



Briefing Notes

Group 62 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

16 August 2021

Afghanistan

Attacks on civilians / internally displaced persons

The number of internally displaced persons has risen to approximately 390,000 since the beginning of 2021, according to UN figures of 12.08.21. On 11.08.21, a well-known comedian was murdered by the Taliban in Kandahar province. It was reported on 10.08.21 that 30 civilians had been killed and about 300 injured in Herat province in the last two weeks. On the same day, there were reports that the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in Afghanistan had treated about 4,000 patients injured by fighting in 15 clinics nationwide since the beginning of August. Also on the same day, three civilians were killed in Ghazni province after being hit by a grenade. According to a report on 09.08.21, hundreds of internally displaced persons (IDPs), including from Kunduz province, were sleeping outdoors in parks in Kabul's police district 15 without any food. The report said that these were families with women, children and old people. According to the report of 12.08.21, they are now to be accommodated in mosques. On 08.08.21, twelve civilians lost their lives in an explosion in Paktia province. On 10.08.21, it was reported that 183 civilians had been killed and 1,181 injured in the four cities of Lashkargah, Kandahar, Herat and Kunduz since 09.07.21. In Lashkargah alone, 139 civilians have been killed and 481 injured since 28.07.21. The battle for Kunduz on 08.08.21 claimed about 100 civilian victims, including 14 fatalities, the report says. The number of unreported cases is said to be higher in all cities, as many people take their dead directly to the cemetery.

Capture of the capital Kabul by the Taliban / End of the war and the republic

On 15.08.21, the Taliban declared the war over after they captured Kabul largely peacefully, occupied government buildings and all checkpoints in the city, and proclaimed the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan. They wanted peaceful relations with the international community, they said. The UN Security Council had called a special session on Afghanistan for the evening of 16 August. Earlier, President Ashraf Ghani had fled the country with his family and allies, allegedly to avoid a battle for Kabul. Other government members including Mohammad Mohaqiq, Karim Khalili, Ahmad Zia Massoud and Yunus Qanooni had left for Islamabad in Pakistan on 15.08.21. Government member Abdullah Abdullah stayed in Kabul and consoled the people on the streets. Reportedly, he is to form a transitional council together with ex-president Hamid Karzai and former warlord Gulbuddin Hekmatyar to hand over the reins of government to the Taliban. The first night under Taliban rule in the country had been calm. The only chaotic scenes occurred at Kabul airport, where diplomatic staff from several Western countries (including Germany) were evacuated and many Afghans tried to leave the country. All commercial flights have been suspended until further notice and hundreds of Afghans are currently besieging the airport. On 13.08.21, the US had decided to send 3,000 troops to Kabul airport to safely evacuate its personnel. This was achieved on 16.08.21, the US said. The Russian embassy personnel will remain in Kabul, according to the Russian government. On 11.08.21, US intelligence agencies had still assumed that the capital Kabul and thus the government had 30 days left before isolation and 90 days before its possible fall. In mid-June, they had still expected that it would take six months (cf. BN of 05.07.21). The Taliban had succeeded in capturing almost all provinces as well as all strategically important provincial capitals such as Kandahar, Herat, Mazar-e Sharif, Jalalabad and Kunduz within a very short time. In some of the cities,

prisons had reportedly been stormed and inmates freed. Warlord Ismail Khan was captured by the Taliban in Herat on 13.08.21, according to press reports. He left for Mashhad in Iran on 16.08.21, according to Twitter messages.

Humanitarian situation / infrastructure

On 10.08.21 it was reported that the Taliban had destroyed a dam in the Dawlatyar district of Ghor province. Therefore, 1,000 people were cut off from drinking water and farmland is drying up, the report said.

Afghanistan/Pakistan

Pakistan maintains consular service in Afghanistan

On 15.08.21, the Pakistani government declared that it would continue to maintain consular services in the Afghan capital Kabul after the Taliban invasion. The government also said that a department had been set up within the Ministry of Interior in the Pakistani capital Islamabad to process visas and other documents for international diplomatic personnel, staff of multilateral international organisations and media workers.

Armenia

Pashinyan appointed Prime Minister again

Six weeks after the parliamentary elections in Armenia, Nikol Pashinyan was appointed Prime Minister of the South Caucasus republic for a new term of office on 02.08.21. President Armen Sargsyan published a corresponding decree in the capital Yerevan. Pashinyan must present his new cabinet and have it confirmed by parliament, in the course of this week. Pashinyan's party, the Civic Contract, won 54% of the vote in the early parliamentary elections on 20.06.21. He has already held the office of Armenia's prime minister since 08.05.18.

Bangladesh

Attacks on Hindu temples, homes and shops in Khulna

On the night of 07.08.21, unidentified armed persons vandalised and looted several houses, shops, and at least four temples belonging to the local Hindu community in Shiyali village in Khulna district. According to reports, the attacks were preceded by disputes between a Hindu and a Muslim group the day before. According to a local media report, ten people were arrested in connection with the attacks on 09.08.21

Deaths after boat accident

According to media reports, 27 members of the Rohingya Muslim minority died in a shipwreck in the Bay of Bengal on 14.08.21. Around 41 men, women and children are said to have tried to leave the controversial refugee shelter on the remote island of Bashan Char for the mainland. Since December 2020, the government has resettled around 20,000 people from the overpopulated refugee camps in Cox's Bazar to the island. According to various reports, a total of 100,000 people will be brought to Bashan Char. The government has invested several million USD for the construction of shelters and infrastructure on the formerly uninhabited island. Human rights organisations criticise that the people are exposed to floods and storms there and that the resettlements are not always voluntary, which the government denies.

Brazil

Brazil extends asylum waiver for Venezuelan migrants

The so-called simplified recognition procedure for refugees, which has been in force since June 2019 and would have expired in August 2021, has been extended until December 2022, according to the Brazilian National Committee for Refugees (Conare). The procedure allows Brazil to grant refuge to Venezuelan migrants without them having to prove that they were persecuted.

Burkina Faso

Twenty-year prison sentence for jihadists

On 10.08.21, two jihadists were sentenced to twenty years in prison for an attack on a school in the north of the country in 2018. Both defendants are members of the armed group Ansaroul Islam. This sentence is the first in a series of trials opened by the Correctional Chamber to combat acts of terrorism.

17 jihadists and five militiamen killed in attacks

On 11.08.21, seventeen suspected jihadists and five members of a civil defence militia were killed in an attack in northern Burkina Faso, according to security and government sources. Armed terrorists on motorbikes attacked the defence militia camp in Bilakoka.

Pascal Zaïda, civil society personality, arrested after criticising security policy

On 13.08.21, Pascal Zaïda, coordinator of the Framework for Democratic Expression (CED), was arrested and taken into police custody. He is accused of undermining state security and making a subversive statement at a press conference of his association. During the press conference, he criticised President Kaboré's response to attacks by jihadist groups and a price increase for essential products.

Cameroon

Security situation in the Anglophone regions

Fighting in the Anglophone South-west and North-west regions between Cameroonian security forces and various armed groups has continued for more than four years. According to the latest reports by Amnesty International (ai) and Human Rights Watch (HRW), serious human rights violations are committed by both sides.

New research by ai, published in a report on 28.07.21, shows the extent of the destruction caused by the ongoing conflict in the Anglophone regions. For its report ai analysed witness statements and satellite images showing the killing of civilians and the destruction of villages in different parts of the two Anglophone regions. According to ai, however, procurement of information is difficult due to poor accessibility of the locations and poor telecommunications networks.

In its latest report of 02.08.21, HRW also cites new cases of attacks by both security forces and armed separatists. According to the UN, more than 700,000 people from the Anglophone regions are said to have become internally displaced.

China

Canadian citizen convicted of espionage

On 11.08.21, a court in Dandong (Liaoning Province) sentenced Canadian businessman Michael Spavor to eleven years imprisonment for espionage and the illegal disclosure of state secrets. Spavor had run a cultural exchange organisation with North Korea in Dandong. His detention in December 2018 came only days after the arrest of Meng Wanzhou, then chief financial officer of Chinese telecoms company Huawei, in Vancouver (cf. BN of 29.03.21). US authorities accuse Meng of violating Iran sanctions and demand her extradition to the US, which is currently being negotiated.

Hong Kong: Largest opposition civil rights organisation dissolved

The Civil Human Rights Front (CHRF) officially announced its dissolution in a statement on 15.08.21. The reason given was that it had no other choice after the Chinese government's crackdown on the democracy movement. The group had organised many protests against a proposed law from China in 2019. Figo Chan, the organisation's former leader, is in detention. In addition, the Hong Kong police are investigating the CHRF.

Colombia

FARC rebels recruited over 18,000 children

The Special Justice for Peace (JEP), which is responsible for investigating the crimes of the parties involved in the armed conflict in Colombia, stated on 10.08.21 that at least 18,677 children were recruited and used by the FARC between 1996 and 2016. In addition, 26 former members of the FARC are required to testify as witnesses in Case 07, which investigates the recruitment and use of minors by the former rebel group. JEP judge Eduardo Frentes stated at a press conference that the children were used by the FARC in many different ways as part of a systematic policy. In Colombia, minors continue to be abused by other illegal armed groups, who use them as combatants, human shields and sex slaves.

DR Congo

North Kivu/Ituri: deterioration of the security situation; increase in ADF activities

In the view of provincial deputies of the two provinces subject to the state of emergency, North Kivu and Ituri, the security situation on the ground has further deteriorated since the state of siege came into force at the beginning of May 2021. Meanwhile, the civil society movement Lutte pour le Changement (Lucha) reportedly called on the government to lift the state of siege on 12.08.21. The call was mainly based on the fact that since the state of siege has been imposed, violent clashes and human rights violations had surged, for which both the armed groups and state actors are responsible. According to Lucha, already more than 530 civilians died since the state of siege was declared.

Several civil society organisations report that in addition to other developments the activities of the Islamic rebel militia Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) have increased since the state of siege came into force. According to a report by the Centre d'études pour la promotion de la paix, la démocratie et les droits de l'homme (CEPADHO) of 09.08.21, the ADF alone has killed at least 75 people in the last two weeks and just in the territories of Beni (North Kivu) and Irumu (Ituri). According to press reports, further attacks, which were attributed to the ADF, occurred in these territories on 08.08.21 and 10.08.21, causing several civilian deaths. While the Congolese armed forces, together with the multinational troops of the UN Stabilisation Mission in the DRC (MONUSCO), are said to have killed a total of 45 ADF fighters on 13.08.21, according to a media report, the military has publicly admitted that the state of siege will not be able to put an end to the conflicts in the region, which have been going on for more than two decades. The military operations in the province of North Kivu, directed against the ADF rebel militia since the declaration of the state of siege, have not only led to the killing of ADF fighters, the uncovering of sleeper cells and ultimately to the arrest of more than 140 ADF collaborators, but have also resulted in the surrender of more than 600 members of various armed groups to the Congolese armed forces in the province of North Kivu alone, the military said.

South Kivu: deteriorating security situation

According to a security report by the NGO Synergie des associations des jeunes pour l'éducation civique, électorale et la promotion des droits de l'homme (SAJECEK) of 10.08.21, the security situation in South Kivu province is continuously deteriorating. Already on 20.07.21, MONUSCO reported that the resumption of fighting between the various parties to the conflict had led to a concerning increase in violence in the various territories of the province (cf. BN of 26.07.21).

Tanganyika: systematic use of severe sexualised violence; internally displaced persons

The UNHCR states in a press release dated 13.08.21 that women and children in the Eastern Province of Tanganyika are victims of widespread and systematic sexual violence by armed groups, including sexual slavery and gang rape. Victims of sexual violence not only suffer physical and psychological trauma, but also face stigmatisation and possible marginalisation by their own families. The attacks by armed groups competing for mining areas in the province are also linked to the military operations of the Congolese armed forces. In the wake of armed clashes between rival armed groups on the one hand and Congolese armed forces and armed groups on the other, more than 23,000 people have been internally displaced in the Kongolo territory of Tanganyika province since May 2021 alone. As of July 2021, the UN estimated the total number of people displaced in the province over the course of this year at more than 310,000. A large number of the internally displaced are affected by multiple displacement.

Life sentences for bodily harm

According to several media reports, the military court of the state of emergency province of North Kivu on 10.08.21, sentenced two officers of the Congolese armed forces to life imprisonment for (simple) assault in combination with "disobeying orders during the state of siege" according to the charges brought against them. The convicts, who can be seen in a publicly accessible video recording, beat each other up at the airport of Goma (North Kivu) on 03.08.21. A defence lawyer announced that he would appeal the sentence to the Supreme Military Court in Kinshasa because of the extremely harsh and severe punishment.

Egypt

IS attacks in Sinai Peninsula kill several security forces

At least eight soldiers were killed and six others injured when their vehicle hit a booby trap planted on the road near the town of New Rafah, on the Sinai Peninsula, on 12.08.21, according to army sources. A short time later, IS claimed responsibility for the attack.

IS fighters had already attacked a checkpoint in the town of Sheikh Zuweid at the end of July 2021, killing at least five soldiers and injuring at least six others. In this attack security forces also killed an unknown number of the IS fighters.

Ethiopia

Government calls on population to mobilise

Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed called on all "able and adult Ethiopians" to "show their patriotism" and join the army, special forces or militias in the fight against the Tigray Peoples Liberation Front (TPLF). Observers consider this as an attempt to regroup the weakened security forces and at the same time as the end of the ceasefire, which was declared by the government on 28.06.21 to last until September (cf. BN of 28.06.21). The TPLF and its armed wing, the Tigray Defence Forces (TDF), continued their fight and not only regained control over large parts of Tigray, but also occupied areas in the neighbouring regional states of Amhara and Afar (cf. BN of 19.06.21 and 26.07.21).

In view of the expansion of the conflict, UNICEF stated on 09.08.21 that it was "extremely concerned" and referred to an alleged attack by the TDF on a refugee camp in Galicoma district in Afar on 05.08.21, in which more than 200 people - including over 100 children - were reportedly killed.

Amnesty International (ai) reports crimes against humanity

A report published by ai on 10.08.21 says that women and girls have been massively subjected to sexual violence in Tigray since the conflict broke out in November 2020. The actors had "lost all sense of proportion", the report says. Victims tell of gang rapes, sexual enslavement and mutilation of the private parts, among other things. Previously, also other sources had reported gender-specific violence (cf. BN of 29.03.21 and 26.05.21). Eritrean and Ethiopian soldiers as well as members of ethnic militias are held responsible for the acts. According to ai, almost half of the women interviewed named Eritrean soldiers as the sole perpetrators. All of them cruelly used sexual violence as a weapon of war, the report says. The NGO accuses the governments in Ethiopia and Eritrea of condoning the sexual violence and calls for free access for UN and African Union (AU) expert teams to Tigray to investigate the allegations.

Alliance between TPLF and OLA

According to unconfirmed reports, the TPLF and the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA) have formed a military alliance. Their aim is to overthrow the government of Prime Minister Abiy, OLA leader Kumsa Diriba said on 12.08.21. Observers fear that this will further escalate the Tigray conflict, which might now also spread to the regional state of Oromia. The OLA, a splinter group of the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), refuses to engage in political discourse with the Ethiopian government and - by use of arms - demands autonomy for the region, it has taken control of the province of North Shewa in Oromia in recent weeks. Both the OLA and the TPLF were classified as terrorist groups by the Ethiopian parliament in May 2021 (cf. BN of 03.05.21).

Benishangul-Gumuz: More than a hundred Sudanese militia killed

Government agencies informed on 14.08.21 that at least 170 Sudanese militiamen were killed in the Ethiopian regional state of Benishangul-Gumuz. Without giving further information on the background, it was said that the armed groups had wanted to attack the local population and spread terror. The militias had also wanted to sabotage the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) project, which is disputed between the riparian states of Ethiopia, Sudan and Egypt, it was said (cf. BN of 18.05.20, 09.11.20 and 08.02.21).

Ghana

Human rights experts criticise anti-LGBTQI bill

UN human rights experts, in a statement dated 09.08.21, have strongly criticised the Promotion of Proper Human Sexual Rights and Ghanaian Family Values Bill, 2021: They stated that the bill would lead to a system of state-sponsored discrimination and violence against sexual minorities. According to media reports, the bill had been tabled in Parliament by a group of MPs on 02.08.21. The report says that the bill makes advocacy for the rights of LGBTQI persons a criminal offence, imposes an obligation to report "suspects" and takes into account the completion of so-called "conversion therapy" in sentencing. In their statement, the UN human rights experts called on the Ghanaian government to take all necessary steps to ensure that the bill is not considered. The proposal is to be debated in parliament in October.

Guinea

Opposition politician back in custody

Abdoulaye Bah, former mayor of Kindia, and temporarily released from prison only on 17.07.21 together with other opposition politicians of the Union des Forces Démocratiques de Guinée (UFDG) (cf. BN of 19.07.21), was arrested again on 09.08.21. He was charged with violating the conditions for his release. Specifically, he posted a video on social media stating that UFDG politician Cellou Dallein Diallo, and not Alpha Condé, was the elected president, as his lawyer explained. This had been interpreted as a call for civil disobedience as well as an attack on the institutions of the republic. According to Bah's lawyer, the release conditions did not include refraining from making political statements. It was a purely political matter in which politics, not the judicial authorities, were the determining factor, he said.

Guinea/ Ivory Coast

First occurrence of Marburg fever in West Africa; Ebola case in Ivory Coast

As the WHO announced on 09.08.21, the first ever case of Marburg virus in West Africa has been confirmed in Guinea. Laboratory tests had traced the death of a man from the village of Koundou (Guéckédou prefecture, border triangle with Sierra Leone and Liberia), who died on 02.08.21, to the Marburg virus.

The virus is similar to the Ebola virus in origin (transmission by flying foxes) and its spread among humans, it also causes similar symptoms (including haemorrhagic fever) and mortality. Mortality amounted to between 24 % and 88 % in other outbreaks. Isolated cases have occurred in Kenya, South Africa, and Uganda, with major outbreaks in DR Congo (1998 - 2000) and Angola (2005). There are no approved therapies or vaccines against Marburg fever yet. According to media reports, the WHO associates a high national and regional risk with the first appearance of the virus in West Africa and it praised the initial response of the local health forces and sent ten staff to the scene. Four people were identified as high-risk contacts of the deceased, with a total of 155 contacts under surveillance, according to a media report.

On 14.08.21, the WHO also expressed great concern about the confirmed Ebola infection of a Guinean woman in the metropolis of Abidjan with its approximately four million inhabitants. This is the first case of Ebola in Ivory Coast in 25 years. The infected person had entered the country on 12.08.21. So far, no connection could be established with the Ebola outbreak in Guinea, which was declared over on 19.06.21 (cf. BN of 21.06.21).

Haiti

Nearly 1,300 dead after major earthquake

On 14.08.21, a 7.2-magnitude earthquake struck about 150 kilometres west of the capital Port-au-Prince near the municipality of Saint-Louis-du-Sud. According to the country's Civil Defence Agency, the quake has so far killed 1,276 people and injured 2,800. The tremors, which were felt as far away as Jamaica and the Dominican Republic, destroyed thousands of buildings. The director of the disaster control authority, Jerry Chandler, stated that hospitals could no longer accommodate the many injured, especially in the coastal town of Les Cayes. In Haiti, hardly any government structures are in place to provide rapid assistance and the already poor infrastructure has been severely damaged. In addition, tropical storm "Grace" is approaching, although it has already been downgraded by the hurricane centre in Miami, heavy rain is still expected for Haiti.

Honduras

Femicides 2021

On the morning of 09.08.21, a total of three femicides occurred in Olancho, Tegucigalpa and San Pedro Sula. By the end of July 2021, the NGO Centro de Derechos de Mujeres (CDM) had already recorded 174 cases (cf. BN of 09.11.20).

Iran

COVID-19 pandemic: intensification of the fifth Corona wave

Health ministry officials expect the death toll to continue to rise in the fifth wave of the pandemic and to peak in the next month to month and a half. On 14.08.21, authorities officially reported 620 deaths. This is the highest officially announced death toll since the pandemic began. On average, between 500 and 600 daily deaths were recorded from 09.08.21 to 16.08.21, according to official figures. However, the authorities admitted for the first time that the actual death toll is much higher. According to media reports, every three minutes one person died of COVID-19 in Iran during the above-mentioned period. In the major city of Mashhad alone, 200 people are currently dying every day, according to media reports. Therefore, a nationwide six-day lockdown was imposed on 14.08.21. Hospitals, especially in the big cities, have no capacity to admit new patients. The Caspian Sea provinces and the east of the country are particularly affected. In many places, the sick are administered oxygen on the streets or in hospital courtyards in makeshift arrangements. So far, barely four percent of the population has been fully vaccinated. According to official figures, about 96,000 people have died since the beginning of the pandemic. Iranian media abroad, however, assume that more than 200,000 people have succumbed to COVID-19. Despite this development, the government continues to insist on celebrating the Shiite month of mourning, Muharram, which began on 01.08.21. As part of these celebrations, public events with mass attendance are held.

Violation of the hijab regulations: Two women run over in Urumiyeh

According to media reports on 09.08.21, a driver of a car in the north-western Iranian city of Urumiyeh ran over two female passers-by in the middle of the street after arguing with them. One of the two women was seriously injured. The driver had accused the two women of breaking the hijab rule. The man committed a hit-and-run, but was later arrested. The police have started an investigation.

Amnesty International (ai): Repression of protests condemned

Citing witness statements, photographs, film footage and other documents, ai accuses the Iranian security forces of disproportionate use of force in the crackdown on the recent protests (15.07.-25.07.21). The police used brutal force, especially in the small Kurdish town of Naqadeh (western Azerbaijan). Children and youths were also arrested and shotgun ammunition was used. ai said, arrests had also been made by masked gunmen who entered houses at night and took people away in Khuzestan and Kermanshah. In some cases, torture was also used and those arrested included participants of the protests in November 2019.

Iraq

Mayor of Karbala killed

The mayor of the southern Iraqi city of Karbala, Abeer Salim Al-Khafaji, was fatally wounded by multiple gunshots on 10.08.21. Al-Khafaji was inspecting illegal constructions when he was shot at close range. A suspect has been arrested.

Attacks on electricity pylons

So far unknown perpetrators damaged a utility pole in Tarmiya, north of Baghdad, on 13.08.21. This caused the failure of a local pumping station and as a result, western Baghdad was cut off from water supply. The Iraqi army has accused IS of being behind the attack. On 12.08.21, power lines and poles were damaged by explosives in Karbala. In the Riyadh region of Kirkuk province, seven electricity poles had been destroyed by explosives on 10.08.21, causing widespread power outages. These are the latest incidents in a series of attacks on Iraq's power grid.

Attack on oil field in Kirkuk

Suspected IS supporters carried out an explosives attack on an oil field near Kirkuk on 15.08.21. No personal injury or property damage was recorded. In recent months, IS attacks against targets in Kirkuk, Diyala and Salahuddin have become more frequent. IS has not yet officially claimed responsibility for the latest attack.

Kosovo

Exclusion of Serbian returnee

International media are currently reporting on the situation of 59-year-old Dragica Gašić, who fled from Kosovo to Serbia after the end of the Kosovo war in 1999. In June 2021, she was the first member of the Serbian minority to return to her former hometown of Gjakova. In this town Serbian units had used massive violence against the Albanian civilian population during the war. For this reason, Gašić is exposed to severe hostility from the inhabitants. A lawsuit filed by the municipality of Gjakova to cancel the lease of Gašić's flat was decided negatively by the local land court. Gašić is under police protection. In a joint statement, eleven local NGOs have called on the authorities to expel the Serbian woman.

Lebanon

End of subsidies for fuel imports

The Lebanese Central Bank announced on 11.08.21 that it would stop subsidies for fuel imports due to the continued severe shortage of foreign exchange. As a result of Lebanon's poor economic situation, more and more necessities, including fuel and medicines, are becoming scarce, because certain goods can only be imported to a very limited extent. The expected increase in fuel prices motivated some petrol station owners to hold back their fuel to sell it later at higher prices. This caused riots and even deaths in some places. On 14.08.21, soldiers of the Lebanese Armed Forces started to force petrol stations to hand over fuel and to stop black marketing.

Dozens die in explosion

Following the seizure of an illegal fuel depot in the northern region of Akkar by the Lebanese army, an explosion occurred on the morning of 15.08.21, killing at least 28 people. At least 79 others were injured. The explosion was preceded by a scuffle between the people present and a rush for the confiscated fuel.

Israel intercepts Hezbollah drone

The Israeli army announced that it had shot down an unarmed Hezbollah drone on 11.08.21 after it had entered Israeli airspace. This follows a renewed outbreak of violence between Hezbollah and Israel the week before.

Libya

Employees of the transitional government abducted

On 02.08.21, the chief of staff and another staff member of the deputy prime minister of the transitional government (GNU) were kidnapped by unknown gunmen in Tripoli.

In order to secure control and influence or to suppress critical voices, civil society activists, media workers and people working in the public sector are regularly abducted by armed groups.

Mali

Numerous civilians killed in attacks

According to media reports, more than 40 civilians were killed in attacks on three villages in the Gao region not far from the border with Niger on 08.08.21. Other sources cite at least 51 deaths and more than ten injured. Armed attackers on motorbikes are said to have attacked the villages of Karou, Ouatagouna and Daoutegeft, shooting at villagers and looting and burning houses. So far, no one has claimed responsibility for the attack. The government declared a three-day national mourning from 10.08.21.

The border region of the three countries Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger, has experienced repeated deadly attacks on the civilian population in recent weeks (cf. BN of 09.08.21).

Mexico

Drug cartel threatens journalist with death, situation of media workers in Mexico

On 10.08.21, the Mexican cartel Jalisco Nueva Generación (CJNG) threatened the well-known TV journalist Azucena Uresti of Milenio Televisión with death in a public video message. The reason for this, she said, was her one-sided reporting on fights between the CJNG and vigilantes for supremacy in the city of Ecatepec in the state of Michoacán. President Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO) assured the journalist of state protection. Mexico is one of the most dangerous countries in the world for media workers. According to the Ministry of the Interior, 43 journalists were killed between December 2018 and mid-July 2021, seven of whom had been under government protection. In 2020, the NGO Artículo 19 also recorded 692 attacks on the free press.

Morocco

COVID-19 pandemic

The number of new infections decreased slightly. At last count, 10,828 new infections and 104 deaths were reported in 24 hours on 12.08.21 and 7,380 new infections and 84 deaths on 15.08.21.

On 28.07.21, Yassine, a 25-year-old street vendor in Sidi Bennour, set himself on fire and died in protest against the local authorities who had confiscated his stall. The young man's death sparked protests against police arbitrariness and abuse of power by the authorities in Sidi Bennour and the nearby city of El Jadida. Young people in particular took to social media to express their outrage at the actions of the local authorities, writing: "We are all Yassine". The security authorities are monitoring the situation closely.

Myanmar

Deaths in Yangon raid, violence in several parts of the country

In Yangon (Rangoon), five people jumped from a high-rise building on 10.08.21 to escape imminent arrest. At least two of them died. The incident was preceded by a search of a flat, during which explosives were found, according to state media. In addition, three people were arrested. Two of the detainees confessed to involvement in an explosive attack in the Yangon township of Pazundaung, in which two police officers were injured.

More bombs exploded in Yangon on 09.08.21 and 10.08.21. Local media also reported clashes between the military and ethnic armies and People's Defence Forces in Kachin, Kayah and Shan states, and Sagaing region. On 12.08.21,

fighting was reported from Kayah and Sagaing Region. According to the underground National Unity Government (NUG), ethnic armies and resistance groups killed 740 Myanmar Army (Tatmadaw) personnel in July 2021 alone, over half of them in Sagaing. According to the NUG, about 200 civilians were killed in fighting with the military nationwide during the same period. The latter figure is based on media reports.

Nicaragua

Ambassadors recalled, arrest of another opposition politician, emigration

While Nicaragua recalled its ambassadors from Mexico, Argentina, Colombia, and Costa Rica, on 09.08.21, the Spanish government announced the recall of its ambassador from Managua on 11.08.21. On 09.08.21, former diplomat Mauricio José Díaz Dávila, the national spokesman for the Ciudadanos por la libertad (CxL) party, which was most recently deprived of its legal personality (cf. BN of 09.08.21), was yet another opposition politician arrested for violating Law N°1055 (Ley de Soberanía). According to data from the Costa Rican migration authority, 5,379 Nicaraguans applied for asylum in the neighbouring country in July 2021, i.e. the number of applications had tripled compared to the month of May and was also higher than in the same month of 2018 after the protests. A large proportion of those who fled were activists who had left the country via informal border crossings.

Niger

Another deadly attack in the border region

On 09.08.21, 15 villagers were killed in an attack by suspected jihadists in the Banibangou region near the border with Mali. According to the interior minister, the attackers, who have not yet been identified, attacked people working in the fields. The border region of the three Sahel countries Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger, has experienced repeated attacks on the civilian population causing numerous deaths in recent weeks (cf. BN of 02.08.21 and 09.08.21).

Nigeria

Abduction cases attract national attention

Nigerian and international media have reported extensively on kidnappings and robberies that became known in the first half of August 2021. Although kidnappings are relatively common in Nigeria, some recent cases attracted more attention: On 04.08.21, six people were abducted in Zamfara State, including the father of the Speaker of Zamfara State Parliament. On 07.08.21, unknown persons in Ogun State attacked a Swiss national and his armed companions on a rural road. Although two of the attackers were killed, the others managed to kidnap the Swiss national and another person. The following weekend, two kidnapping incidents occurred in Kwara State in which a total of 13 persons, including seven guests of a wedding party, a clergyman and his wife were abducted. In the meantime, the majority of the abductees are said to have been freed by security forces. Other sources report a total of three abduction cases in Kwara with a total of 29 people kidnapped. All the kidnap victims were reportedly travelling in cars or as passengers in a bus at the time of the attacks. The most prominent recent kidnapping victim is the Commissioner for Information of Niger State. The politician, who also holds a state-level government post, was abducted from his home in the night of 09.08.21. In most cases it does not become known whether and how much kidnappers demand and receive in ransom. In the first half of 2021, Nigerian kidnap victims included about 1,000 schoolchildren and students. In total, the media counted ten cases of kidnappings associated with educational institutions from December 2020 to July 2021 (cf. BN of 02.08.21). Around 200 - according to other information around 300 - of the schoolchildren and students affected are currently considered to be still missing.

Surge of violent crimes in Kaduna and Plateau states

During the period 03.07.21 to 05.08.21, Amnesty International (ai) has recorded a spate of violent crimes in Kaduna and Plateau states, located in the north and east of the capital Abuja, according to recent media reports. In connection with this, at least 112 people have been killed, 160 abducted and thousands displaced. Among the kidnap victims are over 100 students of Bethel Baptist High School, some of whom have since been released (cf. BN of

02.08.21). According to ai, criminal gangs are responsible for the violence in the region. On the other hand, unresolved conflicts between villagers and herders have also led to mutual attacks causing deaths on both sides.

Military kills over 100 fighters of armed groups in the north-west

In the first week of August 2021, soldiers in cooperation with the Nigerian Air Force attacked several hideouts of armed groups in the north-western state of Zamfara. Logistics facilities were destroyed and 123 men were killed. This was recently reported by the media, which also refer to official military figures of 12.08.21. Many bandits were killed when they tried to escape the air-strikes on motorbikes, the reports said. In the summer of 2021, security forces had intensified their operations against armed gangs in the region. They are accused of spreading terror on motorbikes, illegally taxing the population, stealing livestock and abducting people for ransom. On 18.07.21, a group of gunmen in Zamfara State allegedly succeeded for the first time in bringing down a Nigerian Air Force fighter plane. The pilot is said to have ended an air attack directed against kidnapers immediately before being downed (cf. BN of 26.07.21).

At least 22 killed in attack on convoy of Muslim pilgrims

On 14.08.21, at least 23 people were killed and as many injured in an attack on a convoy of 90 Muslim pilgrims in Plateau State. According to media reports, the attack was carried out by Christian militias. Twenty suspects have already been arrested. As a result of the incident, a twelve-hour curfew was imposed in Bassa, Jos North and Jos South districts on 15.08.21.

Pakistan/Afghanistan

Riots at the Afghan-Pakistani border

On 12.08.21, riots broke out at the Afghan-Pakistani border crossing at Chaman in Balochistan province between Pakistani security forces and hundreds of Afghan nationals trapped there due to the temporary closure of the border crossing after a 56-year-old Afghan had died there from a heart failure. The Pakistani security forces were pelted with stones and used tear gas to counter the attack. No one was seriously injured. The Taliban closed the border on 06.08.21 in response to the Pakistani government's initial decision to no longer allow visa-free border travel for Afghan nationals. According to recent media reports, this plan was not implemented by the Pakistani side, though: there is sporadic traffic across the border and Afghan nationals are still able to enter Pakistan without a visa either with an Afghan passport or with a refugee passport issued in Pakistan.

At the second major Afghan-Pakistani border crossing at Torkham in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa province, however, Pakistan has suspended border traffic since the Taliban also captured the border post on the Afghan side after their advance on the city of Jalalabad.

Palestinian Autonomous Areas/Israel

Israel: Campaign against crime in Arab neighbourhoods

On 11.08.21 Israeli authorities announced the arrest of more than 40 people suspected of various crimes during a wave of police operations as part of a new campaign against crime within Arab neighbourhoods in Israel. The new government under Prime Minister Naftali Bennett is responding to accusations of deliberate neglect of Arab neighbourhoods (cf. BN 22.03.21 and 19.04.21).

West Bank: Four Palestinians killed in undercover operation in Jenin

On 16.08.21, an armed confrontation took place between an undercover Israeli military unit and several armed Palestinians in Jenin, in the north of the West Bank. According to the Palestinian News Agency, when the unit disguised as Palestinians attempted to arrest a suspect, the two parties exchanged gunfire, killing four Palestinians. The Israeli military did not suffer any casualties, according to official reports.

West Bank: Approval of Jewish settlements as well as Palestinian construction projects

On 11.08.21 it was announced that for the first time in its term of office, the Israeli government would approve Jewish settlements in the West Bank for 2,000 people. At the same time, the construction of housing for 1,000

Palestinians in the C-Zone is to be approved as well. The granting of building permits for Palestinians in this zone, which is completely under Israeli control, has so far been considered extremely restrictive and almost impossible to obtain.

Republic of the Congo

Release of government critic after serving prison sentence

The government critic Raymond Malonga, who was arrested under controversial circumstances in February 2021 and sentenced to six months imprisonment and a fine of FCFA 30 million (approx. € 45,828, as of 13.08.21) in May 2021 for slander of the wife of the nephew of the president of the republic, has been released after serving his full sentence (cf. BN of 15.02.21 and 10.05.21).

Republic of Moldova

New pro-European government in office

After winning an absolute majority in the early parliamentary elections on 11.07.21 (cf. BN of 19.07.21), the parliament confirmed the government formed by the pro-European Action and Solidarity Party under Prime Minister Natalia Gavrilita on 06.08.21. According to media reports, the new government is pursuing a reform agenda with a focus on the rule of law and the fight against corruption. For the unresolved Transnistrian conflict, the new government will seek to actively cooperate with the Russian Federation, according to President Sandu.

Russian Federation

Navalny faces longer prison sentence

New charges have been brought against imprisoned Putin critic Alexei Navalny that could significantly extend his prison sentence. He is accused of founding an unlawful organisation, explained the investigative committee responsible for serious crimes. If convicted, Navalny faces an additional three years in prison. The case concerns Navalny's anti-corruption foundation FBK, which has since been classified as extremist in Russia and was banned in June 2021. Navalny is accused of "violating the rights of citizens" with the organisation. The FBK was founded ten years ago and has since published several videos about hidden assets and luxury possessions of Russian officials, especially Prime Minister Medvedev and President Putin, and the like. The Russian opposition accuses the Moscow leadership of waging a massive intimidation campaign against people critical of the government in the run-up to the planned parliamentary election in September 2021. According to Russian state media, Lyubov Sobol, one of Navalny's closest supporters, left the country on 08.08.21 to avoid execution of a sentence.

Somalia

Van attacked

On 10.08.21, an explosive attack on a van in the Mudug region killed at least eight civilians, including three children, according to official reports. So far, no one has claimed responsibility for the attack; the authorities assume that al-Shabaab is responsible. The military has been trying to drive al-Shabaab out of the Mudug region for several weeks and was also supported by the US military with drones (cf. BN of 26.07.21 and 02.08.21).

AMISOM investigates civilian deaths after fighting with al-Shabaab

The African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) said it was investigating reports that civilians had been killed in a shoot-out between AMISOM troops and al-Shabaab fighters. The incident occurred on 10.08.21 when patrolling AMISOM troops in the Lower Shabelle area were ambushed by al-Shabaab and an exchange of fire ensued. Residents reported seven civilian casualties. Thereafter dozens of people protested outside a hospital in Mogadishu where the dead had been taken.

COVID-19 pandemic: Delivery of vaccine doses

On 12.08.21, Somalia received 410,400 COVID-19 vaccine doses under the COVAX initiative. Vaccination coverage among the population has been low so far. As of 11.08.21, only 93,458 people out of a population of over 15 million had been fully vaccinated against COVID-19, according to WHO data. Somalia has recorded more than 16,000 COVID-19 cases and 864 deaths since the first case had been recorded in March 2020. The number of COVID-19 infections spiked in recent weeks.

Sri Lanka

2019 terrorist attacks: charges brought against 25 people

According to media reports, on 10.08.21, Sri Lanka filed 23,270 charges under the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) against a total of 25 persons in connection with the 2019 Easter Sunday suicide bombings. The charges include conspiracy to murder and collecting arms and ammunition. The attacks claimed more than 250 lives, including those of foreign nationals. The attacks targeted churches and luxury hotels. The government is accused, including by the country's Catholic Church, of not pursuing the investigations into the terrorist attacks conscientiously.

South Sudan

Internal party crisis of the SPLM/A-IO

On 12.08.21, Henry Odwar, deputy to the first vice-president, Riek Machar, announced that he was leaving the transitional government to join the military wing of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army -In Opposition (SPLM/A-IO). The latter had previously issued a statement relieving Machar of his position as party leader (cf. BN of 09.08.21). This attempted removal led to violent clashes between supporters of both sides, in which, according to media reports, at least 32 people have been killed so far.

Sudan

Extradition of al-Bashir to the International Criminal Court

The Sudanese government announced that it would extradite former President Omar al-Bashir, who was ousted after almost 30 years in office in April 2019, to the International Criminal Court (ICC). The ICC accuses al-Bashir of crimes against humanity and war crimes committed during the conflict in Darfur, which has been ongoing since 2003. On al-Bashir's orders, the Janjaweed militia allegedly systematically committed human rights violations against insurgents. Two other high-ranking former officials have also been charged and are to be extradited.

Syria

Ceasefire in Dar'a

After continued fighting in the provincial capital of the same name (cf. BN of 02.08.21), rebels and government troops agreed on a two-week ceasefire mediated by Russia, on 14.08.21. According to a spokesperson for local coordination committees, negotiations are to continue in order to reach a final agreement.

On 13.08.21, the UN Special Envoy for Syria, Geir Pedersen, described the situation as alarming after thousands of civilians fled the city and the population no longer had sufficient water, bread and fuel.

Almost half of the population had fled from the southern district of Dar'a al-Balad, which had remained under rebel control following a 2018 power-sharing agreement and has been hardest hit by fighting during the recent conflict. Of the 33,540 refugees registered by the UN on 12.08.21, 31,076 were women and children, according to the report.

Turkey

Violent attacks in Ankara

On 11.08.21, a mob of several hundred people attacked houses, shops, and cars of Syrians in Ankara. The trigger is said to have been the death of an 18-year-old Turk who, according to media reports, was presumably stabbed to death by a Syrian when two groups had clashed the previous day. He died of his injuries on 11.08.21, shortly thereafter rioting started in an area of Ankara where a large number of Syrian migrants and refugees live. The governor's office said during the night that the situation was under control and that several dozen people had been arrested. For years already, sentiments towards refugees within Turkish society have increasingly turned sour. While initially the willingness to help and tolerance had dominated, the tense economic situation greatly dampened these feelings.

Arrest of terror suspects

According to media reports, security forces arrested a number of people in the eastern province of Kars on 10.08.21 for suspected links to the PKK, including five members of the opposition People's Democratic Party (HDP).

Classification as COVID-19 high risk area

From 17.08.21, the German government classifies Turkey as high-risk area due to the surge in COVID infections. COVID-19 case numbers have been rising very rapidly since the end of July 2021, with sometimes over 20,000 new cases being registered daily.

Yemen

Houthis plan visa requirement

According to a memorandum from the Houthi Ministry of Transport, visa offices will be set up at the border between the areas occupied by the Houthi rebels and the rest of the country controlled by the government. Accordingly, entry to and exit from the Houthi areas will only be possible with a visa. Transport companies are urged to forward passenger lists to the authorities in advance. The place of origin and destination will also be recorded. The Houthis' announcement is widely seen as an attempt to effectively separate the north from the rest of the country and thus consolidate Houthi control over northern Yemen.

Pentagon: Iranian arms supplies to Houthi rebels increase

On 10.08.21, a senior US-Pentagon official accused Iran of ramping up its arms supplies to the Houthi rebels. According to the official, the rising number of attacks on Saudi Arabia by the Houthi rebels in the first half of 2021 was a direct result of these sales. The complexity of the weapons had also increased, he said.

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