



# Briefing Notes

## Group 62 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

17 May 2021

### Afghanistan

#### Attacks on civilians

Despite an agreed three-day ceasefire between the Taliban and government forces, nine people were killed and 17 others injured by landmines in Kandahar and Kunduz provinces on 13.05.21, media report. On 11.05.21, the Afghan government informed that a total of 255 civilians were killed and over 500 injured since the beginning of the fasting month of Ramadan on 13.04.21. On 10.05.21, a bus hit a landmine in Zabul province, killing ten people and injuring 40 others. The UN Security Council has condemned the attack on the girls' school in Kabul on 08.05.21 with 60 dead, most of them Shiite Hazaras (cf. BN of 10.05.21). Attacks on educational institutions have recently been increasing.

#### Local forces in Afghanistan

On 12.05.21, the German government announced to set up two offices to protect local staff in Afghanistan from June 2021 onwards, in order to bring these staff members to safety before the withdrawal of the German armed forces scheduled for 04.07.21. There will be one office in Mazar-i-Sharif and one in Kabul, where current and former staff members (e.g. drivers or translators) can state whether they are at risk from insurgents and apply to leave the country for Germany. 400 people have already done so.

#### Media

On 12.05.21 the news portal Salam Watandar reported findings that last year, a total of 30 media outlets in 13 Afghan provinces have ceased operations for security and economic reasons, including five television stations, nine radio stations and 16 print media.

### Brazil

#### Deadly police operation in Rio de Janeiro

Media report that on 06.05.21, a total of 28 people were killed in a police raid in the Jacarezinho favela in Rio de Janeiro, among them one police officer. The aim of the operation was to execute 21 arrest warrants against people suspected of drug and gang crime; however, this was only partially implemented. The operation was conducted despite a decision by the Federal Supreme Court of 05.08.20 that, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, police raids in Rio de Janeiro must be suspended until further notice and may only be carried out in exceptional circumstances. Despite this decision, 266 people died in 93 police operations in Rio de Janeiro in January and February 2021, a research report by the Universidade Federal Fluminense said. Both human rights organisations and the UN have condemned the violence used by the security forces as disproportionate and have demanded an independent investigation of the incidents.

## **Burkina Faso**

### **Deadly attacks**

On 16.05.21, an attack by unidentified individuals on the village of Palsegué (Centre-Nord region) claimed about nine lives, initial reports say. On 11.05.21, two people were killed in an attack on the village of Wiboria (Sahel region).

## **Cameroon**

### **Two transgender people sentenced to imprisonment**

On 11.05.21, two transgender people were each sentenced to five years in prison and fined around EUR 300. The two people, one of whom is known as local social media star Shakiro, were found guilty of 'attempted homosexuality' and of causing public nuisance; they were handed down the maximum sentence. They had already been in custody since early February 2021. They had been arrested in Duala town for wearing women's clothes in public. The defence lawyers have announced to appeal the verdict.

Most recently, at the end of April 2021, Human Rights Watch (HRW) accused the Cameroonian security forces of an increasing number of attacks on LGBTQI people (cf. BN of 03.05.21).

## **China**

### **Tibet/international: Penpa Tsering officially appointed as the new Tibetan president-in-exile**

On 14.05.21, the Tibetan Election Commission (TEC) announced the election of Penpa Tsering as the new Tibetan president-in-exile (Sikyong). On 11.05.21, the former speaker of the Tibetan parliament-in-exile won the run-off election with 34,324 votes; his rival Kelsang Dorjee Aukatsang, who had served as an advisor to Tsering's predecessor Lobsang Sangay, secured 28,907 votes. The turnout was over 75%. Tsering is expected to take office on 26.05.21. The new parliament-in-exile, which was also elected on 11.04.21, will take up its functions on 30.05.21. The Tibetan government-in-exile is not recognised internationally.

## **Colombia**

### **No agreement reached in negotiations; continuing protests**

The protests, which started on 28.04.21 and were originally directed against a tax reform bill that has since been cancelled (cf. BN of 03.05.21 and 10.05.21), continue to lead to violent clashes between demonstrators and police. A first round of talks between the government and the protest leaders ended without result on 10.05.21. While the protesters are calling for an end to violence by the armed forces, the government demands that the roadblocks be lifted. As a first concession, President Duque has announced that studies at public universities will be free for students from low-income families in the second semester of 2021. The state leadership has signalled readiness for further negotiations mediated by the Catholic Church and the UN.

## **Côte d'Ivoire**

### **Child labour in cocoa production**

At the beginning of May 2021, more than 60 children working on cocoa plantations were apprehended during a police operation in the area of the town of Soubré (Bas-Sassandra district, south-western part of the country). Many of them come from Mali and Burkina Faso; some of them are said to be victims of human trafficking. Operation 'Nawa 2' was accompanied by media coverage and is intended to highlight the authorities' fight against child labour in the sector, not least vis-à-vis other countries. The cocoa production is an important sector of the country's agricultural economy (cf. BN of 04.05.20). So far, attempts to address the widespread child labour in the cocoa sector have proven unsuccessful (cf. BN of 15.06.20).

## **DR Congo**

### **Eastern Congo: State of siege, militarisation, militia violence**

Various media have reported critically on the 30-day state of siege declared by President Félix Tshisekedi on 30.04.21 in the conflict provinces of North Kivu and Ituri, which are seriously affected by militia violence (cf. BN of 03.05.21). Apparently, the civilian provincial governments have been temporarily suspended and placed under the control of the military and the police. During the state of siege, the civilian judiciary was completely replaced by the military judiciary. In addition, constitutionally guaranteed civil rights and freedoms were severely restricted. National and international NGOs have expressed concern about the human rights situation, as both military and police have special executive powers of intervention in the regions under the state of emergency. In addition, the two military governors appointed in the crisis regions, Luboya Nkashama Johnny (for Ituri) and Constant Ndima Kongba (for North Kivu), who are both former rebel commanders, are blamed for their involvement in human rights violations; also, the Congolese armed forces are held responsible for a large number of human rights violations. The military has assured compliance with international human rights and humanitarian law during the state of siege. Bintou Keita, head of the United Nations Stabilisation Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUSCO), has assured the Congolese security forces of continued support in the pacification process in eastern DRC and the protection of the civilian population threatened by militia violence during the state of siege. On 14.05.21, Africanews reported that President Tshisekedi has meanwhile turned to the EU to set up a military mission to train the Congolese armed forces; he has also asked the neighbouring state of Uganda for support in the fight against the Islamic rebel group Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), who are originally from Uganda; before, the President had also approached France and Kenya (cf. BN of 03.05.21). Local media report that several rebel groups operating in North Kivu have already signalled their intention to lay down their arms and participate in the Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration programme (DD&R). Meanwhile, the military has reported success in the fight against the rebel groups ADF and Coopérative de développement du Congo (CODECO) in Ituri province. The ADF has responded with retaliatory attacks, killing over 20 residents and abducting 52 others in several villages in Ituri province last week, Radio Okapti reported on 16.05.21. However, militia violence is not limited to the crisis provinces. In Tanganyika province, for example, more than 20 people have been killed, media reports informed on 11.05.21.

## **Ethiopia**

### **Parliamentary election postponed again**

Ethiopia has again postponed the parliamentary elections scheduled for 05.06.21. The National Election Commission gave organisational reasons for the postponement on 15.05.21; a new date has not yet been set. Originally, the elections had been due to be held in May 2020. However, in view of the COVID-19 pandemic, the election was first postponed to August 2020 and finally to June 2021. The elections are seen as a yardstick for the future policies of Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, who had come to power after the resignation of his predecessor Hailemariam Desalegn in April 2018 and has yet to pass the key test of the ballot box. Abiy has been praised worldwide for his numerous reforms and was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in December 2019 for his reconciliation with the former war enemy Eritrea, among other things; but he has also been controversial due to the growing violence in the country, the increase in ethnic tensions and, above all, the armed conflict in the regional state of Tigray.

## **Georgia**

### **Opposition leader Melia released**

Nika Melia, leader of the main Georgian opposition party United National Movement, who has been detained since 24.02.21 (cf. BN of 12.04.21), was released from Rustavi prison on 10.05.21. This was preceded by the posting of bail in the amount of 40,000 GEL (approx. 9,650 EUR, as of 17.05.21) by the EU and an EU-brokered agreement between the government and the opposition. Apart from to far-reaching reforms of the electoral law and the judiciary, the agreement of 19.04.21 provides, inter alia, for the return of the opposition parties to the parliament

which they have been boycotting (cf. BN of 12.04.21), and - with regard to Melia - an amnesty for individuals who were or are affected by criminal proceedings following the anti-government protests in June 2019. In a radio interview he gave shortly after his release, Melia left open whether his party would join the agreement (which it has not done so far) and thus return to the current parliament. Further developments remain to be seen.

## India

### **COVID-19 pandemic: Opposition criticism; redevelopment of government quarter in New Delhi**

While India continues to be hit hard by a second Corona wave and the health system is overburdened, construction work continues on the new parliament building as part of the Central Vista Redevelopment Project in New Delhi. The prestigious project of the incumbent Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is expected to be completed by the general elections in 2024, and the parliament building is scheduled to be completed by India's 75th Independence Day in 2022.

Opposition parties have criticised Prime Minister Narendra Modi in an open letter on this matter, saying that instead of construction projects, priority should be given to feeding the poor and to free vaccinations; also, the controversial law to liberalise the agricultural sector should be stopped. The letter also criticises the recent large-scale election rallies in several states and the religious festivals recently held with tens of thousands of pilgrims.

## Iran

### **Detained activist on hunger strike**

Iranian foreign media report that activist Saba Kord Afshari, sentenced to 24 years in prison for inciting 'depravity and fornication', planning criminal actions against national security and propaganda against the system, has gone on hunger strike in protest against the situation of her seriously ill mother, who is also imprisoned. Saba Kord Afshari had been arrested in Tehran in the summer of 2019 after taking part in the 'White Wednesday' campaign against the mandatory hijab for women.

### **Two labour activists arrested**

Iranian foreign media report the arrest of two labour activists in the city of Saqez (Kordestan). On 16.05.21, the two men were summoned to the local court for questioning and were arrested for distributing pictures and brochures on social media on the occasion of the International Workers' Day, the reports say. They refused to pay a bail of IRR 40 million (approx. EUR 781, as of 17.05.21).

## Iraq

### **Activist killed**

On 09.05.21, activist Ihab al-Wazni was shot dead by unidentified individuals in his car in Kerbala. After his death became known, protests broke out in Kerbala. The protesters demand an investigation into the attack. They blame the attack on militias supported by Iran. Protests were also reported from Nasiriya. During the night, protesters tried to storm the Iranian consulate in Karbala and set fire to some of the checkpoints in front of the consulate. Iranian foreign minister Mohammed Javad Zarif stated that Iran had nothing to do with the killing of Ihab al-Wazni. Since the death of the activist, there have been repeated protests in various places. On 13.05.21, Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi promised that those responsible would be brought to justice. On the same day, people who had taken part in the protests were arrested in Babil.

### **Attacks on airbase**

On 04.05.21 and 09.05.21, the Ain al-Asad airbase used by Iraqi and American forces was targeted by missile attacks, which prompted the military to step up security at the base. Since the death of Iranian General Soleimani in January 2020, there have been repeated drone or missile attacks on military bases in Iraq.

### **Attack on oil field in Kirkuk**

On 05.05.21, there was an attack on an oil field in Kirkuk. Security forces were killed in the incident, and the oil field was damaged. ISIS insurgents have claimed responsibility for the attack.

### **Yazidi**

On 10.05.21 Karim Khan, chief investigator of the UN team at the UN Security Council, informed that his investigation team had found evidence that the crimes committed by ISIS against the Yazidi people constituted genocide; so far, more than 1,444 suspects have been identified, he said.

### **ISIS hideouts**

The international coalition informed on 16.05.21 that they had found and attacked five ISIS hideouts in the Hamrin mountains. The raids were conducted after ISIS militants had killed dozens of Iraqi soldiers and peshmerga over the past three weeks. A Pentagon report dated 04.05.21 describes the possibility of ISIS regaining strength, especially in places with a power vacuum, such as the regions disputed between the central government and the KRG.

## **Kazakhstan**

### **Fines against protesters**

On 12.05.21, an administrative court in Almaty fined at least four participants in a lengthy protest rally outside the Chinese consulate in Almaty; the defendants had been arrested the day before. The protesters were demanding information about their relatives in Xinjiang who they believed were in detention or under house arrest. The court found the protesters guilty of violating the law on organising and conducting peaceful assemblies. Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty's Kazakh service reported fines ranging from the equivalent of approximately EUR 186 to approximately EUR 280 (median monthly income: approximately EUR 160 in 2017).

## **Kenya**

### **Three police officers killed in attacks in Kenya near the Somali border**

On 12.05.21, two security personnel were killed in the northern district of Mandera after al-Shabaab militias attacked mobile phone towers near the Somali border in an attempt to paralyse communication. A police spokesperson stated that on the same day, a third police officer was killed with a rocket-propelled grenade in Wajir district when al-Shabaab tried to blow up another mobile phone tower.

The attacks were targeted at the military support that the Kenyan government has provided to Somalia to fight the al-Shabaab militias.

## **Mali**

### **Interim government dissolved**

On 14.05.21 Kalilou Doumbia, secretary general of the presidential office, announced the dissolution of the transitional government without giving any reasons. Head of government Moctar Ouane was tasked with forming a new transitional government. Since the military coup of August 2020 and the formation of a transitional government in October 2020, there has been increasing criticism that the transitional government is dominated mainly by people with links to the army. There is also increasing criticism that reforms are progressing too slowly. In mid-April 2021, the dates for the presidential and parliamentary elections had been set (27.02.22, 13.03.22 and 20.03.22, cf. BN of 19.04.21).

## Mexico / USA

### **Strengthened cooperation in the area of migration**

On 07.05.21, Mexico's head of state Andrés Manuel López Obrador and US Vice President Kamala Harris agreed to cooperate more closely in the area of migration. The two governments intend to jointly promote economic development in the so-called Northern Triangle countries (El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras) in order to curb illegal migration from there to the USA. In addition, stronger cooperation is envisaged in the fight against smuggling and human trafficking. US President Joe Biden is under increasing domestic political pressure because of the recent significant increase in the number of migrants at the Mexican-US border.

## Morocco

### **King grants pardon**

King Mohammed VI issued 810 pardons on the occasion of Eid-al-Fitr (festival of breaking the fast). Among those pardoned are 17 people arrested and sentenced to up to 20 years in prison in connection with the Hirak movement protests in the Rif region in 2017. Furthermore, the justice ministry informed that twelve prisoners imprisoned for extremism and terrorism were also pardoned.

## Myanmar

### **Deadly fighting, dozens of arrests in protests, journalist convicted**

Since the military coup on 01.02.21, at least 796 people have lost their lives following police and military violence. 3,998 people are currently in detention, with arrest warrants for 1,679 people still outstanding.

The Myanmar military (Tatmadaw) and local resistance fighters or ethnic armies have clashed again in Chin and Kachin states and in Sagaing and Mandalay regions.

On 11.05.21 and 12.05.21, fighters of the Tamu People's Defence Force (TPDF), which was established at the end of March 2021, apparently killed 15 Tatmadaw soldiers in Panthar and Kuntaung (Sagaing region). On the TPDF side, five people were killed, among them four members of the Meitei (Kathe) ethnic group from the Indian state of Manipur, who had fought alongside the TPDF. Apart from traditional hunting rifles, the TPDF also has modern weapons.

In Myingyan (Mandalay region), junta forces managed to enter Talokemyo village tract on 12.05.21 after several days of fighting with the Myingyan People's Defence Force. At least 30 members of the group, who had been defending the villages against raids, were arrested. One of those arrested was tortured to death.

Following unrest in Mindat (Chin State), the Tatmadaw imposed martial law on the town on 13.05.21 and began to use heavy artillery against lightly armed insurgents. By 15.05.21, most of the Mindat People's Defence Force fighters was forced to retreat. When the Tatmadaw entered the town, they reportedly used 18 prisoners as human shields. 20,000 people are trapped in the town and 15 people have been injured in attacks by the military. Information on the civilian death toll varies between five and eight in reports. On 16.05.21, fighting continued between civilian resistance fighters and the Tatmadaw west of Mindat.

Following an attack by the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) on a military base near Mansi Township (Kachin State) on 11.05.21, fighting broke out there between the Tatmadaw and the KIA. The clashes intensified on 13.05.21 after junta forces launched airstrikes on Madan Yang village.

Between 10.05.21 and 16.05.21, junta forces and unidentified individuals killed at least four people across the country who either were members of the National League for Democracy (NLD), actively supported the democracy movement or had insulted the military.

On 11.05.21 and 12.05.21, the military violently dispersed protests, arrested over 40 people and fired into homes in search of fleeing protesters in Dawei (Tanintharyi region) and Mandalay.

On 12.05.21, for the first time a journalist was convicted for reporting on the protests against the military junta. The conviction was made under Article 505(a) of the Penal Code which dates back to the British colonial era and penalizes the publication of reports with the intent of inciting military personnel to mutiny. After the coup of 01.02.21, the junta had increased the sentence from two to three years.

## **Nepal**

### **COVID-19 pandemic**

Various reports say that the explosive spread of the coronavirus has moved from India to Nepal. New highs are reported almost daily, apparently caused by the India variant B.1.617.2 which is being detected with increasing frequency. In relation to population numbers, the infection curve in Nepal is now rising more sharply than in India. Since the outbreak of the pandemic, more than 450,000 of the approximately 30 million Nepalese have been infected with the virus, and more than 5,000 people have died from COVID-19 (as of 17.05.21), official figures say. The Nepalese health system was already completely overstretched by the end of April 2021.

## **Niger**

### **Five killed in attack on village in border region**

On 12.05.21, unidentified individuals attacked the village of Fantio in the Tillabéri region on the border with Mali. Media report that five people were killed and two wounded in the incident. Apparently, soldiers from the G5 Sahel regional organisation have been sent to Fantio.

In recent months, there have been repeated deadly attacks in the border regions with Mali (cf. BN of 19.04.21 and 03.05.21).

## **Nigeria**

### **Attack on Maiduguri thwarted**

On the evening of 11.05.21, the Nigerian military foiled an attack by the Islamist terrorist group Boko Haram on Maiduguri, capital of north-eastern Borno state. Media report that the attackers burnt down several houses in the suburb of Jiddari Polo and opened fire. Residents fled in panic to Maiduguri. A military spokesperson informed that the attack was repelled by the combined action of police, youth vigilante and hunters. Nine attackers were killed and many others wounded. Maiduguri is considered the birthplace of Boko Haram, as the group had been founded there by Muhammed Yusuf in 2002.

In the north-east of the country, the two groups Boko Haram and Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) have repeatedly attacked civilians and military personnel (cf. BN of 03.05.21). Most recently, a total of 35 civilians, military and militia members were killed in several attacks attributed to ISWAP on 04.05.21, media reports say.

### **Suspected ESN leader arrested**

The Nigerian military has informed that on 12.05.21 Awurum Eze, alleged second leader (behind a man named Ikonso) and financier of the Eastern Security Network (ESN) organisation was arrested in Aba town in south-eastern Abia state. Citing statements from members of ESN and IPOB (Indigenous People of Biafra) who had already been arrested, the army said that apart from Ikonso, Awurum Eze was apparently the only one to have had a direct link to Nnamdi Kanu, the fugitive IPOB leader. Ikonso had been killed on 24.04.21 in a raid by security forces in southeastern Imo state (cf. BN of 03.05.21). ESN, a paramilitary arm of the secessionist IPOB group, had been founded in December 2020 to protect the oil-rich south-east from raids by Fulani herdsmen.

## **North Macedonia**

### **CPT report criticises police misconduct and poor prison conditions**

A recent media report cites country reports from the EU and the USA that have repeatedly pointed out in recent years North Macedonia's need to make structural changes with regard to cases of police violence as well as poor conditions in prisons. This concern is also expressed in the current report of the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT) published on 11.05.21. The report gives rise to concern that ill-treatment of suspects by police officers has increased again and that so far, the competent authorities have done too little to address the known shortcomings within the prison system. Victims have described being slapped, punched or kicked (inter alia with rubber batons) during their arrest or inside a police

facility for the purpose of extracting a confession. The CPT report recommends, among other things, that in such cases, legal action be taken against both senior officers and subordinates and that investigative work be intensified and made more effective. The report already includes a 32-page statement by the North Macedonian government outlining that it will continue to work on improving all the shortcomings identified by the CPT, including those in detention centres.

## **Palestinian Autonomous Territories / Israel**

### **East Jerusalem/West Bank: Ongoing protests cause deaths and injuries**

On 10.05.21, at least 330 Palestinians and 21 Israeli soldiers were injured in riots, the Palestinian Red Cross has informed. The protests were triggered both by the anticipation of parades on 'Jerusalem Day', an Israeli holiday commemorating the conquest of Jerusalem by Israel, and by the events in Sheikh Jarrah (cf. BN of 10.05.21). In the morning, Palestinians and the military clashed on the grounds of the Al-Aqsa Mosque, one of Islam's holiest sites. The Israeli military stormed the area.

On 14.05.21, at least eleven people were killed and another 500 injured by the Israeli military in protest rallies. The rallies were among the largest in recent years and were fuelled in part by events in the Gaza Strip.

On 15.05.21, the Palestinians' annual day of remembrance of the 'Nakba' (the expulsion of numerous Palestinians in 1948), the Israeli military killed two Palestinians and injured 450 others during protests. Clashes were reported from Hebron, Ramallah, Nablus and Qalqilya, and other places.

On 16.05.21, a Palestinian injured six soldiers when he drove his car into a checkpoint. The attacker was shot dead by the soldiers.

### **Israel/Gaza Strip: Escalation of violence between Hamas and Israel**

Triggered by the events in East Jerusalem, Hamas shelled Jerusalem on 10.05.21 with long-range rockets after their demands for Israeli military withdrawal from both the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound and the Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood in Jerusalem were not met. Israel returned the fire with massive air strikes on targets in Gaza.

On 12.05.21, two Israelis, among them a child, died from Hamas rocket fire that hit a car.

On 13.05.21, Israel announced the call-up of 9,000 reservists and the massing of troops at the Gaza border. In addition to further air strikes, the Israeli military shelled targets on the other side of the border from the ground with tank and artillery shells. Hamas repeatedly fired volleys of rockets towards Israeli territory.

Late in the evening of 14.05.21, Israeli shelling killed ten members of a Palestinian family in the Shati refugee camp in the Gaza Strip; the dead were eight children and two women. According to the Israeli military, the airstrike targeted a high-ranking Hamas member, who, however, was not present at the time of the attack.

On 15.05.21, an Israeli died when a rocket hit his house in a Tel Aviv suburb.

On 16.05.21, Israel carried out another air strike which killed 42 people, among them ten children and 16 women, and injured another 50 people, the Palestinian health authority stated. The military said that the attack targeted Hamas tunnel systems.

On the same day, the Israeli army said that Hamas fired 3,100 rockets at targets in Israel. Of these, 400 hit Gaza, 1,100 were intercepted, and a large number of the remaining rockets hit uninhabited areas.

On 16.05.21, the Palestinian authorities informed that a total of 192 Palestinians, at least 58 of them children, were killed by Israeli attacks on Gaza since the offensive began on Monday. More than 1,235 people were injured. The Israeli military stated to have killed 75 Palestinian fighters and accuses Hamas of hiding behind civilians. In Israel, a total of ten people were killed by Hamas rockets, among them two children.

Israeli attacks on Gaza targeted four high-rise buildings which were also used by Hamas, the Israeli military said. In one of the buildings, international media were based. The residents of the building had been warned beforehand, so there were no fatalities. The UN Special Envoy for the Middle East said that more than 34,000 people are currently displaced from their homes within Gaza, and their supplies are not guaranteed.

### **Israel: Escalation of violence between Jewish and Arab Israelis**

On 10.05.21, an Arab Israeli lost his life in the city of Lod during clashes in the course of protests against the Israeli military presence at the al-Aqsa Mosque compound and in East Jerusalem.

On 12.05.21, about 400 people were arrested across the country in the ongoing riots. There were further clashes between extreme nationalist, Jewish and Arab-Israeli groups. Numerous people were injured during the days of unrest, and rioters damaged cars and buildings, including private property, a hotel, restaurant, synagogues, and religious schools. Clashes were also reported from the towns of Ramla and Acre. A state of emergency and a night curfew were declared in Lod. Nevertheless, clashes between Jewish and Arab Israelis continued.

## **South Sudan**

### **President Kiir decides on new parliament**

After dissolving the parliament on 08.05.21 (see BN v. 10.05.21), South Sudanese President Salva Kiir decided on 10.05.21 to establish a new parliament in line with the provisions of the 2018 peace agreement. The national assembly was accordingly expanded from 400 to 550 members.

### **Aid worker killed**

On 12.05.21, an aid worker was killed when unidentified assailants fired at a marked humanitarian vehicle. The team was travelling from Chukudum to a health facility in Kapoeta (Budi County). According to the UN, this is the first aid worker killed in South Sudan in 2021. Nine aid workers were killed in 2020.

## **Sudan**

### **Two people killed at rally**

On 11.05.21, two people were killed by gunfire and dozens were injured when Sudanese forces broke up a peaceful rally in Khartoum. The rally was held to mark the anniversary of the 2019 uprisings, and protesters demanded justice for the demonstrators who had lost their lives at the time. The rally was followed by further demonstrations in Khartoum.

## **Sudan / South Sudan**

### **UN Security Council extends UNISFA mandate**

On 11.05.21, the UN Security Council extended the mandate of the United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA) until 15.11.21 in Resolution 2575 (2021). At the same time, the governments of both Sudan and South Sudan, as well as local communities, were called upon to take all necessary steps to effectively demilitarise the disputed territory of Abyei and to cooperate with UNISFA.

## **Syria**

### **Release of more than 400 prisoners**

On 11.05.21, the Syrian government released more than 400 imprisoned civil servants, judges, lawyers, and journalists who had been jailed this year for expressing dissent on social media. The amnesty that allowed the release excluded opponents of Assad and political prisoners. The releases took place shortly before the presidential elections scheduled for 26.05.21.

### **Idlib: Attack on Turkish military convoy**

On 10.05.21, a Turkish soldier was killed in an attack on a Turkish military supply convoy, another four soldiers were injured. The Turkish defence ministry reported a rocket attack between the Bab al-Hawa border crossing and the Syrian border town of Kfar Lousin. In contrast, the pro-opposition Syrian Observatory for Human Rights referred to a roadside explosive device. It was not clear who carried out the attack.

## **Thailand / Myanmar**

### **Expulsion of journalists**

On 11.05.21, media reported that three Myanmar journalists and two activists are facing deportation from Thailand. They were arrested in Chiang Mai (northern Thailand) for illegal entry on 09.05.21.

## **Turkey**

### **Arrest for video recording of a police officer**

On 12.05.21, a man was arrested in western Afyonkarahisar province when he tried to film a police officer during an altercation. Video and audio recording of police officers on duty was banned by the Turkish interior ministry with effect from 30.04.21 (cf. BN of 03.05.21).

### **Racist attack in Mersin province**

Media report that on 13.05.21, a Kurdish-Iraqi family in southern Mersin province became victims of a racist attack by a group of Turkish right-wing extremists. Witnesses said that the family was attacked with stones and batons in the open street. In the attack, one man was seriously injured and had to be hospitalised, and a twelve-year-old child was also injured. The responsible authorities have announced an investigation into the incident.

## **Uzbekistan**

### **High prison sentence against blogger**

On 10.05.21, a court in southern Surxondaryo province sentenced blogger Otabek Sattoriy to six and a half years imprisonment on several counts of extortion and defamation. Sattoriy, who has reported on local grievances in his video blog Halq Fikiri (Opinion of the People) and is considered a fierce critic of the provincial governor, had been initially arrested on 30.01.21 on charges of extorting a mobile phone from the head of a local bazaar. Several human rights organisations and media representatives say that the trial was a reprisal for Sattoriy's critical reporting and a general warning to the growing number of independent bloggers in Uzbekistan.

## **Vietnam**

### **COVID-19 pandemic**

With over 180 new recorded daily infections, the pandemic reached a new peak on 16.05.21. So far, the country has managed the pandemic relatively well; but since the end of April 2021, infection numbers have been rising steadily. Official figures put the total number of infections at 4,112; so far, 36 people have died (as of 17.05.21).