



Briefing Notes

Group 62 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

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Afghanistan

Attacks on civilians / internally displaced persons

During fighting around the town of Lashkargah in Helmand province, air-strikes reportedly destroyed a school and a hospital and killed 20 civilians on 08.08.21. On 06.08.21, it was reported that there had been over 1,000 civilian casualties in the country in the last month alone. On 05.08.21, the Taliban tortured the historian and poet Abdullah Atefi to death, it was said. On 04.08.21, the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) reported that 900,000 people had been internally displaced in the last three months. On the same day, a young woman was reportedly shot dead by the Taliban in Balkh province for not wearing a veil, but tight clothing and was not accompanied by a man. On 03.08.21, it was reported that the fighting had displaced 50,000 people in the Ghaziabad and Nari districts of Kunar province in the last two months. On the same day, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) site said that ten civilians had been killed and 85 injured in Lashkargah city in the last three days. In the city of Kandahar, five were killed and 42 injured. It was said, that the rise in civilian victims was mainly due to the greater number of army air-strikes. On 02.08.21, the US and UK governments accused the Taliban of committing war crimes against civilians in the provinces of Kandahar (Spin Boldak border crossing) and against the Hazara in the Malistan district of Ghazni province. On 31.07.21, it was reported that the Hazara in the highlands of Bamiyan feared the capture of the area and human rights violations by the Taliban. One in ten people had already left the city of Bamiyan, it was said.

Fighting / Kabul and provincial capitals / War crimes / Border crossings

According to the Long War Journal (LWJ), as of 09.08.21, the Taliban controlled 229 districts, the government 66 districts and 112 are contested. On 08.08.21, the Taliban captured the provincial capitals of Kunduz (Kunduz province), Sar-e Pol (Sar-e Pol) and Taloqan (Takhar), according to the LWJ. Earlier, the provincial capital and border crossing Zaranj and its lucrative customs post in Nimroz province had already fallen to the Taliban without fighting, as had the town of Sheberghan in Jawzjan province (General Dostum's hometown). In the latter two towns, it was reported that government buildings were looted and prisoners were freed from jails. Many of Afghanistan's border crossings are now under Taliban control (cf. BN of 19.07.21). By now, many civilians have fled from the city of Zaranj to Iran (cf. BN of 02.08.21). According to leading Taliban commanders (including Mullah Yaqoob, who was previously considered moderate), it is the Taliban's intent to capture the cities of Kandahar, Herat and Lashkargah (in particular the airports in Kandahar and Herat) and other provincial capitals. On 08.08.21, the Afghan army began a counter-offensive to retake the cities. On 07.08.21, US President Biden therefore ordered air support for the Afghan army with B-52 bombers. On 06.08.21, Uzbek General Dostum returned to Afghanistan from Turkey. He immediately submitted a plan for the recapture of the north to President Ghani, which was to be implemented promptly, it was reported. On 05.08.21, joint manoeuvre exercises by Russia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan began on the Afghan border with the latter two countries. On 04.08.21, an explosive device was detonated in front of the house of acting Minister of Defence, Bismillah Mohammadi, in Kabul. Thereafter, gunmen from a Taliban martyrs' battalion stormed the house, killing eight people and injuring 20 (including the attackers). Allegedly, the minister was not

among them. According to the Taliban, this marked the beginning of a campaign of retaliation against leading government politicians. Another explosion on the same day, in front of the National Directorate of Security (NDS) building in Kabul injured four civilians and one security guard. On the same day, the Afghan government called for a special session of the UN Security Council to seek international assistance in its fight against the Taliban. The meeting was allegedly held on 06.08.21 in an attempt to bring an end to the attacks on provincial capitals. On the evening of 04.08.21, thousands of Afghans throughout the country had shouted "Allah Akbar" (God is great) in the streets or from the roofs of their houses in support of the Afghan army. On 03.08.21, the army called on the citizens of the city of Lashkargah in Helmand province to leave their homes to enable it to oust the Taliban from the city (reinforced by air strikes), who had allegedly taken nine out of ten districts. It was said, that there was fighting in the city centre near government buildings, police headquarters and prisons. On 02.08.21, it was reported that the Taliban had captured several television and radio stations in the city of Lashkargah.

Media / Refugees

On 05.08.21 it was reported that the Taliban were closing down many media facilities in their areas of control (51 nationwide) or forcing them to broadcast their propaganda. On 04.08.21, 300 Afghans arriving from Iran in a lorry were picked up by Turkish security forces, reports said. On 02.08.21, the New York Times reported that countless Afghans were leaving the country or planning to leave. According to the IOM, the number of people leaving the country has increased by 30-40%. The UNHCR reported on 20.07.21 that 5,000 Afghans were entering Iran every day, an increase of 68% against the same period last year (cf. BN of 02.08.21).

Benin

Setback for press freedom

On 23.07.21, Benin's Supreme Court upheld the conviction of journalist Ignace Sossou, who was jailed from December 2019 to June 2020. According to media reports, he had quoted a prosecutor on 18.12.19 who had described Benin's digital law at a conference as a weapon to be used against journalists. Sossou was arrested shortly afterwards and sentenced to 18 months imprisonment and a heavy fine for so-called harassment by electronic communication. After the Court of Appeal of Cotonou reduced the prison sentence to twelve months and suspended six of them, Sossou was set free again on 24.06.20. The country's Supreme Court now ruled that the Court of Appeal's sentence was fully in line with the law. The NGO Reporters Without Borders (RSF) has announced its support for Sossou's further legal representation. According to media reports, the journalist is considering having the national sentence reviewed by the Court of Justice of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS Court of Justice). Since 2017, Benin has dropped down 36 points in the World Press Freedom Index and now ranks 114th among 180 countries.

Burkina Faso

FDS members killed in attack; dozens die in assault

On 08.08.21, at least twelve members of the Defence and Security Forces (FDS) were killed in an ambush in Dounkou in the community of Töni in the Boucle du Mouhoun region, near the border with Mali. So far, no group has claimed responsibility for the attack. Recently, a special military unit had killed two leading jihadists in the region. On 04.08.21, armed gangs attacked several locations in Oudalan province near the border with Niger, killing at least 15 civilians and 15 soldiers. A dozen of the attackers also died in the fighting. Islamist militias and gangs are active in Burkina Faso and neighbouring Niger, Mali and Nigeria. Furthermore, groups affiliated with the al-Qaeda terrorist network and IS frequently carry out attacks.

Chad

Several soldiers injured and killed in Boko Haram attack

According to army reports, at least 26 Chadian soldiers died and others were injured in an attack by the radical Islamist group Boko Haram in the Lake Chad region on 04.08.21. The attack occurred on the island of Tchoukou

Telia, 190 km north-west of N'Djamena. The Lake Chad region is considered a retreat area for radical Islamist groups such as Boko Haram, which regularly attacks army bases as well as civilians in this region.

China

Legislative amendment on the three-child policy launched

The agenda for the 30th session (date: 17.08.21 to 20.08.21) of the Standing Committee of the 13th National People's Congress includes the review of a draft amendment to the Population and Family Planning Law. The draft is based on the Politburo's announcement of 31.05.21 that all married couples will be allowed to have three children in future. The amendment is expected to be adopted during the upcoming session. Upon inquiry, the National Health Commission announced on 19.07.21, that all babies born after 31.05.21 would be covered by the three-child policy, although the legal changes were still pending.

COVID-19 pandemic: Delta variant causes largest outbreak since spring 2020

Since 10.07.21, the delta variant has spread from an airport in the metropolis of Nanjing to 16 provinces and independent cities (as of 06.08.21). The cities affected include Beijing, Shanghai and Wuhan, as well as Henan province, which was hit by severe flooding on 20.07.21. On 08.08.21, the National Health Commission reported 720 active cases. In response to the outbreak, the authorities, who continue to pursue a zero-COVID strategy, ordered mass testing for millions of people and restrictions of movement for hundreds of thousands, as well as travel restrictions. A woman believed to have brought the virus from Nanjing to Yangzhou was arrested on 03.08.21 for obstructing disease prevention.

DR Congo

UNJHRO mid-year report: "fewer" human rights violations and abuses

The United Nations Joint Human Rights Office in the DRC (UNJHRO) documented 3,276 human rights violations and abuses of all kinds across the country in the reporting period January to July 2021, according to media reports. This would represent a decrease of 14% compared to the previous reporting period (July to December 2020) and of 20% compared to the same reporting period last year. Compared to the previous reporting period, cases of political violence had decreased by 53%. However, according to a media report, the decrease in political violence must be considered in the light of the limited possibilities of gathering information during the reporting period and the fact that the health emergency used to justify the suppression of rallies and gatherings no longer existed and generally fewer protests took place. During the reporting period, tensions between President Tshisekedi's party alliance Cap pour le Changement (CACH) and that of former President Kabila, the Front commun pour le Congo (FCC), had also subsided, the report said. State actors, such as members of the police (PNC), the armed forces (FARDC), the domestic intelligence service (ANR) and other administrative and judicial authorities, were responsible for almost 43 % of all documented human rights violations and abuses, including extrajudicial killings and executions of women and children. Among these state actors, the FARDC was the agency responsible for most incidents, as it had been in the previous reporting year 2020. In the 2021 reporting period, the vast majority of the incidents occurred in the eastern province of North Kivu (320 incidents). North Kivu is followed by the eastern provinces of Ituri (74), Tanganyika (72), South Kivu (61) and the province of Kasai Central (50).

North Kivu/Ituri: Extension of the state of siege; human rights situation

According to several media reports, the state of siege in force in the eastern provinces of North Kivu and Ituri since the beginning of May 2021, which has been increasingly criticised including in DR Congo's political circles, will be maintained. The bicameral parliament (National Assembly, Senate) approved a corresponding extension for another fifteen days on 04.08.21. The military and the police thus continue to have controversial executive (special) powers of intervention in the two provinces (cf. BN of 17.05.21).

According to the NGO Union des familles pour la recherche de la paix (UFAREP), which operates in North Kivu, more than 430 cases of human rights violations and abuses have been documented in the territories of Beni, Lubero, Rutshuru and Nyiragongo in North Kivu province since the state of siege came into force. These were committed by both state and non-state parties to the conflict, the NGO said.

According to an article published by the UN information radio Okapi on 04.08.21, fighting between the FARDC and the rebel militia Coopérative de développement du Congo (CODECO) in the Djugu territory of Ituri province, in the areas around the commercial centre of Kobu, Bambou, as well as in Beliba, Tolo and Nyapala, triggered a renewed wave of internal displacement. As a result, over 30,000 people have been internally displaced in the last two weeks only. According to local civil society organisations, the provision of basic services to internally displaced people in the various places of refuge is questionable.

Cuba

Government allows establishment of small and medium-sized enterprises

After mass protests against the government in July 2021 (cf. BN of 19.07.21), the Council of State on 06.08.21 passed a decree allowing the establishment of small and medium-sized enterprises (micro, pequeñas y medianas empresas (MIPYMES). According to this decree, private companies with up to 100 employees may be founded. In recent months, the Cuban government initiated various reforms to modernise the economy and curb the worsening economic crisis. In addition to abolishing one of the two domestic currencies, much of the state-controlled economy has been opened up to the private sector. With the exception of key sectors such as health, media and education, more than 2,000 sectors were made accessible to the self-employed. In addition, as a result of the protests, the government lifted ad valorem and customs restrictions on the import of medicines, food and sanitary items in passengers' luggage, initially until the end of this year.

Djibouti

Local unrest

On 01.08.21, a rare outbreak of violence within the city occurred between the Afar and Issa ethnic groups in the capital Djibouti. People were attacked and houses set on fire. The police had to intervene. According to official reports, three people died in the process, however, it is not known whether the deaths occurred before or after the police intervention. Other sources speak of a dozen fatalities. Several people were arrested, police presence was increased in some areas on the following days and the internet was interrupted for the time being. The reasons for the riots are not known.

Gambia

Prosecution for human trafficking

According to the Gambian news portal The Point, the director of the National Agency for Combating Trafficking in Persons (NAATIP) stated on 30.08.21 that 15 criminal cases for human trafficking are currently pending in court. For the first time, three people were sentenced to prison terms of 15 years each for trafficking in human beings in the reporting year 2021 (cf. BN of 12.07.21). According to the annual report "Trafficking in Persons 2021" of the US Department of State (USDOS), no case of a criminal conviction for human trafficking has been reported in the past four reporting years.

Death sentence for murder

The Gambian news portal Foroyaa reported on 02.08.21 that the High Court in Basse sentenced a defendant indicted for murder to death (Art. 187 in conjunction with 188 Gambian Penal Code) on 29.07.21. Criminal courts continue to hand down death sentences, citing the current law, despite the fact that the Barrow government enacted a de facto moratorium on executions in February 2018 and also ratified the Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights abolishing the death penalty in June 2019. The last death sentence was carried out in 2012.

Ghana

LGBTQI activists acquitted

The 21 LGBTQI activists arrested on 20.05.21 in Ho town in Volta Region, were acquitted and released from custody due to insufficient evidence, according to media reports of 05.08.21. They had been arrested for participating in an illegal assembly (cf. BN of 31.05.21).

Guinea-Bissau

COVID-19 pandemic: Delivery of vaccine doses

On 07.08.21, Guinea-Bissau received 302,400 doses of vaccine through the COVAX initiative. In view of the third wave of infections since the end of June 2021, the pandemic official urged people to make use of the new vaccination opportunity. According to the WHO representative in the country, the doses will suffice to vaccinate about 16% of the population. So far, according to figures from the Africa Center for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC), less than 1.6% have been fully vaccinated, although the vaccination campaign started already on 02.04.21. The delay was caused by strikes of health workers and, in particular, the lack of vaccine deliveries. The country has a population of about 2 million, of which about 60 % are under 25 years of age; a total of almost 4,800 Covid-19 infections have been confirmed to date; 79 people have died (as of 08.08.21).

Haiti

No investigating judge appointed yet after murder of president

The judiciary has not yet initiated an official investigation after the assassination of President Jovenel Moïse on 05.07.21 (cf. BN of 12.07.21). According to information from judicial circles, the competent court has great difficulties finding an investigating judge, as many fear for their safety and that of their family. The chief judge of the Port-au-Prince court, Bernard Saint-Vil, called on the government to guarantee the safety of the judges and to provide bodyguards. Meanwhile, police announced they had arrested 44 suspects in connection with the attack, including Moïse's security chief.

India

Protests after abuse of a Dalit girl

Since 01.08.21 New Delhi experienced several days of protests following the alleged abuse and killing of a nine-year-old girl. The girl had allegedly been abused by a Hindu priest and three other men near a crematorium and then cremated to cover the traces of the crime. The perpetrators were arrested and compensation was promised to the Dalit family. The members of the lowest caste, formerly known as "untouchables", are still discriminated against in Indian society.

Iran

COVID-19 pandemic:

The fifth Corona wave is reaching a temporary peak. Between 02.08.21 and 09.08.21, the authorities reported an average of between 30,000 and 44,000 new infections per day. The death toll reached a new high on 08.08.21 with 442 officially reported deaths. In total, about 336 cities and districts were classified as high-risk areas. In the capital's hospitals, infusions and oxygen reserves are running low. In the megacity of Isfahan, all hospital beds are occupied. Also, the cemeteries reported that they are overtaxed.

Restrictive internet policy

According to media reports, the conservative parliament referred a controversial package of laws designated "Protection of User Rights and Services of Online Portals" to a parliamentary special commission in a closed vote already

on 28.07.21. This legislative proposal is the most controversial and most publicised bill in Iran's parliamentary history. The non-public vote and subsequent referral to the special commission was based on Principle 85 of the Constitution. According to the bill, companies, web portals and messenger services will be obliged to open representative offices in Iran, otherwise, their websites will be blocked. Next to Facebook, Google, Instagram and WhatsApp are particularly affected. In the future they will have to officially apply for licences. In addition, the sale and use of VPNs outside the government apparatus will be banned and punishable by imprisonment. Critics see the legislative package as an attempt to enable the security services to closely monitor citizens' communications. It would also create the possibility of a nationwide intranet along Chinese lines, it is said. In addition, it has been confirmed in the meantime that the internet or the so-called internet barrier will be placed under the supervision of the military in the future.

The legislative process will be completed when the Special Commission sends the final draft to the Guardian Council for confirmation. Once it has been confirmed that the bill is in compliance with the Constitution and Islamic law, the new law enters into force on a trial basis, where the trial period is unlimited.

Arrests after protests in Khuzestan

In the aftermath of the almost three weeks of unrest in Khuzestan province (cf. BN of 19.07.21 and 26.07.21), Iranian media abroad report further arrests. Referring to the Tehran daily Hamshahri, about 300 arrests were reported only in Susangerd, a town on the Iraqi border. On 04.08.21, some foreign media reported the release of a majority of those arrested, citing the head of Khuzestan's judiciary. However, at the same time, criminal proceedings were initiated against nine civil activists, including Narges Mohammadi. The nine people had protested against the security forces' crackdown on protesters in Khuzestan, expressing their solidarity with the people in the province, in front of the Ministry of Interior on 20.07.21.

Known activist arrested in Mashhad

On 03.08.21, Iranian media abroad reported the arrest of well-known activist Fatemeh Sepehri in the eastern Iranian city of Mashhad. The arrest took place in connection with a solidarity rally for the protesters in Khuzestan. It is said that violence was used during the arrest. After her arrest, the activist was taken to one of the city's police stations for questioning. Sepehri is involved in the campaign "No to the Islamic Republic" and openly calls for the overthrow of the political system.

Iraq

Attack victim died

Meyda Feizullah, a bodybuilder who fell victim to an attack in Kirkuk on 27.07.21, died on 07.08.21. She was shot by an unknown person in the presence of her four daughters. She had repeatedly won prizes in bodybuilding and had come to the attention of Islamists because of her "unfeminine" lifestyle.

Attacks on power lines

On 05.08.21, the Ministry of Energy announced that 13 different attacks on power lines in Kirkuk, Salah ad-Din and Ninawa had occurred in the previous 48 hours, all of which are attributed to IS. IS has been pursuing a strategy of systematically disrupting the power supply for weeks. Iraq's own power production covers only a fraction of its demand, thus the country depends on imports, mainly from Iran. In combination with the current drought and heat, power cuts are part of a systematic campaign of destabilisation.

Kosovo

Head of the Financial Intelligence Unit dismissed

On 03.08.21, Finance Minister Hekuran Murati announced the dismissal of the director of the so-called Financial Intelligence Unit (Njësisë për Intelegjencë Financiare, NIF), Dardan Nuhiu. The NIF is responsible for investigating financial transactions to combat money laundering and terrorist financing. Nuhiu lost his post after a recorded phone call was published on the news portal Shqip.com the day before, in which he allegedly talks about his plans to take over important media companies in order to use them to put pressure on public figures. The authenticity

and legality of the recording, which according to Shqip.com was made in July 2020, are disputed. The Prosecutor General's Office initiated an investigation of the incident and the possible criminal liability of Nuhju's statements.

Lebanon

Incidents at the Israeli-Lebanese border

Since 04.08.21, repeated fighting erupted between armed groups in Lebanon and the Israeli armed forces. After rocket attacks from unknown sources from Lebanese territory, the Israeli air force launched counter-attacks. Then, on 06.08.21, Hezbollah officially fired rockets at the Shebaa Farms area. This is a small piece of land (about 25 sq km) with fields that were mainly cultivated by farmers living in a Lebanese village nearby. However, the attribution of the piece of land is disputed. Observers take the attack on open land in a disputed area as an indication that Hezbollah is not currently bent on war; while other political comments indicate a willingness to go to war, they say that there might well not be any intent to do so.

Libya

Coastal road fully open

After Abdulhamid Dbaiba, Prime Minister of the Transitional Government (GNU), had already declared the western section of the closed coastal road between Misrata and Sirte reopened at the end of June 2021, the section that runs across the front line in Sirte and is de facto under the control of General Haftar and his Libyan Arab Armed Forces (LAAF) has also been reopened since 30.07.21. Due to Haftar's attack on the capital Tripoli in April 2019, parts of the more than 1,800 km-long Libyan coastal road had been closed again and again (cf. BN of 21.06.21).

COVID-19 pandemic: 24-hour curfew in western and central provinces

To limit the rapid spread of the corona virus, the GNU has imposed a 24-hour curfew for the western and central provinces from 07.08.21 to 09.08.21. Pharmacies and food shops are exempt from the regulation. The curfew does not apply to the southern and eastern provinces, which are de facto under Haftar and LAAF control. Since the beginning of the vaccination campaign, about 730,000 people have been vaccinated.

Mexico

The pandemic's direct and indirect effects exacerbated poverty in 2020

According to a report published by the National Council for the Evaluation of Social Development Policy (Coneval) of 05.08.21, the number of people living in poverty at the end of 2020 increased by 3.8 million against 2018. Poverty thus affected a total of 55.7 million people at the end of last year, which is roughly 44% of the total population. According to the national definition of poverty, this part of the population has only about 111 USD per month to live on in rural areas and about 170 USD in urban areas. Also, the extent of extreme poverty increased by 1.5%, affecting about 11 million people living on less than USD 63 per month in rural areas and USD 88 per month in urban areas. In addition, 35 million people did not have access to health care in 2020, the report says; these figures also increased by 12 percentage points to more than 28%. Poverty is a push factor for stronger migration flows to the US. While 298,000 Mexican nationals were apprehended at the border in 2020, the numbers increased to 414,000 in 2021 to date, according to the US Border Patrol.

Montenegro

First same-sex civil partnership registered

One year after the law legalising same-sex partnerships was passed, the first such union was officially registered on 25.07.21. Two young women registered their partnership in the coastal town of Budva. The law, passed in July 2020 against massive opposition from the Serbian Orthodox Church, puts same-sex civil partnerships on an almost equal footing with marriage between a man and a woman. Among other things, it regulates the mutual financial support

of the partners and the division of joint property in the event of separation. A right to adopt or foster children is not provided for.

Morocco

COVID-19 pandemic

The number of new infections continues to rise. On 06.08.21, a new high of 11,358 new infections was reported, 76 people died within 24 hours. The following day, 10,609 new infections and 92 new deaths were recorded. Due to the steady surge of the number of infections, the government has tightened measures as of 03.08.21 and extended the state of emergency until 10.09.21. A curfew between 9pm and 5am has been imposed as well as travel restrictions to and from Casablanca, Marrakech and Agadir, with exceptions for vaccinated persons, public service employees and medical emergencies.

Mozambique

Mocímboa da Praia back under government control

According to the Ministry of Defence, the port city of Mocímboa da Praia (Cabo Delgado province) has been secured by the Rwandan and Mozambican army. For several years, the town had been considered the point of origin of terrorist attacks and had been under the control of Islamist insurgents since August 2020 (cf. BN of 17.08.20).

Myanmar

Fighting and attacks in Kayah, Kachin, Kayin and Yangon

On 03.08.21 and 04.08.21, deadly clashes happened again between the Myanmar military (Tatmadaw) and a coalition of Karenni Army (KA) and Karenni National Defense Force (KNDF) forces in Kayah State. 3,000 people from six villages fled. During the same period, fighting took place in Kachin State between the Tatmadaw and the Kachin Independence Army (KIA). Almost daily there is fighting in Hpapun (Kayin State), which has experienced 133 armed confrontations between the Tatmadaw and the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) since 01.05.21. On 05.08.21, unknown persons attacked, and in some cases assassinated, administrative personnel appointed by the military government in Yangon (Rangoon). According to state media, the junta's vaccination campaign is being sabotaged by "extremist" attacks. Several people were reportedly injured in an explosion at a vaccination centre in Pekon (Shan State).

Once again, the UN warned of a severe hunger crisis that threatens the hundreds of thousands of internally displaced people. The World Food Programme (WFP) says it is short of at least €73 million to continue providing aid over the next six months.

Nicaragua

EU and US sanctions, further repression of the opposition

On 02.08.21, the EU imposed sanctions on seven senior officials and Vice-President Rosario Murillo for human rights violations. On 03.08.21, according to her party, Berenice Quezada, who had been nominated the day before as the vice-presidential candidate of the Alianza Ciudadanos por la Libertad (ACxL), was arrested and placed under house arrest. She is accused of "provocation, incitement and conspiracy to commit terrorist acts", because of statements made when announcing her candidacy, and the public prosecutor's office has also barred her from participating in the elections. In response thereto, the US State Department imposed visa restrictions on relatives of 50 public officials on 06.08.21. Shortly thereafter, the Sandinista-dominated Supreme Electoral Council (CSE) suspended the legal status of the largest opposition party, Ciudadanos por la Libertad (CxL), following a complaint by the Partido Liberal Constitucionalista (PLC), thus excluding this party from the election as well. Allegedly one reason being that the party's leader Carmella María Rogers Amburn, known as Kitty Monterrey, born in the USA, previously held dual citizenship, which violates electoral law. She was also de facto deprived of Nicaraguan citizenship

in an express procedure on the same day by having her identity documents and her registration as Nicaraguan cancelled.

Nigeria

Violence increases in the south-east

At least 115 people have been killed by security forces, consisting of the military, police and the Department of State Services (DSS), in the south-east between March and June 2021. This is said in a statement published by Amnesty International (ai) on 04.08.21. According to ai, the high number of fatalities is a consequence of the escalation of violence in the region. Members of the Eastern Security Network (ESN) are allegedly responsible for a large number of attacks on security officials and public buildings, including prisons and police stations (cf. BN of 03.05.21 and 05.07.21). The ESN is considered to be a paramilitary wing of the secessionist group Independence Movement for the Indigenous Peoples of Biafra (IPOB). IPOB, which advocates secession of the region, denies any responsibility for the incidents. According to the police, ESN members are allegedly responsible for the recent deaths of 21 policemen in Imo State alone. In total, at least 127 security personnel have been killed in the south-eastern states since the beginning of 2021, the police said. In ai's view the high number of killings that have now emerged, are a response thereto. Citing eyewitnesses, ai also reports that ESN members and people suspected of being close to the ESN, have been victims of disproportionate use of force, arbitrary detention, extortion, arson and property crimes by security forces.

Violent cholera outbreak

Hundreds of people have already died in a cholera outbreak in the northern states of Kano and Jigawa. This is reported by the media with reference to official information from the authorities. Cholera cases are relatively common in Nigeria during the rainy season, but the high number of fatalities is unusual compared to previous years. According to the Nigeria Center for Disease Control (NCDC), more than half of the 36 states have been affected by the current outbreak, with thousands of people infected and more than 20,000 suspected cases. Most cases are in the north and most fatalities are children. The outbreak started in March 2021 and has recently worsened. According to media reports, this development coincides with a significant increase in COVID-19 cases and a doctors' strike.

Chibok kidnap victim returned after seven years

One of the schoolgirls abducted by members of the radical Islamist group Boko Haram in April 2014 in the town of Chibok in the north-eastern state of Borno has turned to the military together with her family. According to media reports, the woman, named Ruth Ngladar Pogou, was received by the governor of Borno State and is now expected to undergo a rehabilitation and reintegration programme. Of the over 270 schoolgirls abducted in Chibok, over 100 have so far either escaped or been freed in exchange for Boko Haram members, while the remaining abduction victims are still missing. The mass abduction in Chibok had caused an international stir. Many people campaigned for the release of the schoolgirls under the hashtag #bringbackourgirls on social media. Especially in the north-west, abductions of schoolchildren have increased again in recent months (cf. BN of 02.08.21).

Pakistan

Devastation of a Hindu temple

On 04.08.21, an angry crowd vandalised a Hindu temple in Bhong in Rahim Yar Khan district in Punjab province. The outrage was triggered by the release of an eight-year-old Hindu arrested for blasphemy. He was accused of urinating in the library of a madrassa. Dozens of people broke into the temple, burnt down the entrance door and caused material damage. The government announced swift action against the suspects and deployed security forces to guard the temple and protect the Hindu community living there.

Somalia

UN calls for action after rise in sexual violence

Two recent reports by the UN Secretary-General documented a nearly 80 per cent increase in sexual violence, mostly against girls, in 2020 compared to the previous year. The number of cases attributed to al-Shabaab has doubled and violations by clan militias almost tripled, according to the reports. Over 15% of all confirmed cases of sexual violence are attributed to government security forces. On 05.08.21, the UN Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, Virginia Gamba, and UN Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Pramila Patten, issued a statement calling on the parties to the conflict to stop these violations. They also called on the government to take concrete action, including the adoption of a national action plan, to prevent sexual violence against children and women and to better protect their rights.

Execution for alleged blasphemy

On 05.08.21, an 83-year-old man was executed by firing squad for alleged blasphemy by al-Shabaab near the town of Elbur (Galmudug). Earlier, an al-Shabaab court in the Galgaduud region sentenced the man to death. According to the court, he had confessed to insulting the Prophet. Further information is not known. According to media reports, this is the first execution for blasphemy since 2015.

South Sudan

Parliamentary elections and attempted ouster in the SPLM/A-IO

According to media reports, 588 members of the newly formed national parliament were sworn in in Juba on 02.08.21. The parliament is now composed of representatives from the ruling party and from previous rebel factions that signed a peace agreement. The formation of such an inclusive parliament was a core objective of the ceasefire agreed in 2018. However, the formation of the new parliament is both delayed and incomplete. 62 MPs did not attend the swearing-in ceremony. Some of them probably due to disputes with the government.

According to further reports, the first vice-president, Riek Machar, was relieved of his position as party leader and removed by a declaration of three senior representatives of the military wing of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army -In Opposition (SPLM/A-IO). The party's chief of staff, Lieutenant General Simon Gatwech Dual, has temporarily taken over the party chairmanship. In a statement dated 03.08.21, the persons involved accused the First Vice President of having completely failed and massively weakened the party's position. They said that for years he had pursued a policy of "divide and rule", putting nepotism ahead of the unity of the country and of advancing the interests of the party. On 04.08.21, the political leadership of the SPLM/A-IO responded in a press release rejecting Machar's removal. The statement called the initiators of the ouster 'peace spoilers'. It also pointed out that the people behind the removal did not represent the entire leadership of the military wing of the SPLM/A-IO and did not have the authority to take decisions on behalf of the party.

A spokesperson for the SPLM/A-IO told the media that fighting had broken out between the two factions within the party on 07.08.21. The fighting was said to have been started by forces of Lieutenant General Gatwech Dual and had claimed the lives of more than 30 people. However, no independent confirmation of this statement has been possible, it was said. Gatwech Dual had not responded to the SPLM/A-IO spokesperson's statements.

Extralegal executions

The UN reported on 26.07.21 that 42 people have been killed in extra-legal executions so far. According to the report, since March 2021, UNMISS investigators have documented the killing of 29 people in Warrap State. They had been taken from prisons or police custody and killed without a trial. Human Rights Watch reported that the governor of Warrap state ordered the illegal killings. The UN reported a further 13 killings in Lakes State since mid-June 2021, carried out on the orders of local officials. Based on these findings, the UN directly approached South Sudan's Ministry of Justice and relevant agencies in the two affected states, urging them to investigate the incidents and hold those responsible to account. To the media, the government of Warrap State described the UN report on extrajudicial killings as propaganda and stressed that it had acted in accordance with the country's transitional constitution.

Sudan

More violence in North Darfur

Media reported on the continuing violence in the north of the country. According to the report, violent clashes over livestock and farm land began as early as 30.07.21 and lasted for four days. As a result of these clashes, three people died (as of 03.08.21). Several villages were attacked and at least one was completely burnt down in Kushna region, near Tabit. The inhabitants of some of these villages were already living in the Zamzam refugee camp near El Fasher before the fighting, but had returned to their villages to farm their fields during the season. It is reported that this resulted in a confrontation between the temporary returnees and those who had occupied the land in the meantime. The dispute escalated and triggered the fighting which in turn caused a further wave of flight.

Conviction of members of the RSF

Media reported the conviction of six members of the Rapid Support Forces (RSF). They were charged with shooting six people during protests in the capital of North Darfur, Al-Obeid on 29.07.19. They received death sentences on 05.08.21. The protests at the time were against food and fuel shortages and massively rising inflation and were violently dispersed by the RSF and other government units. Another RSF member was reportedly not sentenced to death because he was still a minor at the time of the crime. Already on 24.05.21, another RSF officer had been sentenced to death for killing a protester during a rally in June 2019.

Syria

Suspected attack near Damascus

Syrian state media reported that on 04.08.21 a bus exploded near a heavily guarded military barracks in Qudsaya. The village is located about 7 km west of Damascus. The bus driver was killed in the incident and three other people were taken to hospital. One of the Syrian state broadcasters spoke of a terrorist attack, but no further details were released.

OPCW: Disagreement over Syrian chlorine gas arsenal

On 05.08.21, the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) requested information from the Syrian government regarding the fate of two cylinders of chlorine gas linked to the 2018 poison gas attack in Douma. The Syrian government informed the OPCW on 09.07.21 that the cylinders had been destroyed on 08.07.21 during an Israeli attack on a military facility.

According to the OPCW, the cylinders were last stored and investigated in November 2020 at a facility located about 60 km from where the Israeli attack occurred. However, according to the OPCW, the cylinders should not have been moved without first obtaining the organisation's approval. After the inspection in November 2020, the OPCW was supposed to move the cylinders to The Hague, but the Syrian authorities obstructed the export at the time.

According to Western representatives at the UN, the new discrepancies would not only constitute a violation of the agreement with the OPCW, but also an interference with the gathering of evidence on the 2018 incidents in Douma.

UN Secretary-General warns of return of IS

In a report to the UN Security Council on 03.08.21, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres drew attention to the global threat posed by IS, which has benefited, among other things, from the disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. While regional offshoots of the organisation in West Africa, the Sahel, East and Central Africa, Afghanistan and South Asia have become more autonomous, the jihadists still consider Iraq and Syria as the heartland of their operations.

In Syria, IS remains active in large parts of the country, particularly through fugitive attacks on border posts on both sides of the Euphrates in Deir ez-Zor governorate and attacks on government forces and other targets in the Syrian desert, he said.

Tanzania

Arrest of several opposition members

After the arrest of opposition leader Freeman Mbowe (cf. BN of 26.07.21), several opposition supporters were arrested in Dar es Salaam while demonstrating for his release. Mbowe has been charged with financing terrorism and terrorist conspiracy, and appeared in court on 06.08.21. These charges preclude his release on bail. Human rights organisations called for his release.

Turkey

Arrest of suspected Gülen supporters

On 06.08.21, at least 46 people accused of belonging to the Gülen movement were arrested during raids in 24 cities. A further 34 people are being sought in this connection.

Ukraine / Belarus

Belarusian opposition member found dead in Kiev

The head of the Belarusian exile organisation Belarusian House in Ukraine, Vitali Shishov, had first been reported missing and was then found hanged in Kiev on 03.08.21. Police said they were investigating whether he had been killed and his death made to look like suicide. The organisation helps Belarusian citizens who have fled from repression in Belarus to neighbouring Ukraine. The organisation itself attributes Shishov's death to an operation by Belarusian authorities. However, Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty reported that some members of the exile organisation belonged to right-wing extremist forces, which also harboured a potential for conflict.

Venezuela

Economic situation and health care

According to the Venezuelan central bank, another six zeros will be removed from national banknotes on 01.10.21 due to continuing hyperinflation. On the same date, the digital bolivar will be introduced. Currently (as of 09.08.21), the largest bank note, one million VEF, is equivalent to about a quarter of a USD, and in May 2021 the inflation rate was 2,719 %. The move, the bank said, was meant to simplify transactions and accounting processes once more after the last monetary policy adjustment in 2018 when five zeros were removed. However, since the dollarisation of the economy in 2019, a large part of transactions and day-to-day operations are already conducted in foreign exchange where possible, the bank added. Cash shortages persist due to inflation, therefore by March 2021 the number of ATMs had dropped from nearly 10,000 units in 2014 to just under 2,300, according to data from the Supervisory Authority for Banking Sector Institutions (Sudeban). According to the Venezuelan Society of Family Farmers, food prices also increased by 1,600% in the first half of 2021. Generally, a price increase of 265% had been recorded between January and May 2021, and the recession was still continuing, the Society said. Although the minimum wage was raised to three months' salary in May 2021, people's purchasing power remains low and often does not buy more than a few products. However, after a sharp decline in remittances from abroad in 2020, which resulted in significantly lower household incomes for many families, economists expect them to increase by up to 21% against last year.

In addition, organ transplants have also remained suspended since 2017, this matter had been presented to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights by sick children and NGOs on 30.06.21. Furthermore, there is a lack of medicines, protective equipment and staff; hospitals experience recurrent power cuts and inadequate water supply. Adequate food supply for patients and diets can often only be provided by contributions from families.

Vietnam

Charges against five journalists amended

Five journalists who ran a popular Facebook page on social and socio-political issues from August 2019 to December 2020 will now only be charged with abuse of democratic freedoms, according to a police report of 06.08.21. Previously, the possibility of a charge of leaking state secrets had been explored, which means that the case of a conviction, death sentences could have been imposed.

Yemen

Houthis reject peace talks

A spokesperson for the Houthi rebels announced via Twitter on 08.08.21 that the Houthis will not attend talks with the new UN Special Envoy for Yemen, Hans Grundberg, for the time being. The Houthis make their participation in peace talks conditional on the lifting of the naval and air blockade by Saudi Arabia, which has been in place since 2015. The Swede Hans Grundberg was appointed on 06.08.21 to succeed British citizen Martin Griffiths, who announced the failure of his efforts in Yemen in June 2021.

Food insecurity remains high

Food prices in Yemen are constantly rising, leading to a further loss of purchasing power, especially in the areas controlled by the Yemeni government. Reasons for this include the high inflation rate of the Aden rial and a lack of foreign currency. According to the Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWS NET), an improvement of the high level of food insecurity is not in sight, both because of the inflation rate and the ongoing fighting between the government and Houthi rebels. According to the World Bank, 80 % of Yemenis are living below the poverty line and 70 % are at risk of hunger.

Fighting in Marib

Yemeni government forces say they took control of a mountain in the south of Marib province on 03.08.21, killing 14 Houthi fighters. Meanwhile, fighting continues west of the city of Marib. No party to the conflict has yet succeeded in making significant territorial gains.

Group 62 - Information Centre for Asylum and Migration
Briefing Notes
BN-Redaktion@bamf.bund.de