



Briefing Notes

Group 62 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

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Afghanistan

Formation of government

The Taliban continue to face difficulties in forming a viable government. These difficulties include the lack of funds (foreign reserves of the old government amounting to nine billion USD), which have been frozen by the US. Therefore, the Taliban are now challenged by rising inflation, a weakened currency, surging unemployment and a liquidity crisis. It remains to be seen, whether reports of internal Taliban fighting between southern and eastern groups are accurate. The rumours of the killing of the new prime minister's deputy, Mullah Baradar, in a gun battle with Haqqani supporters, have not been substantiated. Baradar publicly denied them on 15.09.21. On 15.09.21, the Taliban announced their intention to establish a regular army. Allegedly, also former soldiers and officers of the republic will be recruited. On 15.09.21, the head of the Taliban army, however, stated that the Taliban would continue to take action against people who tried to further defend the values of the Islamic Republic.

Humanitarian situation / economic crisis

According to the reports of 17.09.21, the public passport office is closed and long queues have formed waiting for it to reopen. On 16.09.21, it was reported that the black market for visas in Kabul was booming, as most embassies in the country were closed. On the same day, the Taliban allegedly handed over about twelve million USD and gold bars to the Central Bank, which they had found during house searches of former government members. On 14.09.21, private entrepreneurs asked the US government to release the nine billion USD reserves frozen in the US to prevent Afghanistan's economic collapse. For lack of liquidity, banks in Kabul only permit a weekly withdrawal of about USD 230 per person, forcing many people to sell their belongings. Therefore, at a UN meeting in Geneva on 13.09.21, the international community pledged over one billion USD in humanitarian aid to Afghanistan. The Taliban declared to distribute this aid money transparently. On 13.09.21, it was reported that property prices had fallen sharply and rents in Kabul had already fallen by 50% (partly because many internally displaced persons who had previously been renting had returned to their homes). The World Food Programme of the United Nations (WFP) stated on 15.09.21 that its reserves in Afghanistan could be exhausted by the end of September 2021, which would mean a high risk of hunger for 14 million Afghans. On 15.09.21, the EU pledged EUR 100 million in humanitarian aid to Afghanistan. On 16.09.21, it was reported that many state employees had not been paid since the takeover (and in some cases even before). Therefore, many are working in informal sectors of the economy.

Infrastructure

On 13.09.21, the employees of Kabul airport resumed their work at the request of the Taliban (including the female employees). The first commercial flight from Pakistan landed in Kabul on 13.09.21, following the arrival of flights from Qatar. The first commercial flight from Iran landed on 15.09.21. Technical staff from Turkey and Qatar have been helping to make the airport functional since 15.09.21. As of 20.09.21, Kabul Airport will be fully operational again for domestic and international flights, reports said.

Violence against civilians / women's rights

On 19.09.21, a businessman kidnapped in Kabul was killed by his captors. On 18.09.21, three persons were killed and 20 others injured in bomb attacks by ISKP in Nangarhar province. On 18.09.21, the US government claimed responsibility for the accidental deaths of ten civilians in a drone strike in Kabul on 29.08.21. On 15.09.21, the UN expressed concern that there had been civilian casualties in the fighting around Panjshir province and that the Taliban were not protecting the human rights of Afghan women - including because there were no women in the current government and many women had been sent home from their jobs. Reports said that on 17.09.21 the road into the sealed-off Panjshir valley had been reopened and telecommunications restored. 90% of civilians living there left their homes during the fighting and are now struggling with economic problems, it was said. On 16.09.21, it was reported that robbers were posing as Taliban in Kabul in order to gain access to homes and steal from residents. On 17.09.21, the Taliban announced that secondary school classes for girls would be abolished. Schools had previously been reopened only for boys and male teachers. On 18.09.21, former female employees protested against the Taliban's closure of the Ministry of Women's Affairs and the closure of secondary school classes for girls. This was also condemned by UNICEF and UNESCO on 19.09.21.

Media / Freedom of the press

On 13.09.21, it was reported that 153 media outlets in 20 provinces had ceased operations since mid-August 2021. On 15.09.21, journalists had complained that many Taliban ministries did not have media officers and that they did not receive information when asking for it. On 18.09.21, 100 journalists had signed an appeal to the international community to help them preserve press freedom in Afghanistan. Despite declarations to the contrary by the Taliban, the first signs of a general restriction of press freedom were emerging, especially female journalists were being hindered in their work, they said. There were bans on reporting on protests and physical intimidation and beatings by the Taliban.

Albania

New government confirmed

About five months after the parliamentary election of 25.04.21 (cf. BN of 03.05.21), the parliament confirmed the new government of Prime Minister Edi Rama, who has been in office since 2013, with the absolute majority of deputies of the Socialist Party (PS) on 17.09.21. The opposition Democratic Party (PD) again accused the government of electoral fraud in the parliamentary election and boycotted the election of a new speaker of parliament by tearing up the ballots. According to media reports, the new government sees its priority task in the economic and social reconstruction of the country in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and the severe earthquake of November 2019.

Argentina

Primary election results/ cabinet reshuffle/ economic crisis

On 12.09.21 the primaries for the parliamentary elections in November 2021 took place in Argentina, in which half of the deputies and one third of the senators will be elected. The centre-left government coalition Frente de Todos led by President Alberto Fernández and Vice-President Cristina Kirchner suffered a clear electoral defeat losing a significant number of votes. After tensions within the government coalition as well as the vice-president's public criticism of Fernández' austerity politics on 16.09.21, altogether seven cabinet members were exchanged on 17.09.21 and are to be sworn in on 20.09.21.

Argentina is experiencing a severe economic crisis, inflation is around 50%, and more than 40% of the people now live below the poverty line. The management of the pandemic as well as a private celebration in the presidential palace during the lockdown, additionally increased the population's discontent with the government.

Bangladesh

Verdict against members of Jamaat-e Islami/ more arrests

On 15.09.21, a Dhaka court sentenced seven leaders and activists of the Jamaat-e Islami (JI) party to prison terms for violations of the Anti-Terrorism Act. Also the party's General Secretary, Mia Golam Parwar, is among those convicted. Golam Parwar had been arrested on 06.09.21 together with eight other JI members, on charges of conspiracy to engage in subversive activities (cf. BN of 13.09.21).

Ten female JI members were surprised at a secret meeting and arrested in a raid in Satkhira on 17.09.21.

Arrest of a Hefazat-e Islam leader

On 17.09.21, police in Dhaka arrested Rezwan Rafique, a leader of the Islamist organisation Hefazat-e Islam. According to local media reports, Rezwan had already been arrested in March 2021 for acts of violence during protests in connection with the visit of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi (cf. BN of 19.04.21).

Burkina Faso

Humanitarian and security situation

According to the Burkinabe government's Conseil National de Secours d'Urgence et de Réhabilitation (CONASUR), which is responsible for humanitarian issues, more than 275,000 people have fled increased violence, including by extremist groups, since April 2021. In total, there are more than 1.4 million internally displaced people. According to the International NGO Safety Organization (INSO), more than 480 people were killed in attacks between May and August 2021. An estimated 4.8 million people were food insecure, with 2.9 million suffering from acute food insecurity, it said. Of the approximately USD 607 million in humanitarian aid needed for 2021, only 24% has been funded so far.

Dead in attack on convoy

On 12.09.21, an attack by unknown persons on a convoy of road tankers travelling on the road between Sakoani and Matiacoali (Est region) left six Gendarmerie Nationale security personnel dead.

Burundi

UN Commission of Inquiry criticizes poor human rights situation

On 16.09.21, the UN Commission of Inquiry on Burundi published key findings from a report to be presented to the UN Human Rights Council on 23.09.21. According to the report, serious human rights violations have continued since President Ndayishimiye took office, despite his promise to improve the human rights situation at the beginning of his term. The violations documented by the Commission of Inquiry were primarily directed against members of opposition parties and against persons suspected of being involved in armed attacks or collaborating with armed groups. Returnees and the Burundian population in general had also been affected, the report says, albeit to a lesser extent. Agents of the intelligence service Service National de Renseignement (SNR) are responsible for executions, forced disappearances, arbitrary arrests and detentions, and torture. According to the report, members of the opposition have regularly been targeted for abusive restrictions and serious human rights violations, especially since July 2021, while the perpetrators enjoyed impunity. The UN Commission of Inquiry therefore finds that there the rule of law is progressively deteriorating in Burundi.

China

Hong Kong: Twelve democracy activists sentenced to prison terms, some to suspended prison terms

For taking part in an unauthorised vigil for the victims of the Tian'anmen massacre of 04.06.89 on 04.06.20, a Hong Kong court sentenced nine democracy activists to prison terms of between six and ten months on 15.09.21. Three other activists received suspended sentences ranging from twelve to 18 months. Citing measures to curb the COVID-19 pandemic, the traditional vigil had been banned in 2020 for the first time. The civil society movement

Hong Kong Alliance in Support of the Patriotic Democratic Movement, which has been organising the commemoration for three decades, announced on 16.09.21 that it was deleting its internet sites on instructions of the police.

Ivory Coast

Corruption: action against public officials

According to an agency report, the Minister for the Promotion of Good Governance, whose portfolio had only been set up in April 2021, informed on 14.09.21, that several operations had been launched against corruption in state agencies. At first, specifically the police and the gendarmerie will be scrutinized, in particular their practice of racketeering of street vendors selling food. A corrupt practice that had contributed to the increase in the price of food, he said. According to a media report, this was followed later in the week by a military prosecutor's announcement that 43 police officers and gendarmes would have to stand trial for racketeering from the end of October 2021. This represents a significant increase in such cases compared to previous years.

The country is ranked 104th out of 180 in Transparency International's latest Corruption Perceptions Index. The agency report also pointed to a 2017 survey that said two-thirds of the respondents considered reporting corruption to be dangerous because of possible reprisals.

Release of opposition members

According to various media reports, the leader of the pro-Gbagbo youth, Justin Koua, was released conditionally exactly one year after his arrest on 16.09.20. He is accused, among other things, of having disturbed public order in the course of the protests against the ultimately successful candidacy of President Ouattara for a third term. According to one of the media reports, Koua was set free as part of a larger number of releases of over 20 supporters of former President Laurent Gbagbo.

After the meeting between the former rivals Ouattara and Gbagbo on 27.07.21 (cf. BN of 02.08.21), Ouattara announced the release of 78 prisoners on the occasion of the independence celebrations on 07.08.21. It is unclear to what extent he has followed through with this announcement.

DR Congo

Suppression of various protest marches/ police violence

According to media reports, several protest marches held on 15.09.21 in various parts of the country by civil society organizations and opposition parties and groups were suppressed, in some cases violently. Dozens of arrests were made and several people were injured on both sides. Various journalists who wanted to report on the protest marches were prevented from doing so, physically attacked and temporarily arrested. In particular, the police's brutal crackdown on Patient Ligodi, a journalist who was temporarily detained, was internationally condemned. The Congolese Minister of Communications announced a criminal investigation into the incident. The aim of the protests, which were banned by the authorities, was to depoliticise the Independent National Electoral Commission (CENI) and to hold timely and credible elections in 2023.

WFP: world's highest level of acute food insecurity

As early as April 2021, the UN had announced that the DR Congo had the highest level of acute food insecurity in the world (cf. BN of 12.04.21). According to a new report of the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) of 14.09.21, people in almost all provinces and (major) cities are affected by high and acute food insecurity. In the reporting period February 2021 to July 2021, 1.5 million people in the capital Kinshasa alone were dependent on humanitarian aid. According to WFP, food insecurity in urban areas was caused by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, which led to job losses, lower household incomes and higher food prices.

Provinces of North Kivu, Ituri: extension of the state of siege

For the eighth time in a row, the Congolese representative bodies approved another 15-day extension of the state of siege that has been in force in the two provinces of Ituri and North Kivu since the beginning of May 2021. Thus, the military and the police remain vested with extensive powers of intervention (cf. BN of 17.05.21). Human Rights

Watch (HRW) reported on 15.09.21 that since the declaration of the state of siege and up to 10.09.21, the various armed groups had killed more than 672 civilians in the two provinces. During the reporting period, the state security forces were responsible for the killing of a total of 67 civilians.

North Kivu Province: Increase in sexual and gender-based violence

Various human rights organisations report that the number of cases of sexual and gender-based violence in the eastern province of North Kivu has increased to a concerning extent, particularly since the state of siege came into force at the beginning of May 2021 (cf. BN of 03.05.21). Most of the cases are attributable to armed men.

Gender-specific and sexualised violence is widespread throughout the country (cf. BN of 02.08.21 and 06.09.21). The UNHCR announced on 10.09.21 that in 2021 more than 1,100 rapes had already been documented in the provinces of North Kivu and Ituri alone, which are under siege.

Guinea

After coup: "national consultations"/ sanctions against those responsible

After the coup of 05.09.21 (cf. BN of 06.09.21), the rulers of the National Committee for Reunification and Development (CNRD) held so-called national consultations with representatives of civil society, politics, religion and business from 14.09. to 16.09.21. The aim was to define a framework for a government of national unity (cf. BN of 13.09.21) and to return the country to constitutional order. However, no specific agreements were reported.

Meanwhile, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) imposed a travel ban on CNRD members and froze CNRD accounts on 16.09.21. ECOWAS renewed its demand for the release of President Condé and called for elections within six months.

Marburg fever outbreak ended

According to a WHO statement, Guinea declared on 15.09.21 that the Marburg fever outbreak had terminated. Within 42 days, twice the incubation period, no further infection with Marburg virus was detected. On 09.08.21, a man had died from the disease when the virus first appeared in West Africa (cf. BN of 16.08.21). According to the WHO new outbreaks may occur. It announced that it would continue to support Guinea's efforts in vigilance and in building up rapid response capacities.

Haiti

Interim prime minister dismisses chief investigator/ political crisis intensifies

Following the assassination of Haiti's President Jovenel Moïse (cf. BN of 12.07.21), the government commissioner of the capital Port-au-Prince, Bed-Ford Claude, who acts as chief prosecutor, requested the indictment of interim Prime Minister Ariel Henry last week. The latter was allegedly involved in the assassination of Moïse, having received a phone call from an intelligence agent from the Haitian Ministry of Justice shortly after the murder on 07.07.21. After the allegations came to light, Henry's office announced the dismissal of Claude and that of Justice Minister Rockefeller Vincent, stating that Claude had committed "serious administrative errors." Subsequently, other officials close to slain President Moïse resigned in protest. Meanwhile, on 14.09.21, Senate President Joseph Lambert attempted to take advantage of the confused situation by summoning his colleagues in office and members of the media to the senate building to broadcast his swearing-in ceremony. Shootings outside the senate building prevented Lambert's attempt to seize power. In addition, the elections scheduled for November 2021 have been postponed indefinitely. An amendment of the constitution, which until now has stipulated that the president and prime minister share power, is planned prior to the elections. Currently, Haiti has hardly any functioning structures: the parliament has been dissolved, gangs control certain areas and loot urgently needed aid for the earthquake victims. In addition, the fuel supply in the capital has been interrupted.

Iran

ai: Systematic torture and impunity for the perpetrators

In its latest report, Amnesty International (ai) describes a total of 72 unsolved deaths in Iranian prisons during the period 2010-2021. The incidents occurred in more than 40 prisons and detention centres spread across 16 provinces. The human rights organization accused the prison authorities of inaction, especially since those responsible have not been held accountable. There are allegations of systematic torture, which in many cases led to the death of prison inmates, including of political prisoners. A total of 46 out of 72 deaths are said to have been caused by physical torture on the part of prison guards and security and intelligence officers. The latest documented case occurred on 08.09.21 in Urumiyeh Central Prison, when a 31-year-old detained worker died as a result of torture. The case is also documented by the Kurdistan Human Rights Network and the human rights organization Hengaw. The security forces had informed the family of the man killed that he had been killed during an armed confrontation, though.

Prison sentence for lawyer of Haft Tappeh workers

According to Iranian foreign media, a revolutionary court in Ahvaz has sentenced Farzaneh Zeylabi, the lawyer of the striking workers of the Haft Tappeh sugar company (Khuzestan), to one year in prison and a two-year ban on leaving the country for propaganda against the system. The strikers are demanding their wages, which have been outstanding for months. In addition, there were protests against the private owner of the company, who is accused of bribery in connection with its privatisation (cf. BN of 22.03.21 and 31.05.21). Immediately after Haft Tappeh was nationalised again by court order on 08.05.21, the lawyer and one of her associates were summoned to appear before the local Revolutionary Court and banned from practising for six months (cf. BN of 31.05.21). The workers criticized the charges as contrived and flimsy.

Arrest of a musician critical of the system

According to media reports, rapper Tomaj Salehi, who became famous on social media, was arrested by several security forces on 13.09.21 and taken to an unknown location. The musician, a local of Isfahan, had announced the possibility of his arrest in the days before. His song lyrics are considered critical of the system, because they also deal with protests by the Iranian people, workers' strikes, executions and imprisonments, as well as corruption in business and politics. The reason for his arrest has not yet been officially announced. However, Iranian foreign media speculate that it was triggered by the dissident lyrics of the song Surakh Mush (English: mouse hole). Protests and demands for the artist's release have increased on social media. Rap music, along with other Western-oriented music genres, is considered un-Islamic and immoral, particularly because of the vocabulary used.

Charges against well-known photographer

Photographer Majid Saidi has been released about three weeks after his arrest near the Iran-Turkey border in the country's north-west. Citing the photographer's Instagram account, Iranian media abroad report that a criminal case has since been filed against Saidi. The charges are propaganda against the system and photographing and documenting sensitive military installations. Saidi's arrest had only become known on 08.09.21. He had been in the border area for a report on Afghan refugees (cf. BN of 13.09.21).

Iraq

Formation of joint brigade of Peshmerga and central Iraqi forces postponed

On 18.09.21 it became known that the formation of a joint brigade of Kurdish and central Iraqi forces would be postponed for the time being until after the election on 10.10.21. Joint bases are planned in Khanaqin, Kirkuk, Makhmour and western Nineveh. The brigade will explicitly consist of Arab, Kurdish, Turkmen and other minority members in an effort to improve the security situation in the areas disputed between central Iraq and the KRG. In recent years, IS had gained prominence in these regions due to the power vacuum that existed after 2017.

As recently as 15.09.21, it was announced that after the formation of the brigade Peshmerga forces would not return to Kirkuk City under any circumstances, as some members of the central Iraqi parliament had manifested their concerns about this.

Attack on villages in Dohuk

On 15.09.21, a village in the north of Dohuk province was hit by artillery fire, presumably from Turkey. Turkey regularly shells PKK positions in northern Iraq. Shelling was also reported in the region on 19.09.21.

Assassination of a prominent PKK member

On 17.09.21, a prominent PKK member was murdered in Sulaymaniyah. The 65-year-old had been a member of the PKK's Martyrs' Family Board (caring for dead fighters' families) for 15 years. Already on 18.09.21 a suspect was arrested. The PKK accuses the Turkish intelligence service (MIT) of having carried out a targeted killing, but there is no reliable evidence on the circumstances so far.

Lebanon

Economic crisis

Lebanon's different political groupings and institutions are still trying to organize help on different levels. On 16.09.21, the first deliveries of diesel fuel arrived by road tankers. These had previously been filled in Baniyas in Syria, as Iranian supplies cannot be exported directly to Lebanon without violating sanctions. Iran has sent a total of four tankers in this way by now. Hezbollah is using the shipment to supply hospitals and similar institutions for free and others at cost. This is expected to provide Lebanon's hospitals with electricity for about another month. Also, a first delivery of Iraqi oil reached Lebanon and will fuel the Deir Amar power plant there. This should supply at least parts of the country with electricity for a few hours a day.

On 13.09.21, the Lebanese Ministry of Finance announced that the International Monetary Fund (IMF) had agreed to make Lebanon's special drawing rights available to the central bank. Special Drawing Rights are a type of "surrogate currency." Countries participating in the SDR system must agree to accept up to twice the value of SDRs allocated to them in the form of international currency. Thus, they do not represent deposited assets, but rather a method of creating additional liquidity in a crisis-ridden region. The nominal value of Lebanon's special drawing rights amounts to USD 1.13 billion. Lebanon's foreign exchange reserves are currently estimated at around USD 13 billion.

Libya

Violent clash with Chadian rebel group

On 14.09.21 and 15.09.21, Libyan Arab Armed Forces (LAAF) troops led by General Khalifa Haftar and the Chadian rebel group Front pour l'alternance et la concorde au Tchad (FACT) clashed violently in the southern Libyan towns of Tamsah and Tarbo on the border with Chad. Both groups confirmed the incidents. In recent years, FACT had at times supported the LAAF in the Libyan civil war. In April 2021, the rebel group had fought against the Chadian army in northern Chad; in the process, long-term president Idriss Déby was killed.

Mexico

Drug lord given long-term prison sentence

On 14.09.21, a court sentenced the former leader of the Juárez cartel, Vicente Carrillo Fuentes (also known as El Viceroy), to 28 years in prison for drug offences, money laundering, and hoarding firearms. He had been arrested already in 2014 in the state of Coahuila.

CELAC Summit in Mexico

On 18.09.21, the VI Summit of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) took place in Mexico City, uniting representatives from over 30 countries, including 17 heads of state and government as well as European Council President Charles Michel. The summit ended with a 44-point declaration, including the announcement of the creation of a new fund to deal with natural disasters and enhanced cooperation on the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as declarations on ending economic sanctions against Cuba and on the COP26 climate summit in Glasgow in October 2021. In addition, Mexican President López Obrador proposed the upgrading of

CELAC as a confederation of states along the lines of the EU and as an alternative regional organization to the Organization of American States (OAS).

Montenegro

President criticises revival of Serbian nationalism

According to a recent media report, on 16.09.21, Montenegrin President Milo Djukanovic and Croatian President Zoran Milanovic issued a statement accusing the Serbian leadership of reviving the Serbian nationalism of the 1990s in the Western Balkans region, on the occasion of Djukanovic's state visit to Croatia. With regard to the Serbian attitude he criticised, Djukanovic reportedly said that the fictitious concept was being spread that no multi-ethnic democracy was possible in the Western Balkans and that the time had come to create expanded, nationally and religiously homogeneous states. In an interview for the Croatian daily Jutarnji list on 11.09.21, Djukanovic had accused Serbian President Vucic of interfering in the internal affairs of neighbouring countries under the pretext of allegedly protecting the endangered rights of the Serbian minorities living there. In response to Djukanovic's warning of a threat to peace in the region, Vucic had replied critically on 12.09.21 that Djukanovic was striving for a Montenegro without Serbian nationals and without the Serbian Orthodox Church.

Myanmar

Fighting in Yangon, Chin and Magway

On 17.09.21, security forces and opponents of the military engaged in a gun battle in Yangon (Rangoon) after a bomb attack on a military convoy that claimed several lives.

Deadly clashes also occurred between the military and resistance fighters in Chin State and Magway Region. At least 19 houses burnt down in Thantlang (Chin), which came under hours of artillery fire as part of a military offensive on 18.09.21. A Baptist pastor was shot dead while attempting to put out one of the fires. The capital of Chin State, Hakha, also saw renewed fighting between the Myanmar Army (Tatmadaw) and the Chinland Defence Force (CDF).

Several cases of extreme violence have been reported in Magway since 09.09.21. Up to 17.09.21, between 15 and 22 people were reported killed, including members of the People's Defence Forces and civilians. Furthermore, dozens of houses were burnt down in Myintha and Hnankha villages of Gangaw Municipality. The outbreak of violence is attributed to raids by the military, during which at least four people were deliberately shot or burnt in their homes. According to local People's Defense Forces, about 20 Tatmadaw soldiers were also killed in the clashes.

Communication channels in wide parts of the country are disrupted both by internet shutdowns by the military and by attacks on telecommunications masts of the military-operated telecommunications company Mytel by insurgents. The regions of Sagaing, Mandalay and Magway and the state of Chin are particularly affected.

Niger

Situation for children worsens

In a report published on 13.09.21, Amnesty International (ai) said that the conflict in the Tillabéri region in the border area with Mali and Burkina Faso is having an increasingly devastating impact on children's lives. The human rights organization accuses the Islamist-jihadist groups Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) and Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM) of war crimes, such as the killings of civilians and attacks on schools. According to ai, 60 children have been killed in the border region so far in 2021. Armed groups set schools on fire and threatened teachers because their teaching methods were perceived as "Western". As a result, already 377 schools in the region had to close by June 2021; 31,000 children were no longer able to attend school, the report said. While ISGS had attracted attention with major attacks along the border with Mali since the beginning of 2020, JNIM had established itself along the border with Burkina Faso. Niger's security forces have done little to protect civilians from the violence, the report continued. The ban on motorcycles, which would be used by armed groups to carry out attacks, had reduced the population's ability to obtain supplies and medical services.

ai interviewed 119 people, including 22 children, civil society activists and staff from human rights organisations, the UN, and the Nigerian government for the report.

Nigeria

Unknown persons free hundreds of prisoners

From 12.09. to 13.09.21, armed assailants in Kabba town in the central state of Kogi helped at least 240 prisoners escape, according to a prison spokesperson. Two correctional officers were killed in the attack, he said. About half of the escaped prisoners were arrested again on the following day. Attacks on prisons are relatively common in Nigeria. For example, in the south-eastern state of Imo, more than 1,800 prisoners managed to escape on 5.04.21 after unknown persons had blown up the walls of a prison (cf. BN of 12.04.21).

Traditional ruler kidnapped in the north-west

Hassan Atto, Emir of Bungudu in the north-western state of Zamfara, was kidnapped by unknown persons on 14.09.21. According to media reports, the crime occurred on the highway between the mega-cities of Kaduna and Abuja, which is generally considered very unsafe. Emirs, like Obas and Chiefs, are traditional rulers who still have great influence and are very popular in large parts of Nigeria. Kidnappings increased in the northern states since December 2020, recently the number of kidnappings associated with educational institutions has been on the rise (cf. BN of 06.09.21).

Accommodation for the reintegration of returnees opened

The NGO Patriotic Citizen Initiatives (PCI) has opened a shelter in the southern Nigerian metropolis of Lagos to accommodate men who have returned to Nigeria. According to media reports published in mid-September 2021, the so-called male shelter is the first facility of its kind in Nigeria that is open exclusively to men. Present at the opening were representatives of the project partners: the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), the UK Home Office (UKHO) and the Nigerian National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP). According to the founder and Executive Director of PCI, the shelter can accommodate 40 returnees. Speaking at the opening, she pointed out that male victims of human trafficking and torture, in particular, have received too little attention in Nigeria so far. The facility will offer holistic reintegration measures such as psychosocial counselling, preparation for vocational training and mentoring programmes. The planned duration of stay is stated to be three months.

Civilian casualties in Nigerian air force attack

Ten people were killed and at least 20 injured in an attack by the Nigerian Air Force (NAF) in the town of Buhari in the north-eastern state of Yobe on 15.09.21. According to a media report, a spokesman for the NAF initially denied that bombs or rockets had been used, saying that it had been an armed reconnaissance flight. However, on 16.09.21, the NAF informed that an aircraft had been dispatched to respond to suspected terrorist activity by the jihadist groups Boko Haram/Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) along the border with the neighbouring state of Niger. Based on suspicious movements on the ground, the pilot had fired shots and an investigative committee had been set up to ascertain the circumstances surrounding the incident, the statement said. The NAF is deployed in the fight against Boko Haram/ISWAP in the north-east (cf. BN of 06.09.21) as well as against groups of so-called bandits in the north-west (cf. BN of 30.08.21).

Seven people accused of witchcraft killed

Seven persons were killed on 14.09.21 in Dasin Bwate village in the north-eastern state of Adamawa over allegations of witchcraft. According to media reports, the police confirmed the incident on 15.09.21. The village chief and the other local residents had reportedly left the village before the arrival of the police investigation team. No arrests have been made so far.

Pakistan

Attacks by the TTP in former tribal areas

The Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) carried out two attacks in the former tribal areas bordering Afghanistan in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province: seven Pakistan Army soldiers were killed in an attack on 15.09.21 in North Waziristan; another soldier died in a suicide bombing in South Waziristan on 13.09.21.

The former tribal areas in north-western Pakistan have long served as sanctuaries for militant groups. As a result of the military's frequent counter-terrorism operations in the area over several years, a number of militants allegedly sought refuge in Afghanistan or hid in the mountainous terrain.

Protests against state control of the media

On 12./13.09.21, thousands of media professionals staged an overnight sit-in protest in front of the parliament against a bill that they say would further tighten state control and surveillance of the media, including social media, and all but undermine press freedom. Protests continued across the country throughout the week. The bill proposes to repeal the existing media laws and create a new regulatory body, the Pakistan Media Development Authority (PMDA). This is to combine the functions of the existing regulatory bodies. There are also plans to set up courts to try media professionals and companies for "defamatory" coverage of military generals, judges and government officials.

Pakistan already ranks on one of the lowest positions of the press freedom index. According to Reporters Without Borders (RSF), the pressure exerted by the military on the media has increased significantly since Imran Khan took office in 2018. Media professionals are repeatedly targeted for intimidation, violent attacks and even torture, others lost their jobs, often for criticizing the powerful military and intelligence agencies. In addition, extremist groups regularly target media outlets.

Palestinian Territories / Israel

Gaza Strip: Start of Qatari financial aid payments to Gaza families

On 15.09.21, the first payments of Qatari financial assistance to needy families from the Gaza Strip since May 2021 were made. The payments are now paid out through the same mechanisms that the UN uses to distribute payments. This involves the distribution via supermarkets, money exchange offices and other retail outlets. According to UN figures, the funds amount to USD 40 million and will so far be paid exclusively to needy families. Payments of salaries to members of the Hamas-led government in Gaza through Qatari funding, as was common before the May 2021 war and under the previous Israeli government, have so far failed to materialize.

Accusations of torture, arrest of escaped persons

On 15.09.21, the lawyers of two of the four escaped prisoners who had already been detained again (cf. BN of 13.09.21) accused the Israeli security authorities of mistreating their clients during their arrest.

On 19.09.21 the last two, of the original six escapees, were arrested again in Jenin in the West Bank. Two other persons who allegedly helped them escape were arrested with them. They had surrendered after Israeli military forces discovered and surrounded their hideout.

Russian Federation

Kremlin party wins parliamentary elections

After the counting of two-thirds of the votes cast in the election to the State Duma held from 17.09 to 19.09.21, the ruling party United Russia is in the lead with almost 48%, but, as expected, performs worse than in the 2016 election (54.2%). According to the Central Election Commission, the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (CPRF) is the second strongest party with around 21% of the vote. The other parties represented in parliament, the right-wing populist Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (LDPR) and the Just Russia party, can also expect to be re-elected. Like the CPRF, they are considered loyal to the system. Already in the run-up to the vote, the opposition parties experienced various forms of repression (cf. BN of 07.06.21) and promising candidates were excluded from the election.

There have been reports of irregularities in the context of voting, over 4,500 suspected cases have been reported to the Russian electoral rights organisation Golos (as of 19.09.21). The organization, which is classified as a "foreign agent", as well as independent media reported, among other things, multiple voting, the stuffing of ballot boxes with bundles of pre-filled ballots, as well as cases of coercion to participate in the vote, especially in state-owned enterprises. There were also reports of threats and violence against election observers and pressure on voters to cast their ballots using the new online procedure, which is considered particularly susceptible to manipulation. The Central Election Commission and the Ministry of the Interior announced a review of the allegations, but at this stage already rejected "serious violations" that would be likely to affect the election. Already prior to the election, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) had for the first time refrained from sending election observers to Russia, citing the "considerable restrictions" imposed by the authorities.

São Tomé and Príncipe

Opposition candidate wins presidential election

Carlos Vila Nova, former Minister of Infrastructure of the West African island state of São Tomé and Príncipe, has won the second round of the presidential election held on 05.09.21. The candidate, backed by the opposition Independent Democratic Action (ADI) party, received 57.54% of the vote with a turnout of around 65%, according to the National Electoral Commission. The opposing candidate who had reached the second round of voting belongs to the ruling Movimento de Libertação de São Tomé e Príncipe (MLSTP) party. The ballot proceeded without major incidents. The second round of voting had been delayed after the result of the first round, held in July 2021, was legally challenged by the third-place finisher. The outgoing president had not sought a second term.

Somalia

Death of NISA employee: lawsuit before military court and commission of inquiry

Following the controversial death of National Intelligence and Security Agency (NISA) employee Ikran Tahlil (cf. BN of 06.09.21 and 13.09.21), the family of the deceased filed a lawsuit in the military court against four persons close to President Mohamed Abdullahi Farmajo. Among the accused is former NISA chief Fahad Yasin, who has been Farmajo's security adviser since his suspension (cf. BN of 13.09.21). Farmajo set up a commission of inquiry, which has since been dismissed by Prime Minister Mohamed Hussein Roble on the grounds that Farmajo was determined to obstruct justice. With the exception of Villa Somalia, the state media boycotted the publication of Farmajo's statements on Tahlil's death.

Security meeting cancelled due to absence of Fahad Yasin

A National Security Council meeting scheduled for 18.09.21 was postponed after the absence of former NISA chief, now Farmajo's security adviser, Fahad Yasin. According to official reports, he and other Somali officials were unlawfully detained at Djibouti airport and prevented from travelling to Mogadishu. However, Djibouti's Foreign Minister Mahmoud Ali Youssouf denied these allegations. He said the plane had turned back to Istanbul because of "technical problems", as one of the pilots did not have permission to land in Mogadishu.

Attacks

On 14.09.21, at least 11 people, including civilians and soldiers, were killed and several others injured in a suicide attack at a busy tea shop near a large military base in Mogadishu's Wadajir district. Al-Shabaab claimed responsibility for the attack.

On 19.09.21, one person was killed and five were injured in an attack at Bula Burte airport in Hiiran region, central Somalia. The perpetrators had secretly entered the recently rebuilt airport and planted landmines which later exploded. Al-Shabaab claimed responsibility for the attack.

Clashes between military and police in Mogadishu

On 16.09.21, the Somali National Army (SNA) and the elite Haramcad police clashed in Mogadishu, resulting in an exchange of fire in which eight people, including civilians, were critically wounded. According to reports, the clash was triggered by a disputed over some private property.

South Sudan

Cash shortages force WFP to cut food aid

On 13.09.21, the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) said that funding shortfalls will force it to suspend life-saving food assistance to more than 100,000 displaced people in parts of the country from next month until early 2022. According to the statement, due to limited resources, only those on the verge of starvation can be fed for the time being. The three-month suspension is part of a broader cut in food assistance for all refugee and IDP camps announced in April 2021. In total, these measures will impact 700,000 people. In order to provide sufficient food assistance, WFP needs an additional USD 145 million. Food insecurity has continued to increase in recent years. According to WFP, it is more serious this year than at any time since independence ten years ago. 7.2 million people are acutely affected.

Sudan

Egyptian training programme for police officers

Sudan's official news agency reported that 105 police officers had been sent for three weeks of training in criminal investigation, personal security and internal security. The focus of the programme, according to media reports and Egyptian authorities, was on the fight against the Muslim Brotherhood. In February 2021, protests, violence and looting occurred in the states of North Darfur, West Darfur, North Kordofan and East Darfur, for which the transitional government blamed supporters of the former Bashir regime and the Muslim Brotherhood, saying that the Muslim Brotherhood continued to have major influence in Sudan, particularly in Darfur.

UN calls for more support for stability in Darfur

On 14.09.21, the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Sudan and Head of the UN Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in Sudan (UNITAMS) called for more international support to maintain stability in the Darfur region and more resources for UNITAMS to better carry out its mandate. The mandate is based on monitoring, reporting, mediation and reconciliation, but not on physical protection. He said the violence in Darfur showed the need for support of the Sudanese police. On 30.06.21, the Transitional Sovereign Council (TSC) established a permanent ceasefire committee for Darfur, as well as sectoral committees for Darfur's five states. The chairmanship of these committees was entrusted to UNITAMS. The Ceasefire Committee, subsequently initiated by UNITAMS, is composed of representatives of the military, armed groups in Darfur and other key stakeholders, in addition to the UN Mission. In this regard, the Special Representative also stressed that the Committee can only contribute to monitoring, reporting and mediation. However, he said, it is no substitute for the joint Sudanese forces and their protection mandate.

Syria

Defence Minister visits Jordan

For the first time since the beginning of the Syrian conflict, a cabinet member of the Syrian government was received in Amman on 19.09.21. The Jordanian royal family has long supported the armed uprising against the Assad government. The Syrian minister's visit came after the full recapture of all parts of Dar'a of the Syrian military (see BN of 13.09.21), a governorate bordering on Jordan.

The topic of discussion is said to have been the fight against insurgents and cross-border drug smuggling. According to reports, it is in particular the Lebanese Hezbollah that is smuggling drugs from Syria via Jordan to the Gulf states.

Widespread power failure after attack on gas pipeline

The Minister of Electricity said on 18.09.21 that the previous day a bomb attack on a pipeline south-east of the capital had led to a brief blackout in large parts of the country. The attacked pipeline supplies nearly 50% of Syria's power plants, according to the Energy Ministry. Although supply has been restored, severe rationing is expected until repairs to the line will have been completed.

President Assad on a visit to Moscow

The Syrian head of state travelled to Moscow on 14.09.21 for his first meeting with President Putin since 2018. Putin used the meeting to criticise the presence of foreign troops in Syria. This, he said, is the main problem in Syria today. In this context, he pointed out that neither the US, nor Turkey (unlike Russia or Iran) had received permission from Syria to send military forces to the region. Assad called the sanctions that have been imposed internationally against Syria "anti-human".

Tunisia

Demonstrations for and against actions of the president/ arrest of politicians

For the first time since the removal of the prime minister and the suspension of parliament (cf. BN of 26.07.21), about 200 opponents and about 700 supporters of the measures took to the streets of Tunis on 18.09.21. Security forces separated the two groups in order to prevent violent clashes.

In addition, the head of the ultra-conservative and Islamist party Al-Karama, Seifeddine Makhlof, was imprisoned for criticizing state officials on 17.09.21 during a court martial. He had recently become increasingly visible as a critic of the current situation.

Further measures announced/ travel ban lifted

On 14.09.21, President Saied again announced to amend the constitution and form the government "in a timely manner". On 17.09.21, instructions were issued to subject only persons against whom an arrest warrant has been issued or for whom deportation is planned to the travel ban imposed on 25.07.21.

Turkey

Suspected coup plotters deprived of their ranks

On 13.09.21, 13 retired generals convicted of their involvement in the 1997 military coup were stripped of their ranks after the Supreme Court of Cassation upheld their sentences to life imprisonment in August 2021 (see BN of 23.08.21).

ECHR judgment in the Bakırhan case

On 14.09.21, the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) ordered Turkey to pay EUR10,000 in damages and EUR 3,000 in expenses for the unlawful removal and detention of the Mayor of Siirt, Tuncer Bakırhan. The court said his impeachment and arrest in November 2016 had been disproportionate and a violation of his freedom and freedom of expression. Bakırhan, a member of the pro-Kurdish Peace and Democracy Party (BDP), was accused of belonging to the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and was held in pre-trial detention for two years and eight months. In October 2019, he was sentenced to ten years imprisonment.

Arrests of suspected Gülen members

On 14.09.21, prosecutors in 43 provinces issued at least 143 arrest warrants for suspected Gülen supporters. The suspects are accused of being members of a secret Gülen group within the country's security forces. According to the prosecutor's office, the suspects have been identified by the Turkish intelligence agency (MIT) and the police. 102 suspects are alleged to have been active as "secret imams" within the movement.

Arrest of suspected IS members

On 14.09.21, twelve people were arrested during several raids carried out in the cities of Ankara, Istanbul, Konya, Adana, and in Sanliurfa province. Those arrested are suspected of having links to the IS terrorist group and are accused of providing financial support to IS between 2018 and 2019.

Venezuela

Demonstration for LGBTQI rights in Caracas

On 18.09.21, numerous activists protested for more rights for LGBTQI persons. Among other things, they demanded a discussion about equal civil marriage for sexual minorities as well as the recognition of LGBTQI families and the legal recognition of the change of identity of transgender persons. They also demonstrated for improved protection for their community from threats, discrimination and violence based on sexual orientation or gender identity. This year alone, at least twelve people have been victims of fatal hate crimes, according to the executive director of the LGBTQI human rights initiative País Narrado, Dani Toro

Yemen

Protests against poor living conditions

After the currency continued to lose value, protests, some of them violent, erupted in the larger cities of the southern governorates of Aden, Hadramawt, Shabwah and Taiz since 15.09.21. Thousands of people have protested against rising food prices and the lack of electricity and water, and in some cases roadblocks have been set up. Some protesters stormed the presidential palace in Aden and set fire to government buildings. In an attempt to contain the protests, a curfew was imposed in Hadramawt on 16.09.21, however, it was largely unsuccessful. In some cases, security forces of the government and the Southern Transition Council used force against demonstrators. So far, four demonstrators have died in the protests. Formally, the Yemeni government and the Southern Transitional Council are allies in the fight against the Houthi rebels, but they rival each other for power and influence in southern Yemen, which greatly hinders the fight against economic problems.

Houthis execute death sentences

Nine people were executed by firing squad on 18.09.21, including a 17-year-old youth. The individuals had been sentenced to death by a Houthi rebel court for involvement in the air strike on Hodeidah in April 2018, they were accused of spying for the anti-Houthi coalition and other charges. The 2018 attack killed Saleh al-Sammad, who held the office of president in the Houthi areas. The executions were publicly broadcast on large screens in Sanaa. Seven other people had also been sentenced to death in absentia, including Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman and former US President Donald Trump.

At least 50 dead in fighting in al-Bayda

A Yemeni military spokesman has announced that 20 government soldiers were killed in fighting in al-Bayda governorate on 16.09.21. 30 Houthi rebel fighters were also killed. In recent weeks, the Houthi rebels had advanced in al-Bayda.

Saudi Arabia intercepts Houthi drones

On 16.09.21, the anti-Houthi coalition intercepted several explosives-laden drones and a missile targeting the Saudi city of Jazan. Earlier on 15.09.21, the Saudi Air Force intercepted an explosives-laden drone targeting the airport in Abha. Drone attacks by Houthi rebels against Saudi territory have increased in recent weeks.