people suspected of links to the PKK were arrested by police during raids in Istanbul and the provinces of Siirt and Diyarbakir. They are accused of supporting a separatist terrorist organisation. Another person is being sought.

Uganda

Parliament passes Sexual Offences Bill, 2019

On 03.05.21, parliament introduced a bill to provide a basis for dealing with sexual offences such as sexual harassment, cyber harassment, or rape, and to introduce a register for sex offenders. At the same time, same-sex relations and sex work are criminalised, among other things. Alongside the Anti-Homosexuality Act, 2014, the Sexual Offences Bill is the second directive to criminalise same-sex relations. Human rights activists fear continuing discrimination against LGBTQI people and sexual minorities if the law comes into effect.

Venezuela

Activist arrested

On 25.04.21, media reported that human rights activist Orlando Moreno was arrested by police in the town of Tucupita, Delta Amacuro State, while attending to people whose relatives had lost their lives when attempting to escape to Trinidad and Tobago. The law enforcement authorities accuse Moreno of inciting hatred, insulting public officials, causing bodily harm, and resisting public authority. On 30.04.21, the activist was provisionally released from prison.

Vietnam

Prison sentence for land rights activist

On 05.05.21, a court in Hoa Binh province sentenced well-known land rights activist Can Thi Theu and her son to eight years' imprisonment each, followed by a three-year suspended sentence. Both had been arrested in June 2020 for critical publications on social media in connection with the land rights conflict in Dong Tam commune in January 2020 (cf. BN of 13.01.20).

Yemen

Actress and model arbitrarily arrested

On 07.05.21 Amnesty International (AI) called for the immediate release of a Yemeni model and actress who had been arbitrarily arrested by the Houthis in Sanaa on 20.02.21. She was held incommunicado for the first ten days and reportedly physically and verbally abused during interrogations. She was forced to 'confess' to several crimes, including drug possession and prostitution; she was also accused of committing an 'indecent act' and of 'violating Islamic principles'. Apparently, the Houthis are now intending to conduct a forced 'virginity test'. The woman was regularly seen in photographs on the internet without a headscarf, thus violating social norms in Yemen.

Humanitarian situation

More than 20,000 people, most of them internally displaced, have been affected by heavy rains and flooding. Many have lost all their belongings. Some areas are inaccessible due to the severely damaged infrastructure. Some people have died in collapsed houses.

Group 62 - Information Centre for Asylum and Migration
Briefing Notes
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