



Briefing Notes

Group 62 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

27 September 2021

Afghanistan

Government formation / Law enforcement / International recognition

On 24.09.21, it was announced that the Taliban were once again advocating - as they did in the 1990s - the rigorous application of Sharia law in the fight against crime, including the amputation of limbs and the death penalty. On 25.09.21, the Taliban hung the bodies of four slain criminals (who had been responsible for a kidnapping) in different places in the city of Herat as a deterrent to imitators. On 26.09.21, citizens reportedly complained that the Ministry of Justice remained closed and perpetrators of crimes were not prosecuted. On 27.09.21 it was reported that the Taliban had prohibited barbers to trim beards in Helmand province. On 21.09.21, the Taliban announced the names and positions of further members of the interim government, intending to also consider minorities this time, as a Hazara was appointed as Minister of Health. However, still no women were included. According to the Taliban this will not happen until their government will have been internationally recognised. On 20.09.21, the Taliban stated that they would only look at resolving domestic human rights abuses after an international recognition. The Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) announced on 20.09.21 that the Taliban had prevented its activities since they took power in mid-August 2021 and had occupied its offices. On 21.09.21, contrary to reports by US intelligence agencies, the Taliban stated that there were no members of al-Qaeda in the country and that the Islamic State of Khorasan Province (ISKP) posed no threat to them, despite recent attacks. On 24.09.21, the government passport office was still closed, according to reports. On 25.09.21 it was reported that Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan had advocated the international recognition of the Taliban at the UN General Assembly.

Humanitarian situation

On 27.09.21 it was reported that 17 children had died of malnutrition in Ghor province in the last six months. On 25.09.21, in response to criticism of its tough sanctions, the US agreed to issue licenses allowing humanitarian aid to Afghanistan from the US. On 24.09.21, many citizens had demonstrated throughout Afghanistan against the US withholding foreign reserves. On 23.09.21, the UN announced that it would save Afghanistan's health care system from collapsing by providing USD 45 million in aid. On the same day it was reported that a policeman from Kunar province had committed suicide because he had not been paid for three months and could not feed his family. On 20.09.21 reports said that the International Monetary Fund (IMF) would not allow Afghanistan to access its Special Drawing Rights reserves until the government was internationally recognised.

Violence against civilians / hostilities

On 25.09.21, a bomb attack targeted the Taliban in the city of Jalalabad, one Taliban was killed and several civilians were injured. On 24.09.21, ISKP had claimed responsibility for killing at least six Taliban in various attacks in Jala-

labad. On 23.09.21, the Taliban Defence Minister, Mullah Yaqub, admitted in a speech that revenge killings of former government members by individual members of the Taliban had taken place across the country - in violation of the proclaimed general amnesty. In the same speech, he called on anyone concerned to refrain from doing so in the future and to respect the amnesty. On 21.09.21, resistance fighters reported that the Taliban had captured civilians in Panjshir province and tortured them in prisons in Kapisa province. Houses of civilians were also being used as bunkers and for fighting, they said. On 24.09.21, the politician Mohammad Mohaqiq reported on social media that the Taliban evicted 800 Hazara families from their homes in Daikundi province to hand the houses over to Pashtuns.

Women's rights / Education

According to a report of 26.09.21, students cannot attend their lectures at universities abroad because they cannot renew their passports and thus cannot obtain visas from the government. On 23.09.21 it was reported that the Taliban had seriously violated the human rights of women in the provincial capital Herat. Prominent women in senior positions were being sought, women were not allowed to work or to leave their homes without a male companion and had to be fully veiled. On the same day, it was reported that universities remained closed throughout the country. On 21.09.21 it was reported girls still cannot attend secondary schools. This concerns approximately six million girls across Afghanistan. The Taliban said they would soon allow them to return. In addition, many teachers have not been paid for the last two months.

Media

On 23.09.21, the NGO Reporters without Borders criticized the Taliban's new rules for journalists as too unspecific, with too much room for interpretation and thus as a gateway for censorship. News should not be published that "contradict Islam", "insult national personalities", "violate privacy", "whose news content is distorted", "which does not respect journalistic principles" and "whose reporting is not balanced".

Albania

Domestic violence homicides on the rise

According to media reports, domestic violence remains widespread in Albania (cf. BN of 30.11.20). So far this year, 17 murders of women by their partners or ex-partners have been recorded, most recently two cases in the week from 13.09.21 to 19.09.21. Public protest marches took place in the cities of Tirana and Fier on 15.09.21. According to current government statistics, over half of all Albanian women are victims of domestic violence at least once in their lives, but according to the Albanian police, only about 13% of all reported cases were prosecuted between January and December 2020.

Algeria

Death of ex-president Bouteflika and ex-transitional president Bensalah

On 17.09.21, long-time former President Abdelaziz Bouteflika died, after a long illness, at the age of 84. He had ruled the country for 20 years and resigned in 2019 after the people strongly protested against him running again as a candidate in the presidential election. On 22.09.21, Abdelkader Bensalah, who was the interim president after Bouteflika and had stepped down in 2019, died.

Angola

South-west provinces: Severe famine caused by drought

According to a statement by the World Food Programme (WFP) on 24.09.21, as a consequence of the worst drought in the country in 40 years more than 1.3 million people are facing severe famine in the south-western provinces of Cunene, Huíla and Namibe alone (cf. BN of 26.07.21). According to WFP, the drought could lead to even greater famine, affecting nearly 1.6 million people from October 2021 to March 2022. Massive crop failures caused by a plague of locusts and high food prices further exacerbate the food and hunger crisis. The drought mainly affects

the south-western parts of the country, while the northern border areas with Namibia are less affected. WFP reports refugee movements abroad and at home as a result of the drought disaster.

Azerbaijan

Azerbaijan commits to pay damages to opposition members at the ECHR

In an action before the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) concerning the final sentence of opposition member Tural Abbasli to 15 days of administrative detention for failing to comply with a previous sentence of 220 hours of community service, Azerbaijan undertook to pay damages of EUR 4,500 to the plaintiff as part of a consensual settlement of the dispute. The Azerbaijani judiciary had imposed the community service in connection with Abbasli's participation, as the then head of the youth organisation of the opposition party Müsavat, in a demonstration in Baku on 12.01.13 which addressed non-combat deaths in the Azerbaijani army. The subject matter of the dispute before the ECHR was the protection of the applicant's right to a fair trial (Art. 6 ECHR), in particular the right to a reasoned decision and the right to be defended by legal representation of his choice.

Back in September 2019, the ECHR awarded Abbasli EUR 10,000 in compensation for his detention following his participation in an opposition rally on 02.04.11. In February 2017, the ECHR found a violation of Abbasli's rights in relation to arrests on 20.10.12 and 07.05.14. Furthermore, in December 2015, Abbasli was awarded EUR 12,000 in damages by the ECHR for the violation of his right to vote in the 2010 parliamentary elections.

Bangladesh

Increase in child marriages during the COVID-19 pandemic

After various initiatives managed to reduce the number of child marriages in Satkhira administrative district by half since 2019, one school alone recorded 50 illegal marriages since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in early September 2021, i.e. a renewed increase. The victims are girls between the ages of 14 and 18. 149 child marriages were prevented during the same period, according to local authorities. Schools in other parts of the country reported similarly high numbers. On 24.09.21, the Manusher Jonno Foundation (MJF), a human rights organization, issued a statement expressing concern about the "nationwide incidence of child marriages" and the reduction of the number of schoolgirls noted after the resumption of attendance classes. It said the target of banning child marriages by 2030 was in jeopardy in view of the recent developments. As of March 2021, 51% of women aged 20-24 in Bangladesh had been married as minors, a 49% decline since 1970. The COVID-19 pandemic now threatens to reverse this progress.

Burundi

Several attacks claimed lives and injured

Media reported several attacks in different cities. On 19.09.21, two people were killed and several injured when a grenade exploded in a bar in the capital Gitega. One day earlier, the airport in Bujumbura had been shelled by mortars, but no-one was harmed. The shelling happened on the day before the president's departure for the UN General Assembly in New York. The rebel group RED-Tabara claimed responsibility for the attack on the airport via Twitter.

According to further reports, there were renewed attacks on 20.09.21, in which at least two people were killed and 102 injured in the city of Bujumbura, again by grenades. These two attacks happened almost simultaneously. According to the report, two explosives blew up at the central bus station in the city centre. The grenades detonated near people about to board the buses. One person was killed and several were injured. There was another explosion close to the city centre in the Bwiza district, near Jabe market. According to witnesses, the grenade detonated right next to a group of fish vendors, killing two people and injuring several others. A fourth grenade blew up near a crowded bus in the outskirts of Bujumbura. Nothing is known about the casualties. So far, no one has claimed responsibility for these attacks. On 22.09.21, the Attorney General accused opposition member Alexis Sinduhije of

leading a group of eight people responsible for the attacks. Sinduhije is the leader of the opposition group Mouvement pour la solidarité et le développement (MSD); in government circles he is considered to be the actual leader of RED-Tabara, which Sinduhije consistently denies. He is living in exile in Belgium. During the investigations of these attacks, the Attorney General issued several international arrest warrants, as the eight wanted persons also live in exile. The warrants were also linked to earlier attacks and were accompanied by a statement that refusal to execute the warrants would "seriously jeopardize peace and security in the region." To media, the RED-Tabara group denied any involvement in the grenade attacks, condemning them as "barbaric" and expressing solidarity with the victims. The group MSD also denied all allegations.

Cameroon

Soldiers killed in multiple attacks in Anglophone North-West Region

Cameroon's military informed that at least 15 soldiers were killed in an attack near Bamessing in North-West Region on 16.09.21, when armed separatists allegedly attacked an army convoy. Military vehicles were reportedly set on fire and weapons stolen.

In another attack on the evening of 12.09.21, seven soldiers were reportedly killed when their vehicle was hit by an explosive device near Kumbo (North West Region). Also the deaths of several civilians are reported in these two attacks.

Central African Republic

Increased violence in the north-west

Recently, clashes between the armed group Retour, Réclamation et Réhabilitation (3R) on the one side and government troops and Russian mercenary groups on the other side, intensified in the country's north-west. In the process, the civilian population is caught between the front lines; according to media reports, both 3R and the mercenaries kill, rape, and subject civilians to other reprisals, as well as looting. The opposition party Mouvement pour la libération du peuple centrafricain (MLPC) denounced, e.g. an assault by 3R on the village of Mann that left seven dead, the reports said and that the MLPC also accuses the UN blue helmet mission MINUSCA of inactivity. Further reports of several incidents with civilian casualties from the north-west and west, through which the country's essential supplies are delivered from Cameroon, have been received, but are difficult to verify. In a communiqué dated 11.09.21 it was reported that 3R accused the Russian paramilitaries of massacres directed against the Peulh and Gbaya ethnic groups with more than 100 deaths. This had been rejected by the government as "fake news". In an interview of 20.09.2021 President Touadéra denied knowing of any activities of the Russian security company Wagner (cf. BN of 12.04.21) in the country, saying he had not signed anything with a Wagner company.

China

After release of Huawei manager: Canadian citizen released from prison

The chief financial officer of the technology company Huawei, Meng Wanzhou, who has been under house arrest in Canada since December 2018, will be released following a settlement with the US judiciary. Meng had been detained in Vancouver at the behest of the US over allegations of bank fraud in connection with Iran sanctions. In exchange for Meng's release, Chinese authorities released the Canadian citizens Michael Spavor and Michael Kovrig from detention. Spavor, a businessman, and Kovrig, a former diplomat, had been detained shortly after Meng's arrest and charged with espionage. In addition, Spavor was sentenced to eleven years in prison in August 2021 (cf. BN of 16.08.21).

Hong Kong: High turnout in first patriotic election

On 19.09.21, 4,380 of 4,900 eligible "patriots" - by way of a new procedure - determined the electoral committee that will elect 40 of the 90 deputies for the next city parliament in December 2021. 30 MPs will be elected by special interest groups and only 20 directly. In 2022, the Election Committee will also decide on the next leader of Hong

Kong's government, with Beijing's involvement. For each of the vast majority of the 1,500 seats that were voted on on 19.09.21 there was only one candidate. A police force of 6,000 had been deployed to secure the election.

Colombia

Killings of Colombian activists and former FARC members

According to the Colombian Peace Research Institute (Indepaz), 124 social leaders and human rights defenders have been killed so far in 2021. On 20.09.21 alone, five activists from the provinces of Nariño, Antioquia, Chocó and Cauca were assassinated. With more than 400 human rights defenders killed between 2016 and 2020, Colombia records the highest murder rate of this type in Latin America (cf. BN of 30.08.21). In addition to social leaders and human rights defenders, 37 former fighters of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) guerrilla group in the process of reintegration have also been killed this year. Since the signing of the peace agreement in November 2016, 283 FARC ex-combatants have been killed.

Five killed in attack by suspected FARC dissidents

The media reported five people killed and six others injured in an attack by suspected FARC dissidents on 26.09.21. The report said that the attackers fired indiscriminately at people from a car in the town of Tumaco in the southern department of Nariño. According to the army, violent clashes between armed groups active in the local drug trade have become ever more frequent in the region lately.

DR Congo

Provinces of North Kivu, Ituri: Announcement of an indefinite state of siege

At this year's session of the UN General Assembly, Congolese President Félix Tshisekedi declared that he intended to indefinitely maintain the state of siege declared since the beginning of May 2021 in the two eastern provinces of North Kivu and Ituri. He said, its termination would only be justified by the cessation of the circumstances on the basis of which this type of state of emergency had been proclaimed. Opposition circles already raised doubts about the constitutionality of the indefinite continuation. Extensions of the state of emergency, as per Article 95 of the constitution, are subject to the approval of the representative bodies and are limited to a maximum of 15 days (Article 144(5)). With the enactment of the state of siege, the armed forces and the police in North Kivu and Ituri were given complete control, including in the areas of administration, the judiciary and, temporarily, civilian law enforcement. These security forces are vested with special powers of intervention (cf. BN of 17.05.21 and 06.09.21). While President Tshisekedi reported an improvement of security and stability in the provinces subject to the state of emergency, various civil society and non-governmental reports repeatedly drew a critical picture of the situation with regard to security, stability and human rights (cf. BN of 16.08.21, 30.08.21, 13.09.21 and 20.09.21).

ADF: IS technical assistance, new waves of displacement.

According to an article published by the UN information radio Okapi on 22.09.21, there may, for the first time, be evidence that the radical Islamic group Forces démocratiques alliées (ADF), originally from Uganda, is receiving direct support from IS on Congolese territory. A Jordanian national arrested in the Beni territory of North Kivu province and reportedly found with a Kosovar residence permit issued to a Saudi national was training ADF fighters in the use of drones, according to official government sources. As early as May 2021, a hostage freed from ADF captivity had told the French news agency AFP that there were light-skinned individuals operating drones in Beni territory. In April 2019, IS declared the ADF, which also goes by the name ADF-National Army for the Liberation of Uganda (NALU) or Madina at Tawhid Wai Muwahdeen (MTM), a Congolese offshoot and claimed an attack in DR Congo for the first time. Press reports in recent days and weeks have stated, among other things, that the ADF's recent and, in some cases, repeatedly deadly attacks in the Irumu region of Ituri province have triggered new waves of internal displacement. There is no reliable information on the number of internally displaced persons. However, in the wake of several attacks by the ADF, more than 15 localities had been depopulated. Komanda, a trading centre located 75 km south of the provincial capital Bunia, which is of strategic importance for supplying the population in the province, is said to be emptying rapidly for fear of another ADF attack. It was said that on 26.09.21 only 30%

of the town's original population of around 45,000 inhabitants had remained, many internally displaced persons are seeking refuge in the town as well.

South Kivu: Witchcraft accusations against women

Citing the local NGO Association des femmes de médias, the UN information radio station Okapi reported on 26.09.21 that more than 320 women had been accused of witchcraft in South Kivu province during the reporting period of June to September 2021. Witchcraft accusations, which would emanate from young people and particularly affect older women, continued to increase in the province, the report said. The women accused of witchcraft were abducted, lynched and sometimes burnt alive.

The DR Congo's society is very religious. The superstition of witchcraft is widespread throughout the country and in all strata of the population. According to the report prepared by the Committee on the Rights of the Child and released by the UN on 28.02.17, also murders, abuse and violence against children accused of witchcraft have increased. According to UNICEF, children in some communities are accused of witchcraft because of their disabilities or speech impediments. Laws enacted against witchcraft accusations are not effectively enforced.

The Gambia

ai: Persistence and application of repressive legislation

According to media reports, Amnesty International (ai) stated in a report published on 23.09.21 that parts of restrictive legislation dating back to the era of former President Jammeh still apply, despite the Barrow government's commitment to change and a reform programme. Cases documented so far show that parts of the laws restricting the rights to freedom of expression, freedom of the press and freedom of assembly are also applied under the Barrow government. Citing the Gambia Press Union, ai further states that even after the change of the head of state, media workers are still victims of violent attacks, for which both the police forces and the supporters of political parties are responsible. No criminal convictions had been handed down in any of the cases, ai said. The Gambian Minister of Information, Ebrima Sillah, accused ai of one-sided and factually incorrect reporting. Among other things, the government had introduced a law to amend the criminal law and a draft constitution. These had also been introduced in parliament. The Government respects the principles of separation of powers, he said. Police investigations had been initiated in the cases of attacks on media workers. The government could not influence these investigations without exposing itself to accusations of interference in criminal prosecution, he added.

Ghana

Protest

On 21.09.21, several hundred supporters of the #FixTheCountry movement demonstrated in Sekondi-Takoradi (Western Region). The movement, which emerged on social media, opposes the high cost of living in the country and demands economic and social reforms as well as a constitutional reform for more democracy. It portrays itself as a non-partisan and non-political movement of Ghanaian youth. Faced with rising national debt and economic losses from the COVID-19 pandemic, the government has raised taxes. More than half of the population of about 31 million is under the age of 25. One-third of the young people have neither jobs nor vocational training.

Trial for homosexual acts

According to reports on 26.09.21, the leader and founder of a Christian church in Abura Asebu Kwamankese District (Central Region) was arrested for engaging in homosexual acts with church members. He was charged with sexual assault under the Criminal Offences Act. He remains in police custody pending continuation of court proceedings on 19.10.21.

Guinea-Bissau

Health care walkout causes loss of life

A strike by health workers that began on 20.09.21 claimed the lives of 30 people by 22.09.21, according to the nurses' union. The number cannot be verified, but on the second day of the strike there were already reports of over ten deaths in the important Simão Mendes Hospital in Bissau alone. The strike is directed against poor working conditions, insufficient salary and other problems. Since the beginning of 2021, the staff had repeatedly gone on strike, but had always maintained minimum services. So far, the government reacted to the five deaths by announcing that it would bring those responsible to court. It also deployed military health personnel at the Simão Mendes Hospital, whereupon eight of its directors resigned. It is said that it is planned to deploy a team of Cuban health workers.

According to a detailed UN report on the health system from 2017, most clinics in the country lacked electricity and water supplies; maternal mortality was among the highest in the world. Recently, the third wave of the COVID-19 pandemic (cf. BN of 09.08.21) weakened significantly.

India

Assam: Escalation of violence during forced evictions

On 23.09.21, security forces forcibly evicted hundreds of families from their land and destroyed their huts in a land clearing drive in Sipajhar in the state of Assam that is ruled by the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). The majority of those affected are Bengali Muslims who claim to have bought the land years ago and approached the local court to oppose the eviction. Nevertheless, the eviction went ahead amid protest and resistance from the local residents, without the court having previously considered the matter.

Later, a video that surfaced on social media caused a national stir. It shows a group of more than a dozen armed police officers shooting a resident during the eviction because he - scarcely clothed - tried to defend himself against the security forces with a wooden stick. Thereafter, protests were called in Assam, New Delhi, and other major cities across the country.

Iran

Deaths in Tehran Central Prison:

According to Iranian foreign media, two deaths in Tehran Central Prison raise questions. On 22.09.21, the Iran Human Rights organization confirmed the death of a male prisoner who was in solitary confinement at the time of his death. The reports say, in 2020 the man had occupied the cell adjacent to that of Navid Afkari, a wrestler later sentenced to death for the murder of a security guard, during his detention in Shiraz Adelabad Prison. Allegedly the prisoner witnessed Afkari's torture there when he was forced to confess his guilt. In a voice message posted on social media, the man disclosed that he had pointed out the alleged torture of the wrestler during interrogations. Subsequently, he was verbally threatened by the interrogator in charge. A short time later, he was transferred to Tehran Central Prison, where he has now died under dubious circumstances.

On 25.09.21, foreign media, citing the Kurdistan Human Rights Network, reported the death of a 23-year-old man. The man had been arrested in early September 2021 for criminal proceedings against him and taken to Tehran Central Prison. In a telephone conversation with his father on 21.09.21, he told him that he was severely beaten by prison staff and that he will be transferred to hospital. Relatives were denied a bedside visit. On 23.09.21 the prison administration informed the family of the prisoner's death.

After the second death within a week became known, spontaneous protest rallies took place outside the gates of the central prison. The protesters demanded accountability from the judicial authority and the prison administration. The central prison, known as Fashafuyeh, is located 5 km south of Tehran on the highway to the pilgrimage city of Qom.

Labour activist convicted after appeal

According to reports by human rights organisations on 20.09.21, a 67-year-old labour activist was sentenced to 74 lashes, five years imprisonment and a fine of two million Tuman (approx. EUR 71) by an appeals court in Tehran. The man had been briefly arrested on 07.03.21 along with other activists outside the Ministry of Labour in Tehran during nationwide protests by pensioners. On 03.04.21 he was arrested again at his home as a co-initiator of the protests and four days later was placed in solitary confinement (cf. BN of 14.06.21). The charges were assembly and conspiracy against the security of the country.

Prison conditions: 43 prisoners on hunger strike

According to foreign media reports, 43 inmates of Urumiyeh Central Prison (West Azerbaijan Province) have been on hunger strike since 22.09.21. They are protesting against the prison administration's refusal to transfer some fellow prisoners who have fallen ill, to external hospitals. Twelve detainees are said to be suffering from serious illnesses requiring specialist treatment.

Iraq

Combat operations against IS

On 23.09.21, air-strikes were flown on an IS base in the Hamrin Mountains in Salah ad-Din province. Four IS members were reportedly killed. According to the Iraqi military, the base was destroyed.

Arrest for abuse video

On 24.09.21, Prime Minister Kadhimi ordered the arrest of a man shown to abuse a child, presumably his son, in a video. The video had been posted on Iraqi social media a few days earlier. The video shows a boy about eight years old, being fixed to a wall with chains and beaten bloody, presumably by his father, while he keeps begging him to stop. The video triggered a wave of solidarity with the boy. In Iraq, a great majority of children experience violence, either in families or at school, both of which are often covered by social norms. The video sparked a public debate about child abuse.

Kosovo / Serbia

Tensions at the border

International media are currently reporting mounting tensions between the two countries because of the entry ban to Kosovo for vehicles with Serbian license plates, which has been in force since 20.09.21. Since then, drivers with Serbian license plates have been obliged to display temporary Kosovar license plates when entering Kosovo. Serbs living in northern Kosovo are blocking two main roads near the border in protest against the ban. The police reported that a vehicle registration office was set on fire in the town of Zubin Potok. In Zvečan, two hand grenades were thrown at the town's registration office but did not explode. The Kosovar government has deployed special law enforcement units to the region. The government in Belgrade considers this move a provocation and has placed the Serbian army on high alert.

Lebanon

Mode for new elections

On 24.09.21, the paper Al-Joumhouryya, citing sources in the electoral commission, reported that the main outlines for the conditions for the 2022 election were in place. According to the report, the election will be brought forward to 27.03.22, non-resident Lebanese will not be eligible to vote, votes cannot be cast in foreign representations, and there will not be six seats for expatriate Lebanese, as previously planned. Elections will continue to be held according to the 15 existing electoral districts and to religious proportional representation.

Economic crisis

The various political groups and institutions in the country are still trying to organize assistance at different levels. On 23.09.21, according to Hezbollah, the second ship from Iran began unloading its cargo in the Syrian port of Baniyas, which will subsequently be shipped to Lebanon via road tankers. On 25.09.21, the UN announced that an aid program would provide fuel to a number of hospitals and water supply facilities over the next few months.

Libya

Hundreds protesting against vote of no confidence

On 24.09.21, hundreds turned out in the Libyan capital to protest against the parliament's decision to pass a vote of no confidence in the incumbent unity government (GNU). On 21.09.21, 89 of the 113 members of the Tobruk-based parliament had carried a vote of no confidence against the GNU. Prime Minister Abdul Hamid Dbaiba rejected the parliament's decision and, referring to the parliamentary and presidential elections planned for December 2021, stated that he would not resign until power had been handed over to elected representatives.

General Haftar pauses military office until December 2021 election

On 22.09.21, General Khalifa Haftar announced he would not exercise his office of army chief of the Libyan Arab Armed Forces (LAAF) until the presidential and parliamentary elections on 24.12.21. With this move Haftar positions himself as a presidential candidate for the December elections. In early September 2021, Parliament Speaker Aguila Saleh ratified a controversial election law that requires state officials intending to run for office, to suspend their duties for at least three months before the actual election date.

Mexico

Femicide rate keeps rising in 2021

On 22.09.21, the Secretariat of Security and Citizen Protection (Secretaría de Seguridad y Protección Ciudadana) informed that the current femicide figures between January and August 2021 totalled 672 cases. Most of these homicides occurred in August 2021, with 106 acts. The rate grew by 8% compared to the same period last year, with an initial increase of 7.1% recorded between January and May 2021 (cf. BN of 05.07.21).

LGBTQI rights: same-sex marriage

After the central Mexican state of Queretaro had already legalised same-sex marriage on 22.09.21, the parliament of the state of Sonora also passed a corresponding amendment to the law on 23.09.21. This means that same-sex marriage is now permitted in 24 of 32 federal states (cf. BN of 30.08.21).

Morocco

Coalition negotiations concluded

The new Prime Minister Aziz Akhannouch announced the conclusion of coalition negotiations. The new government includes the National Assembly of Independents (RNI), the Authenticity and Modernity Party (PAM) and the Istiqlal Party (PI). These are the three parties that received most votes in the election held on 08.09.21.

Myanmar

Violence against (perceived) allies of the military, further clashes in Chin

Between 19. and 23.09.21 unidentified persons attacked several families whose members were said to include allies of the military or persons sympathetic to the military, in the regions of Sagaing and Tanintharyi. At least twelve people were killed, including five children. In retaliation, security forces reportedly burnt down several houses in the Taze (Sagaing) community. The local People's Defence Forces (PDF) denied any responsibility for the violence.

Chin State saw further clashes between the Myanmar military (Tatmadaw) and the PDF of the communities of Matupi and Mindat on 22. and 23.09.21. In response to the renewed escalation of the situation (cf. BN of 20.09.21), the military ordered the internet shut down in large parts of the state.

In view of the continuing and recently increasing violence, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, warned of a civil war that could engulf the entire country. The human rights situation had "deteriorated considerably" as a result of the coup, while at the same time the population was suffering from the consequences of the continuing collapse of the economy and the COVID-19 pandemic, she said. Since the military coup on 01.02.21, security forces have killed over 1,100 civilians. Over 8,000 people, including children, have been detained. 4,700 of them remain in detention to this date and at least 120 detainees have died.

Nicaragua

New HRW report on human rights abuses against political opposition/ Detention

In a new report (Acusaciones fabricadas contra críticos) published on 20.09.21, Human Rights Watch (HRW) speaks of fabricated accusations against critics and arbitrary arrests of opposition members. It also criticises their prosecution without evidence, considerable irregularities in the proceedings, lack of access to lawyers, as well as the inhumane prison conditions with long periods of isolation and insufficient food supplies.

On 20.09.21, the president of the NGO Instituto de Investigaciones y Gestión Social (INGES), Irving Larios Sánchez, was arrested for violating Law 1055. He is the 37th political prisoner since May 2021.

Increased costs of basic necessities, COVID-19 pandemic worsens

The cost of living has risen significantly in the first eight months of 2021, not only basic food items but also cooking gas and petrol become more expensive, similarly, the National Institute for Development Information (INIDE) recorded an increase in the cost of energy for electricity and heating.

Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic has seriously worsened since the beginning of September 2021. From 01.09. to 22.09.21, the independent monitoring agency Observatorio Ciudadano recorded 1066 deaths attributable to COVID-19, the second highest figure after June 2020, as well as the highest number of positive cases so far since the beginning of the pandemic, to wit 5,123. The figures published by the health ministry (Minsa) also reflect a clear increase, they amount to almost twice as many infections as during the, so far, most intensive wave of infection in 2020. However, these figures are well below those of the Observatorio Ciudadano and only one official death has been reported for the last 50 weeks. According to media reports, medical personnel lack sufficient protective equipment. Since 20.09.21, vaccination has been available for people aged 30 and over. The vaccine, which is only available in small quantities, keeps running out.

Nigeria

Dozens of schoolchildren liberated

According to recent media reports, 75 school children who had been kidnapped in the north-western state of Zamfara, regained their freedom in mid-September 2021 with the help of police and military personnel. The children had been abducted by unidentified armed persons from a secondary school in Kaya locality on 01.09.21 (cf. BN of 06.09.21). Following an increase in mass abductions in the vicinity of educational institutions since December 2020, numerous children were released recently (cf. BN of 30.08.21). After the abduction in Kaya, the Zamfara state government had ordered the temporary closure of all primary and secondary schools. According to the governor of Zamfara, Bello Matawalle, no more school children are currently being held by kidnappers in this state.

Media reported on 26.09.21 that ten more school children of Bethel Baptist High School in Kaduna State had been liberated (cf. BN of 30.08.21). According to the Chairman of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), eleven of the school children abducted on 05.07.21 (cf. BN of 12.07.21) still remain in captivity.

UNICEF fears disadvantages for 1 million school children

According to a statement published on 16.09.21 by the UN Children's Fund, 1 million children are expected to start school later than planned in 2021, due to the insecure situation in the north of the country, and that the length of the delay could not yet be estimated. According to UNICEF, since the beginning of 2021, there were 20 attacks on

schools and 1,436 schoolchildren were abducted for ransom. 16 children have been killed in connection with attacks on educational institutions and 200 are still considered missing, UNICEF said. UNICEF estimates that there are currently 37 million school children across Nigeria.

Attacks on security forces on the rise

Between 05. and 18.09.21, at least 26 soldiers, police officers and other security personnel have been killed by armed non-state actors in Nigeria. This is in addition to at least eleven civilian casualties, including traditional rulers and clerics. These figures are the findings of a review of reports by Nigerian media during this period, which spanned barely two weeks. According to reports, this represents a significant increase from the previous week, which saw six killings by non-state actors. According to observers, the major causes are terrorist aspirations, banditry, attacks by separatists and clashes against the backdrop of unresolved communal and inter-ethnic conflicts. An incident in Onitsha in the south-eastern state of Anambra, where three policemen were shot dead on 19.09.21 while conducting roadside security checks, made nationwide headlines. The media reported that local residents suspected members of the secessionist group Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) as potential assassins, but this has so far neither been confirmed nor disproved.

On 24.09.21, a military convoy was reportedly attacked between the towns of Marte and Dikwa in the north-western state of Borno. According to various media reports, seven to approximately 30 Nigerian soldiers were killed in the attack, attributed to the jihadist group Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP). Also on 24.09.21, a total of 17 security personnel were reportedly killed by armed assailants in an attack in Sabon Birni local government area in the north-western state of Sokoto. According to several sources, the so-called bandit leader Bello Turji was responsible for the attack.

Pakistan

Attack and police operation in Balochistan

On 25.09.21, at least four soldiers of the paramilitary Frontier Corps were killed after an IED exploded north-east of the Balochistan provincial capital of Quetta on the Afghan border. No one claimed responsibility for the crime. Separatist militants are active in the province and regularly attack security forces.

On 25.09.21, the police reported the arrest of three members of the banned Baloch Liberation Army (BLA) for their alleged involvement in the August 2021 suicide bombing of a convoy carrying Chinese engineers (cf. BN of 06.09.21).

Protest camp of landmine victims in South Waziristan

For more than two weeks, landmine victims have been holding a peaceful protest in the former tribal area of South Waziristan in the north-western province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. They are calling on the authorities to completely clear the area of landmines and provide financial assistance and jobs to those injured and compensation to the families of those killed. According to Pakistani authorities, work has already started to remove landmines in the tribal areas.

On 21.09.21, according to the civil rights organisation Pashtun Tahafuz Movement (PTM), an activist was injured during a police raid on the protest camp, the protesters responded by blocking a road. A local police spokesperson promised to investigate the incident.

Thousands of residents of South Waziristan have now returned home after anti-terrorist operations by the Pakistani military had forced them to leave in 2009.

Attack on polio vaccination team

On 19.09.21, a policeman accompanying a polio vaccination team was shot dead in a district south of Peshawar in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province (cf. BN of 14.06.21). The vaccination team remained unharmed. Nobody claimed responsibility for the crime. Fundamentalists consider vaccination campaigns a conspiracy of the West.

Palestinian Territories / Israel

President Abbas threatens to withdraw recognition of Israel

In his address to the UN General Assembly, President Mahmoud Abbas announced that he would reconsider the recognition of Israel if the Israeli government did not end its occupation of the territories in which the Palestinians plan to establish their future state, within a year. The mutual recognition of Israel and the Palestinian Authority was part of the Oslo Accords, which were supposed to launch a peace process in 1993 with the goal of a two-state solution.

West Bank: Five killed in wave of arrests

On 16.09.21, the Israeli military killed five Palestinians in an escalation of a series of raids to arrest Hamas members who, according to the Israeli military, had been under surveillance for weeks. The arrests were made in response to direct threats, the military said. In the five simultaneous raids, two people died in Jenin (in the north of the West Bank) and three people died in the village of Biddu (north of Jerusalem), according to the Palestinian Health Ministry. Numerous other people were arrested. Hamas confirmed that four of those killed were members in the group.

Israel: High crime and death rates in Arab communities

According to Abraham Initiatives, a Jewish-Arab organization that advocates equal rights for Jewish and Arab citizens of Israel, 88 Palestinians with Israeli citizenship have been killed as of 21.09.21. Majority Arab communities in Israel are facing rising crime rates, the organization said, attributing it also to the Israeli authorities' neglect of these communities (cf. BN of 19.04.21 and 16.08.21).

In August 2021 Prime Minister Bennett's government launched a campaign developing a nationwide plan to tackle crime in Arab communities and creating a new police department to implement it. Nevertheless, 17 more Palestinians have died since the campaign was initiated.

Russian Federation

After parliamentary election: Two-thirds majority for Kremlin party and protests over election manipulations

According to the official final results, the ruling United Russia party won 324 of the 450 available mandates in the State Duma election from 17.09 to 19.09.21 (cf. BN of 20.09.21) and will thus continue to hold the two-thirds majority required for constitutional amendments, despite losing 19 seats. The other parties represented in the new parliament will be the Communist Party CPRF (57 seats), the Just Russia Party (27), the right-wing populist Liberal Democratic Party (21), and the newly formed New People's Party (13), all of which are considered fundamentally close to the Kremlin. While President Putin and the Central Election Commission spoke of a "free and fair" vote, the independent electoral rights organization Golos called the election "one of the dirtiest" in the country's history, citing reports of massive irregularities (cf. BN of 20.09.21).

According to media reports, around 300 demonstrators gathered in the centre of Moscow on 20.09.21 responding to a call by the CPRF. They accused the Central Election Commission of having falsified the Moscow election results by means of the newly introduced online voting procedure. According to the Russian human rights organization OWD-Info, 90 people were arrested in the following days. The police confirmed investigations into violations of the right of assembly (Article 20.2 of the Code of Administrative Offences). Press reports said that on 25.09.21 another protest was held in Moscow with around 1,000 participants, in the run-up to which 60 activists of the CPRF were allegedly briefly detained by the police.

Somalia

Action before the ICC against government authorities

A group of international lawyers has filed a case with the International Criminal Court (ICC) against government authorities for crimes against humanity. Several cases have been brought before the court, including the controversial disappearance of National Intelligence and Security Agency (NISA) employee Ikran Tahlil Farah (cf. BN of 06.09.21, 13.09.21 and 20.09.21). Further cases include the death of protesters in Baidoa in December 2018 and the

whereabouts of young soldiers who were secretly brought to Eritrea and deployed in the war in Ethiopia's Tigray region, according to UN reports (cf. BN of 14.06.21).

Attack near the presidential palace

On 24.08.21, a car bomb explosion at a checkpoint near the presidential palace killed eight people and injured seven others, according to official reports. The fatalities include Hibaq Abukar, the prime minister's adviser on women's and human rights issues. Al-Shabaab claimed responsibility for the attack.

South Sudan

UN warns of flood impact, as well as widespread violence and corruption

On 21.09.21, the UN reported continued extreme rainfall and associated flooding. So far, about 426,000 people, including 185,000 children, have been affected and had to leave their homes. In some cases relief workers can reach the people only by boat. In some regions, such as Warrap State, the situation is further aggravated by ongoing ethnic conflicts. One year after the record floods, which affected more than 700,000 people, about 100,000 are still homeless and have not yet been able to return to their homes or home regions. In addition to people's homes, schools and other buildings, fields and livestock are also being destroyed or perish. Faced with this situation, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) warns of a shortage of supplies, as so far only 54% of the required budget for South Sudan is available. Also the World Food Programme (WFP) is struggling with declining allocations and already had to cut down on support services (cf. BN of 20.09.21).

Another report to the UN Human Rights Council, dated 23.09.21, described the extensive violence and corruption in the country as a "plague" and a threat to efforts to achieve lasting peace and sustainable development. According to the report, the UNMISS mission says 585 people have been killed, 305 wounded and thousands displaced in the last three months. The report also highlights an increase in extralegal killings, forced displacement, torture, rape and sexual violence linked to the prevailing conflict. Increasing violence against humanitarian workers also hampers their work and results in their withdrawal. Meanwhile, 80% of the population is believed to be at risk of extreme poverty, with 7.2 million people directly affected by food insecurity. The Government of South Sudan is also accused of embezzling more than USD 73 million (approximately EUR 62 million) over the past two years.

Sri Lanka

Tamil MP arrested for commemorating LTTE member

On 23.09.21, police arrested Tamil MP Selvarajah Kajendran and two others during a memorial service for Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) member Thileepan, who died in Jaffna on 26.09.87 following a hunger strike. The police justified the arrests citing violations of the COVID-19 related ban on assembly. Despite repeated calls by the UN Human Rights Council to allow Tamils to mourn their war dead, the Sri Lankan government continues to ban the commemoration of LTTE members. Both Selvarajah Kajendran and the two other persons arrested with him were released on bail the same day.

Sudan

Coup attempt failed

Media reported that members of the military had attempted a coup on 21.09.21. According to the report, citing anonymous sources from the military and the interim government, some 21 officers and several soldiers were arrested after attempting to take control of buildings of the state television station and the army headquarters. Reportedly, also civilians involved in the coup were arrested and a search is on for others involved. Those arrested are said to be supporters of former President Al-Bashir. The chairman of the Sovereignty Council, Abdel Fattah Al-Burhan, reiterated the army's commitment to a civilian and democratic state when addressing representatives of the military on 22.09.21. He stressed that the military had no intention of taking power.

Syria

Idlib: US drone strike kills suspected jihadist

Members of the Syrian Civil Defense, also known as the White Helmets, recovered the body of an unidentified man from a wrecked car on the road between the governorate capital of Idlib and the town of Binnish further east on 20.09.21. Although anti-IS coalition spokesman Wayne Marotto initially said it was not a coalition operation, the US Central Command later commented on the incident and confirmed that there had been a targeted killing of a senior al-Qaeda member near Idlib. There were no indications of further deaths. The pro-opposition Syrian Human Rights Observatory reported that the dead man was a member of a radical group in the region with ties to al-Qaeda.

Russian air raid casualties

According to the pro-opposition Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, at least eleven Syrian fighters of the pro-Turkish Hamsa division died in air strikes flown by Russia in the northern Syrian region of Afrin on 25.09.21, which also injured 13 people. The attack had targeted the rebel group's headquarters about 30 km north west of Aleppo, the organisation said.

Tunisia

Thousands protest against the president's latest decisions

On 26.09.21, several thousand people protested in the centre of the capital against the latest decisions of President Kais Saied demanding his resignation. On 22.09.21 Saied had announced that he would henceforth rule by decree, which is a further expansion of his presidential powers, after he had removed the prime minister and suspended parliament at the end of July 2021.

Several hundred supporters of the president rallied in the centre of Tunis as well.

COVID-19 pandemic: night curfew lifted

Following a decline in COVID-19 infection figures in recent weeks, President Kais Saied announced the end of the night-time curfew for 25.09.21 for the whole of Tunisia. Since the start of the COVID-19 vaccination campaign in mid-March 2021, more than 3.3 million Tunisians have been fully immunised.

Turkey

Constitutional Court rules on torture

On 21.09.21, the Constitutional Court ruled that the rights of a teacher who had been detained and tortured by police after the 2016 coup attempt had been violated. In its ruling, the Constitutional Court stated that the prohibition of ill-treatment could not be lifted even in the case of a situation that threatened the existence of the nation. Ill-treatment remained prohibited even in the most difficult situations, such as the fight against terrorism and organized crime.

Ruling of the Constitutional Court: Change of name of a transwoman

On 22.09.21 the Constitutional Court granted the request for a name change of a transwoman which had been rejected by a first instance court on the grounds that she had not undergone gender reassignment surgery and that society might have "misconceptions" if she had a feminine first name. The Constitutional Court ruled that it was part of the State's obligations to allow people to change their names as long as it did not disrupt public order. In addition, the Constitutional Court ruled that the request for a name change was not related to the conditions for transsexuality set out in Article 40 of the Turkish Civil Code.

Arrest of suspected DHKP-C members

On 22.09.21, Turkish security forces arrested eight people in simultaneous raids in Istanbul who are accused of maintaining links to the extreme left-wing group Revolutionary People's Liberation Party-Front (Devrimci Halk Kurtuluş Partisi-Cephesi, DHKP-C). The public prosecutor's office in Istanbul issued arrest warrants for a total of 16 people who allegedly engaged in propaganda for the organization.

Arrests of suspected Gülen members

On 24.09.21, Turkish security forces arrested 35 people in nationwide operations against the Gülen movement after arrest warrants for 51 people had been issued by the Prosecutor General's Office in Ankara. The remaining suspects are being sought. They are accused of being part of a secret network of the Gülen movement within the Turkish armed forces. The suspects were identified by their use of pay phones in public places. The suspects are former and active soldiers as well as civilians.

Ukraine

Number of civilian victims in the Ukraine conflict increased

According to the latest human rights report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) dated 23.09.21, the number of civilian casualties in the eastern Ukraine conflict zone increased by 51% between 01.02.21 and 31.07.21 against the previous six months. OHCHR documented a total of 15 civilians killed as well as 47 civilians injured during the current assessment period and expressed concern about continued arbitrary arrests and incidents of ill-treatment in detention facilities of the parties to the conflict. The number of ceasefire violations in the conflict area have also increased significantly compared to the previous reporting period, the report said (cf. BN of 15.03.21). Particularly in the spring of 2021, the security situation had temporarily deteriorated significantly when ceasefire violations surged (cf. BN of 12.04.21). Vulnerable persons, in particular the homeless, persons with disabilities and women from social minority groups, continued to be affected by social marginalization and discrimination throughout the country, according to OHCHR.

Venezuela

Political prisoners: reform of the pre-trial detention period

On 22.09.21, the NGO Foro Penal called on the judiciary to implement the reform of Article 230 of the Code of Criminal Procedure (COPP), approved on 16.09.21. The amendment provides for the obligation to release prisoners who have been in pre-trial detention for more than three years, so they can await the end of the proceedings while in freedom. This applies to a total of 67 political prisoners, whose immediate release was demanded by the NGO. In some cases, these individuals have been in prison for up to seven years without trial or conviction. A few hours after the NGO's public demand, Daniel Parra, who had been arrested in 2017 in the course of anti-government protests, was the first prisoner to be released within the scope of this reform.

Yemen

Fighting in Marib and Shabwa

Since 17.09.21, at least 190 soldiers have been killed in fighting in the governorates of Marib and Shabwa, around 130 of them were Houthi fighters. In recent days, the Houthi rebels have once again intensified their advance on the city of Marib, increasingly attacking also from the neighbouring governorate of Shabwa, where they had captured several districts only recently. Marib is the last major city controlled by the government in the northern part of the country and is rich in oil and gas.

COVAX initiative: Third shipment reaches Yemen

On 23.09.21, 356,000 doses of a COVID-19 vaccine have been delivered to Yemen and will be used there for second vaccinations. To date, less than 1% of all Yemenis have been fully vaccinated against COVID-19, and at the same time the country is experiencing a third wave of infections. In the areas controlled by the Houthis, virtually no COVID vaccinations are administered.

USD 600 million in emergency aid for Yemen

At a donor conference on 23.09.21, a further USD 600 million in aid were pledged for Yemen, after USD 1.7 billion in aid pledges had already been collected in March. However, according to UN Secretary-General Guterres, a total of USD 3.85 billion is needed, leaving a funding gap of over USD 1 billion. At the donor conference the World Food

Programme had reported that food aid would have to be cut in October 2021, unless new funds were provided. 16 million people in Yemen would then be threatened by hunger.

Saudi Arabia thwarts Houthi attacks

Saudi Arabia repelled one drone/missile attack per day by Houthi rebels on Saudi territory between 21.09.21 and 26.09.21. The attacks were directed against the Saudi towns of Khamis Mushait, Abha, Najran, and Jazan; no personal or property damage was reported. On 20.09.21 and 23.09.21, the anti-Houthi coalition also destroyed two booby-trapped Houthi boats each north of Hodeida. According to Saudi Arabia, they thereby warded off imminent attacks by the Houthi rebels.

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