



Briefing Notes

Group 62 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

13 December 2021

Afghanistan

Government affairs

On 03.12.21 the Taliban issued a decree on women's rights which is limited solely to the woman's role in marriage and makes no mention of any other rights, such as the right to education or work. The decree apparently bans the previously common practice of forced marriage (e.g. of widows or as a means of resolving conflicts) and also secures the right of inheritance for widows. On 07.12.21 Deborah Lyons, UN special representative for Afghanistan, met deputy prime minister Maulawi Abdul Salam Hanafi. Lyons pledged humanitarian aid and salaries for teachers and health workers, while Hanafi guaranteed the safety of people working for relief organisations. On 11.12.21, Taliban spokesman Mujahid declared the political system in Pakistan to be non-Islamic and claimed that the people were ruled by a system imposed from outside the country. Two days earlier, the Pakistani Taliban ended its ceasefire with the Pakistani army.

Violence against civilians

Two civilians were killed and five injured in three bomb explosions in the Dasht-e Barchi Hazara district in the west of Kabul on 10.12.21. The Islamic State in Khorasan Province (ISKP) has claimed responsibility for the attacks.

Women's rights

According to reports on 08.12.21, many women are now demonstrating for their rights in their homes and disseminating their protests online, as there have recently been repeated incidents in which the Taliban have acted with force against public protests and arrested protesting women. Amnesty International reported on 06.12.21 that there are no longer any shelters in Afghanistan for women who are victims of violence in marriage. Women seeking shelter are reportedly sent back to their families or end up on the street. Prior to the Taliban coming to power, such women had received support from the ministry of women's affairs, which the Taliban have since dissolved. The Taliban have reportedly also released many convicted perpetrators of violent crimes (including domestic abuse) from prison. On 09.12.21 the UN asserted that, contrary to the Taliban's claims, women's rights are restricted in all areas of public life (incl. access to work, the right to education, medical care).

Humanitarian situation / health system

The health authority of Sar-e pul province stated on 07.12.21 that the number of malnourished children and breast-feeding mothers had risen sharply in the past three months. On the same day, the value of the national currency, the afghani, reportedly plummeted still further against the US dollar, while food prices rose. UNICEF stated on 08.12.21 that two billion US dollars were necessary in order to avert the impending collapse of the health and education systems and other vital social services for children and their families. China has handed over 800,000 COVID vaccine doses to the Taliban health ministry and announced a further 200,000 doses. In a report published on 09.12.21, the International Crisis Group (ICG) warned that more civilians would die of hunger in the current

humanitarian disaster than in the last 20 years of the war. On the same day, the UNHCR expressed its fear that this could lead to a mass exodus to neighbouring countries. It stated that international donors and the Taliban were equally responsible for the present crisis and called on them to find a solution quickly. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) reported on 11.12.21 that it was paying the salaries of approx. 6,000 employees at 15 health centres in the country and supplying medicines to 23 public hospitals. Humanitarian relief supplies from India reportedly arrived in Kabul by air on the same day. Also on 11.12.21, the USA issued a decree enabling Afghans living abroad to transfer money to their families in Afghanistan. On 12.12.21 approx. US\$ 19 million in cash from the World Bank arrived at the central bank in Kabul to prop up the national currency.

Bangladesh

20 men sentenced to death for murder

According to reports in the press, on 08.12.21 a court in Dhaka sentenced 20 men to death and five others to life imprisonment for the murder of a fellow student in 2019. Three of the men sentenced to death were convicted in absentia. On 07.10.19 the student Abrar Fahad was beaten to death by 25 fellow students who were members of the Chhatra League, a student organisation with close links to the governing Awami League (AL) party, after he had published a post critical of the government on Facebook. The murder caused a nationwide stir and led to protests by students.

Benin

Prison terms for opposition figures

On 11.12.21 the Court to Counter Economic Crimes and Terrorism (CRIET) in Porto-Novo sentenced opposition politician Reckya Madougou to 20 years' imprisonment for funding terrorism and fined her 50 million CFA francs (approx. EUR 76,400 as per 13.12.21). Three co-defendants, Bio Dramane Tidjani, Sacca Zimé Georges and Mama Touré Ibrahim, received the same punishment. Mohamed Gbassiré Mora was sentenced to five years in prison and fined 2 million CFA francs (approx. EUR 3,000 as per 13.12.21). A further person, Mama Bio Tidjani, was acquitted. Madougou is accused of having funded the murders of several people from the sphere of politics with the aim of preventing the presidential election of 11.04.21 and destabilising the country. Madougou intended to run in the election against the incumbent, Patrice Talon, but was disqualified. She was arrested on 03.03.21 (cf. BN of 08.03.21).

On 07.12.21 the CRIET sentenced opposition politician Joël Aïvo to ten years' imprisonment and fined him 45 million CFA francs (approx. EUR 68,800 as per 13.12.21) for money laundering and endangering national security. The two co-defendants Boni Sarè Issiakou and Ibrahim Bachabi Moudjaïdou also received ten-year prison terms and were each fined 5.7 million CFA francs (approx. EUR 8,700 as per 13.12.21). A further co-defendant, Alain Gnonlonfoun, was acquitted. Aïvo was arrested on 15.04.21 (cf. BN of 19.04.21). He intended to run in the presidential election of April 2021 but was disqualified.

Critics see both cases as politically motivated.

Burkina Faso

Government dissolved, new prime minister

Christophe Joseph Marie Dabiré resigned as the head of the government on 08.12.21. President Roch Marc Christian Kaboré duly dissolved the entire government in accordance with Burkinan law. The previous government will nevertheless remain in office in a caretaker role until a new government is formed. No grounds were stated for the resignation. It is also unclear whether president Kaboré prompted the head of government to take this step. He had recently stated his intention to form a new government. The country's president and the government are subject to growing criticism in the face of continuing extremist violence.

President Kaboré appointed Lassina Zerbo as the new prime minister on 10.12.21. From 2013 until 2021, Zerbo was executive secretary of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization (CTBTO).

Fighting claims lives

Twelve members of the self-defence militia Volunteers for the Defense of the Homeland (VDP) died in an attack by unknown assailants when they were travelling between Ouahigouya and Titao (Nord region) on 09.12.21. Different sources report that 13 members of the VDP died and one other person may have been killed.

In fighting between the military and members of the VDP on one side and unspecified combatants on the other on the road between Tanwalbou and Piega (Est region) on 09.12.21, two of the unspecified combatants were killed.

Burkina Faso / Niger

Joint military operation against extremists in border region

Armed forces from Burkina Faso and Niger carried out a joint operation against extremists in the two countries' border region between 25.11. and 09.12.21. According to information released by the military on 09.12.21, around 100 extremists were killed or rendered unfit for action and some 20 were detained in the course of operation "TAANLI 2". Four members of the Burkinan armed forces were reportedly also killed. According to the military, two bases of the extremists were destroyed and various items were seized, including weapons and ammunition, several hundred motorcycles and vehicles and a large quantity of pharmaceutical products. The first such military operation took place in June 2021.

Various armed groups are active in the border region between Burkina Faso, Niger and Mali, in particular Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) and Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM), which is linked to Al Qaeda. There has recently been a growing number of armed attacks on armed forces and civilians in both Burkina Faso and Niger (cf. BN of 29.11.21 and 06.12.21).

Cameroon

Renewed conflicts between cattle herders and fishers in the Far North Region

It has been reported in the media that at least 22 people have been killed and many others injured in violent clashes between Arab Choa herdsmen and fishers and farmers belonging to the Mousgoum ethnic group in the north of Cameroon. The clashes began on 05.12.21 in the village of Ouloumsa (Far North region) near the border with Chad and quickly spread to neighbouring villages. The conflict centres on access to and control over the scarce water resources in the area. Thousands of people reportedly fled over the border into neighbouring Chad. The UN has put the number of people involved at over 30,000. The latest hostilities follow on from violent clashes between cattle herders and fishers which claimed 32 lives in the region in August 2021 (cf. BN of 23.08.21).

School closures in the anglophone regions

According to a UN analysis, over 700,000 pupils are not attending school as a result of the continuing violence in the two anglophone regions of North-West and South-West. Around two thirds of all schools in the two anglophone regions are closed. Schools have repeatedly been targeted in attacks by armed separatists in the past (cf. BN of 29.11.21 and 09.11.20).

Chile

LGBTIQ rights: Law passed on marriage for all

A bill allowing marriage for all was agreed by the Congress on 07.12.21 and entered into force on 09.12.21 following ratification by the country's president. Civil partnerships between persons of the same sex became possible back in 2015, but such partnerships had been unable to adopt children to date. Chile is the ninth country in the Americas to introduce such a law, following in the wake of Colombia, Brazil, Argentina and others.

China

Freedom of the press

According to a new report by Reporters Without Borders (RSF), more media representatives are imprisoned in China than anywhere else in the world, with a total of at least 127 journalists in custody. Uighurs account for 71 of this total. RSF notes that restrictions on freedom of the press have been tightened still further since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. Two of at least ten people who were arrested in 2020 in connection with reporting on the situation in the sealed off city of Wuhan are currently still in custody. China continues to rank 177th out of 180 countries in the World Press Freedom Index for 2021.

Hong Kong: Guilty verdicts for commemoration of Tiananmen Square massacre

On 09.12.21 the media entrepreneur Jimmy Lai, the journalist and opposition politician Gwyneth Ho and Chow Hang-tung, lawyer and vice chairman of the pro-democracy organisation Hong Kong Alliance, which has since been dissolved, were found guilty by a court in Hong Kong of calling for the Tiananmen Square massacre of 1989 to be commemorated. All three defendants took part in a banned vigil in June 2020 and were already in custody on other charges when the guilty verdict was announced.

Colombia

Two FARC dissidents belonging to the Segunda Marquetalia killed

According to information from the Colombian defence minister, Diego Molano, the former FARC commander and high-ranking members of the FARC dissident groups La Segunda Marquetalia Darío Velásquez (El Paisa) and Henry Castellanos Garzón (Romaña) were killed in two separate incidents in Venezuela on 05.12.21. Reports in the media claim that the incidents involved armed clashes over territorial control and drug trafficking issues with Gentil Duarte's rival FARC dissident group, which is also active in the Venezuelan border region.

DR Congo

MONUSCO: Human rights, humanitarian situation, internally displaced people

The human rights situation in the country has worsened, according to Bintou Keita, UN Special Representative and Head of the United Nations Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO). Keita states that this worsening of the situation is attributable in particular to the violence in the provinces of North Kivu and Ituri, which are subject to substantial levels of militia violence. She identifies the armed groups operating in these provinces and the national security forces as bearing the primary responsibility. Media reports citing information from the American monitoring group Kivu Security Tracker state that in the eastern provinces which are exposed to militia violence armed groups have killed at least 1,546 civilians since May 2021 alone.

The humanitarian situation for the population in the eastern parts of the country has further deteriorated as a result of the worsening security situation, various epidemics and restricted access to basic services and provisions. DR Congo has the highest number of internally displaced people in Africa, at almost six million, approx. 51 % of whom are women. Reports by governments and NGOs repeatedly mention the extremely harsh conditions facing internally displaced people in their places of refuge.

Prison conditions and state of the judicial system remain problematic

A monitoring report by various NGOs under the aegis of the Fondation Bill Clinton Pour La Paix (FBCP) indicates that prison conditions remain extremely problematic throughout the country. A degree of progress is to be observed solely in the area of medical care. The period under review, from January to April 2021, witnessed a lower death toll in prisons than in the comparable periods of 2020 and 2019. All of the country's prisons are reported to be overcrowded. Makala central prison in Kinshasa, for example, currently holds 8,300 inmates, although it is actually designed to accommodate a maximum of around 1,500 people. According to the report, the overwhelming majority of inmates at the prison are on remand for long periods awaiting trial or are victims of unlawful imprisonment. Hygiene and sanitary conditions are identified as a further problem, with some prisons in a state of dilapidation. The state of the prison infrastructure is described as alarming and the prison staff are poorly trained and in some

instances face irregular pay. The judicial system is reported to be overstretched. There are substantial backlogs of cases and proceedings are sometimes disproportionately drawn-out. In practice, the judiciary remains subject to interference.

South Kivu: Women accused of witchcraft

According to the NGO l'Association des femmes des médias (AFEM), 30 women suspected of witchcraft have been burned alive in South Kivu province since the beginning of 2021 alone. Around 335 cases of women being accused of witchcraft have been documented in South Kivu in the period under review from January to November 2021, particularly in the territory of Kalehe and Uvira. There is a widespread belief in witchcraft throughout the country and across all segments of the population. Women and children who are suspected of witchcraft are subject to various human rights violations and forms of discrimination (cf. BN of 27.09.21).

Ethiopia

HRW: Execution of civilians by Tigrayan forces in Amhara

According to a report published by Human Rights Watch (HRW) on 09.12.21 which is based on interviews with eye witnesses, relatives and medical staff, the Tigray Defense Forces (TDF) executed dozens of civilians between 31.08. and 09.09.21 in two towns under their control in the regional state of Amhara. In the course of an attack on the village of Chenna in which heavy fighting ensued with Ethiopian federal troops and allied Amhara militias they reportedly executed 26 civilians before retreating. 23 people are believed to have been executed in the town of Kabo on 09.09.21. The authorities in Amhara blamed the TDF for a massacre on the local civilian population back at the beginning of September 2021 (cf. BN of 13.09.21), stating that the killings were carried out in retaliation for attacks by farmers on the advancing Tigrayan armed forces. HRW called on the UN Human Rights Council to launch an international investigation into the atrocities committed by the warring parties in the Tigray conflict.

Relief supplies suspended in wake of looting

Following the looting of large quantities of vital relief supplies from warehouses and the appropriation by members of the military of three trucks which were used for humanitarian supplies in Amhara, the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) announced on 08.12.21 that it was forced to discontinue the distribution of relief supplies in the towns of Kombolcha and Dessie in the regional state of Amhara. Elements of the TDF and members of the local population were reportedly responsible for the looting. Deliveries of relief supplies are furthermore being hampered in the northern region of Ethiopia by the continuing fighting and road blocks. This has prompted the UN to warn of growing nutrition insecurity for the people in the north. An estimated 9.4 million people are reliant on food aid in the Tigray, Amhara and Afar regions.

TPLF retakes the town of Lalibela

According to reports in the media, the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) has recaptured control of the Amharic town of Lalibela, which borders on Tigray. The TPLF originally took over control of the town in August 2021, but was driven back by government troops in November 2021. The reports have been confirmed by the TPLF. Eye witnesses report that there has been no use of violence to date.

Gambia

Tense situation following presidential elections, unrest, violence

In the wake of the presidential elections of 04.12.21, which were won by the incumbent, Adama Barrow, and which various national and international monitors described as having been largely free, transparent, democratic and untarnished by any major irregularities, on 06.12.21 the riot police (PIU) used force to break up a demonstration by hundreds of supporters of presidential candidate Ousainou Darboe from the opposition party United Democratic Party (UDP), who was defeated in the election and rejects the election result (vgl. BN v. 06.12.21). The police deployed tear gas and used force against the demonstrators, who were protesting against the election result near to the home of their party's leader in Serrekunda. Several people were injured by tear gas, including two journalists. According to a report in the press, the police's tough action followed a physical clash, about which no further details

are provided, between the supporters of the UDP and the president's National People's Party (NPP). There are also reports of further clashes between the police and UDP supporters in other parts of the region and corresponding arrests.

The police authority has announced that it will consider initiating disciplinary proceedings for behaviour glorifying violence against two police officers who are to be seen in a posted video celebrating the use of tear gas against UDP supporters.

The Gambia Press Union (GPU) which, along with other bodies and organisations, including the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), condemned the tough action by the police, has reported that a number of UDP supporters assaulted freelance photo journalist Lamin Dumbuya, accusing her of being a sympathiser with the president's NPP party. The GPU continually criticises the violent attacks by supporters of political parties on members of the media, which continue in a climate of impunity following the change at the head of state (cf. BN 27.09.21).

Public calls by UDP supporter Lamin Darboe, who has since been arrested, for violence, genocide along Rwandan lines and the use of Molotov cocktails in Gambia have been condemned across party lines, including by the UDP.

Haiti

Further hostages released

On 06.12.21 the US State Department and NGO Christian Aid Ministries announced that three further people who were taken hostage in October 2021 had been released, leaving twelve hostages in captivity (cf. BN of 18.10.21 and 29.11.21).

Investigation into reasons for killing of former president Moïse

According to an investigative report published by the New York Times on 12.12.21, former president Moïse was killed because he had drawn up a list of the names of people from the spheres of politics and business who are involved in the country's drug trade and planned to hand the list over to the US authorities (cf. BN of 12.07.21).

Iran

Supreme court questions criminal nature of Christian missionary work and house church activities

Christian human rights organisations report that a ruling announced by the supreme court in Tehran on 24.11.21 questions the criminal nature of practising the Christian religion, for example in the form of house churches. In an appeal following court proceedings against nine men who had converted to Protestantism, the presiding judge at the 28th branch of the supreme court arrived at the verdict that pursuing Christian missionary work and founding house churches do not constitute criminal offences pursuant to Art. 498 and 499 of the Iranian criminal code (IPC/Book 5 of 1996) and thus do not represent actions against national security within or outside of Iran.

The appeal followed the conviction of the nine defendants in the town of Rasht in northern Iran (Gilan province), who were arrested at their homes due to their links to house churches at the beginning of 2019. Human rights organisations report that the accused were initially released on bail of up to 150 million toman (approx. EUR 9,900 as per 2019). Following an increase in the required bail, four of the men were unable to raise the necessary sum, however, and were taken into custody. The subsequent trial of the nine men began on 24.07.19 and ended with a five-year prison sentence for each of the accused.

In accordance with Art. 478 of the code of criminal procedure, the ruling which has now been pronounced results in suspension of the original verdict passed by the 28th branch of the revolutionary court. At the same time, it clears the way for a new trial, the outcome of which remains uncertain. The appeal court ruling could become a highly explosive political issue and has the potential to mark a turning point in the history of Iranian case law.

Violent clashes at teachers' protests

Protests by teachers have been reported again from over 60 Iranian towns and cities since 11.12.21. Citing the coordinating council of teachers' and creative artists' unions, on 13.12.21 Iranian foreign media reported on clashes outside the parliamentary building in Tehran. Security forces attacked the teachers gathered outside parliament. Demonstrations have been reported from Yazd, Kerman, Qom, Shiraz, Marivan and 60 other towns and cities. The

protests are being accompanied by a general strike at large numbers of schools. Numerous classes which are being held online due to the coronavirus pandemic have also been suspended. On 11.12.21 the security forces arrested a high-ranking representative of the teachers' association. Police officers allegedly beat the man in the course of his arrest. Teachers have long been calling for their salaries to be brought into line with the currently paid pensions under the existing system of pay levels (cf. BN of 04.10.21). They claim that the 12.5 billion tomans (approx. EUR 40,000 as per 13.12.21) which the government has budgeted for this purpose is inadequate.

Iraq

Operations against IS

A major joint operation by various central Iraqi and Kurdish security services has been underway in Diyala since 08.12.21 in response to increasing attacks in territories which are the subject of disputes between the KRG and the central government. This joint offensive is a reaction to the increased attacks by IS in recent weeks, which have cost the lives of more than 22 members of the Kurdish security forces since the end of November 2021. In addition, an attack on Iraqi soldiers took place in Kirkuk on 07.12.21, killing two Iraqis.

Bomb attack in Basra

An attack occurred in Basra city centre on 07.12.21. Four people died and four were injured. No-one has claimed responsibility to date.

Air strikes by Turkey

On 07.12.21 the Turkish air force carried out an air strike on a militia commander in the Sinjar region. Martwan Badal Haji, the commander of a Yazidi militia in the region, was killed. Turkey regards the militia as belonging to the PKK. Sinjar is a town which is disputed between the government in Baghdad and Erbil; various armed groups, from the Iraqi military and police forces through Popular Mobilisation Units, Peshmerga and PKK to diverse ethnic militias, are active in the region, largely observing a fragile truce.

Lebanon

Economic situation

The Lebanese pound continued its steep fall after the Lebanese central bank announced on 09.12.21 that holdings in dollars at Lebanese banks can now be withdrawn at an exchange rate of 1:8,000. Dollar holdings had been frozen for the most part since 2019 and were subsequently withdrawable in small quantities only and at a rate of 1:3,900. This meant a drop in purchasing power of up to 80 % and a substantial erosion of savings, which were commonly held in foreign currencies, rather than Lebanese pounds. In this way, the banks reduce their liabilities in foreign currencies with local currency each time a withdrawal is made. The exchange rates on the black market fell accordingly on 10.12.21, with one US dollar fetching around 26,000 pounds. This means that under the new conditions bank holdings in dollars can be withdrawn at the cost of a loss of around 70 % in purchasing power. The inflated exchange rate for withdrawals has a disproportionately severe impact on the lower and middle classes in Lebanon, as these are forced to use far larger shares of their income and assets to cover basic needs.

Explosion in Burj el-Shemali and tensions between Fatah and Hamas

An explosion occurred at the Burj el-Shemali Palestinian camp near Tyre on 10.12.21. Hamas has attributed the explosion to a short-circuit in a store for oxygen cylinders used in the treatment of COVID-19 patients. Various observers consider an explosion in an ammunition dump to be more probable. It is unclear how many people were killed and injured. On 12.12.21 a shoot-out occurred between members of Hamas and Fatah at a funeral of one of the victims. At least three Hamas members were killed.

Libya

High Council of State urges postponement of presidential elections

The High Council of State in Tripoli has spoken out in favour of deferring the presidential elections, which are planned for 24.12.21, until February 2022, citing the lack of an adequate framework in terms of constitutional and electoral law. The High Council of State is an advisory body to the government, but is not recognised by all political entities, such as the House of Representatives (HoR) which is based in Tobruk in eastern Libya.

The national electoral commission has since announced that it is not yet possible to publish a final list of presidential candidates for the election on 24.12.21 due to unresolved legal issues.

Mali

Seven UN soldiers killed in attack

The UN has reported that seven Togolese UN soldiers belonging to the UN's MINUSMA mission were killed and three injured when a convoy travelling between Douentza and Sévaré was hit by an explosive device. No-one has claimed responsibility for the attack to date.

Mexico

55 migrants killed in truck accident

55 migrants, the majority of whom originated from Guatemala, were killed and more than 100 were injured in an accident involving a truck in Chiapas State on 09.12.21. The driver of the overloaded truck was driving at high speed. The Mexican and Guatemalan authorities announced an investigation into the accident and stated that they intended to take tougher action against people smugglers and human traffickers (so-called coyotes). The migration authorities have apprehended migrants in precarious situations, such as in unventilated trucks or unsafe houses without food and water, on numerous occasions in recent months.

Mozambique

Renewed attacks by Islamist groups in Cabo Delgado

Five months after international forces arrived in the north of Mozambique to combat Islamist insurgents, new attacks extending up to the Tanzanian border occurred at the beginning of December 2021. A number of civilians were reportedly killed by Islamist attackers, houses were set on fire, health establishments were attacked and shops were looted.

Myanmar

Junta halves sentence for Aung San Suu Kyi

Only hours after the announcement of the first verdict against the ousted de facto head of the government, Aung San Suu Kyi (cf. BN of 06.12.21), junta chief Min Aung Hlaing stated that he was reducing Suu Kyi's custodial sentence by two years and would enable her to remain under house arrest. Suu Kyi nevertheless faces the prospect of being sentenced to decades in prison in further legal proceedings which the junta is pursuing against her.

Eleven civilians burned alive

According to reports deemed reliable by the UN, junta soldiers attacked the village of Done Taw (Sagaing region) on 07.12.21 and burned six adults and five minors alive. The victims were reportedly unarmed. According to Human Rights Watch, they were merely in the wrong place at the wrong time. The attack on the village was carried out in retaliation for an attack on a military convoy.

Local residents had previously discovered two dead bodies burned beyond recognition in Ooh Myay Htoo (Sagaing) on 05.12.21. The village had been targeted in a raid by the Myanmarese military (Tatmadaw). Since the military coup

on 01.02.21, the total death toll in Sagaing, which has become a focal area of resistance, stands at 414 civilians, of whom over 309 were victims of violence by the police and the military and 105 died in attacks by local People's Defence Forces (PDF) (as per 04.12.21).

Fighting in various parts of the country

Further clashes between local PDFs and the Tatmadaw occurred in the Sagaing and Magway regions and in Chin State between 07.12. and 09.12.21. On 07.12.21 security forces in Mandalay opened fire on a housing estate in the wake of a bomb attack on an administration building, resulting in the death of a five year-old girl who was shot in the head.

Nigeria

Lethal attacks in northern federal states

According to reports in the media, unknown individuals killed at least 16 people and abducted a number of people in an attack on a mosque in Niger State on 08.12.21. Numerous residents of the village of Ba'are which was targeted in the attack were reportedly injured by the attackers riding motorbikes. As recently as 25.10.21, unknown attackers killed 18 people at a mosque in nearby Maza-Kuka (cf. BN of 08.11.21). It remains unclear what group was behind the attack. Lethal attacks and kidnappings are common in the north of the country (cf. BN of 06.12.21). According to reports in the media, over 20 people died when unknown assailants attacked a tour coach and set it on fire in the north-western federal state of Sokoto on 06.12.21. Also in Sokoto State, at least eleven people, including a Muslim cleric, were reportedly killed in two attacks on 10.12. and 11.12.21. Protests were staged in a number of towns in the north and in the capital, Abuja, on 10.11.21. Hundreds of demonstrators called on president Buhari to do more for security in the north.

Kidnapping of more travellers in Borno State

It has been reported in the media that unknown persons abducted an unspecified number of people travelling on the road between Damaturu and Maiduguri in the north-eastern federal state of Borno on 11.12.21. This incident took place only ten days after two kidnappings which recently came to light on the road between Damboa and Chibok (cf. BN of 06.12.21). Observers of the security situation in the region link the kidnappings to the jihadist group Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP).

Days of action against gender-specific violence

16 days of action against gender-specific violence ended on 10.12.21. These form part of an annual worldwide campaign. Natalia Kanem, director of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the UN's agency for sexual and reproductive health, used the kick-off event in Abuja on 25.11.21 to draw attention to wrongs which continue to exist in Nigerian society, such as female genital mutilation (FGM), marrying off young girls and domestic violence. According to reports in the media, domestic violence has increased since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. A UN report published on 24.11.21 focuses on Nigerian women's experiences of violence since the outbreak of the pandemic (cf. BN of 29.11.21).

North Macedonia

Government majority consolidated with new coalition partner

In the wake of a government crisis, the governing coalition led by the Social Democrats (SDSM) has re-stabilised its parliamentary majority by winning over a new coalition partner in the guise of the Albanian minority party Alternative, which holds four seats in parliament and previously formed part of the opposition. Following two weeks of negotiations in the aftermath of a failed vote of no confidence and the withdrawal of coalition partner BESA ("Word of Honour") from the government in mid-November 2021 (cf. BN of 15.11.21), prime minister Zaev (SDSM) and the leader of the Alternative party, Afrim Gashi, signed a corresponding coalition agreement on 05.12.21. According to a recent report in the media, the governing coalition now has a majority of 64 MPs in the 120-seat parliament. Zaev has reportedly stated that this will provide the government with the necessary strength to focus on the ongoing EU accession talks and on overcoming the health and energy crisis.

Pakistan

TTP ends truce

The one-month ceasefire between the Pakistani government and Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) ended on 09.12.21. TTP spokesmen accuse the government of failing to keep to its promises, claiming that security forces have continued to carry out operations during the ceasefire, in addition to which no more than 100 captured fighters have been released. The government has yet to comment on these statements. Twelve fighters who were being held in South Waziristan were reportedly released in the neighbouring Afghan province of Paktika on 07.12.21. They are said to originate for the most part from Pakistan's Bajaur tribal area. The ceasefire which entered into force on 09.11.21 was allegedly brokered by the interior minister of the Afghan Taliban, Sirajuddin Haqqani. Haqqani is the leader of the militant Haqqani network, which is believed to have close links to the most important Pakistani secret service, ISI.

Attacks on polio vaccination teams in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

On 10.12.21 a policeman who was accompanying a polio vaccination team in the north-western district of Tank (Khyber Pakhtunkhwa) was shot dead by an attacker riding a motorcycle. The vaccination team remained unscathed. Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) claimed responsibility for the attack on the following day. Another policeman accompanying a vaccination team was shot dead in the same district on 12.12.21. Similar incidents have occurred in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province in the recent past. Attacks on polio vaccination teams in Dera Ismail Khan on 24.10.21, in Kohat on 19.09.21 and in an unspecified place on 01.08.21 each claimed the life of one policeman.

Palestinian territories / Israel

Investigations into lethal shots fired by Israeli military closed

On 13.12.21 the Israeli ministry of justice announced the completion of investigations into the case of two members of the Israeli police who shot a Palestinian attacker dead with live ammunition while the latter was already lying on the ground (cf. BN of 06.12.21). The ministry concurred with the two accused men's assertion that they had acted in self-defence in a situation of stress.

West Bank: Protester killed by Israeli military

According to reports in the media, Palestinians staged protests near the Palestinian town of Beita in the West Bank on 10.12.21 against the construction of a settlement which was not originally authorised by the Israeli government (cf. BN of 05.07.21). The settlement has since been abandoned, but the infrastructure and buildings continue to be used by the army. Protests are held in the town on a weekly basis.

According to information from the Palestinian Red Crescent, at the protests on 10.12.21 the Israeli military used rubber bullets, tear gas and also live ammunition against the protesters. One protester was shot in the head and died. The Israeli military has denied claims that it used live ammunition, stating that it used only rubber bullets against Palestinians who were throwing stones and burning tyres.

Gaza Strip / Israel: Completion of security barrier

On 07.12.21 Israeli authorities announced the completion of the 65 km long security barrier between Israel and the Gaza Strip. The installation comprises radar systems, maritime sensors and a network of underground sensors to detect tunnelling. In addition, existing fencing has been replaced by higher fences equipped with sensors and cameras.

The new security system which has been built over the last three years is intended to prevent the construction of tunnel systems by Hamas, which have posed a threat to Israel in the past.

Republic of the Congo

Demonstration broken up by force

According to reports in the press, the security forces broke up a non-political demonstration in the capital, Brazzaville, by force on 07.12.21. The police reportedly used tear gas against the demonstrators, some of whom responded with violence. No further details are known. The demonstrators - victims of a number of serious explosions at an ammunition dump of the Congolese army in Brazzaville's Mpila district on 04.04.12 - have repeatedly called on the government to pay the compensation which it has promised to victims, but which has yet to be provided. According to the government's official figures, which have been challenged time and again, the explosions caused 282 deaths and injured several thousand people. Around 20,000 families were reportedly made homeless, with many victims still without a home and living in precarious conditions. There have been repeated reports in recent years of security forces taking severe action and employing disproportionate force (including the use of live ammunition) against demonstrators, leading in some instances to unlawful killings and injuries.

Deaths in police custody attributable to maltreatment

The NGO Centre d'action pour le développement (CAD) reported on 08.12.21 that the results of corresponding autopsies prove that the recent deaths at the police detention centres in the capital, Brazzaville, are attributable to maltreatment. CAD criticises the government's failure to initiate effective and independent investigations.

Senegal

Restoration of the office of prime minister

At a full session of parliament on 10.12.21, MPs voted to reinstitute the post of prime minister. In the wake of the 2019 presidential election, the office was abolished at the instigation of Macky Sall as part of a constitutional amendment on 14.05.19, in the interests of more efficient governance. Sall has now decided to reinstitute the office on account of his assumption of the presidency of the African Union in 2022. Restoration of the office of prime minister is expected to take effect after the local elections in January 2022. Various candidates are under discussion, e.g. Amadou Ba, former economics and finance minister and minister of foreign affairs, and Amadou Hott, minister of the economy, planning and international cooperation.

Somalia

Attacks by Al-Shabaab

Five people, including civilians, were killed and more than six injured in a bomb attack on a busy restaurant near the town of Awdingle (South West State) on 05.12.21. Al-Shabaab has claimed responsibility for the attack.

On 09.12.21 Al-Shabaab fired mortar shells at the airport in the town of Jowhar (Middle Shabelle). The attack destroyed a number of facilities. It is not known whether anyone was injured. Al-Shabaab has claimed responsibility for the attack, stating that it was aimed at foreign troops who are stationed at the airport.

On 08.12.21 Al-Shabaab attacked a convoy of AMISOM troops near the town of Ras Kamboni (Lower Juba), killing a number of Kenyan soldiers.

Water shortage

On 10.12.21 UNICEF called for urgent measures to address the critical shortage of water due to the worsening drought. According to its statement, more than two million people are acutely reliant on support and will require the immediate provision of life-saving water, sanitary and hygiene services in the next six months.

Clashes between clan militias

Clashes occurred between two clan militias in Kahandhaale in the Galgadud region (Galmudug) on 10.12.21. According to official information, six people were killed and a number were injured. No details of the circumstances relating to the incident are known.

South Sudan

ai: Violence in Western Equatoria may amount to war crimes

A report published by Amnesty International (ai) on 09.12.21 documents possible war crimes and other human rights violations against members of the Azande and Balanda ethnic groups. The atrocities concerned were committed in the period from June to October 2021 in clashes between rival armed groups allied either with the government or the opposition in Western Equatoria State (cf. BN of 30.08.21). The report states that all the groups involved indiscriminately destroyed entire villages, causing tens of thousands of people to take flight. The violence was concentrated in the Tambura region. According to the report, the recent violence is attributable to the federal state's allocation to the Sudan People's Liberation Movement-in-Opposition (SPLM-IO) in May 2020 as part of a power-sharing agreement. The subsequently appointed governor was rejected by sections of the population, including the Azande's political elite.

Sudan

Protests continue

On 06.12.21 tens of thousands of people demonstrated in Khartoum and other regions once again against the agreement of 21.11.21 between the military and Abdullah Hamdok which reinstated the latter as prime minister (cf. BN of 22.11.21). The protests also marked the third anniversary of the first demonstrations against the former Al-Bashir regime. After his reinstatement, Hamdok instructed the security forces not to break up the protests by force and stressed that freedom of speech must be ensured. The security forces nevertheless used tear gas to break up a demonstration near the presidential palace in Khartoum. They also erected barbed wire barricades to close off a number of main roads. A number of demonstrators in Khartoum were injured when they were attacked by gangs with knives. Some demonstrators were also arrested.

UN: Restoring trust as a crucial challenge

The UN Secretary-General's special representative for Sudan, Volker Perthes, stated before the UN Security Council on 10.12.21 that the political crisis was not yet over, despite the agreement of 21.11.21 between the military and Hamdok. He said that there was considerable opposition to the agreement among a large proportion of Sudanese stakeholders, including civil society organisations and women's groups. He also expressed concern at the suspension of a number of development aid measures following the military coup. He stated that it was important to win back the trust of the public and the international community in order to avoid further violence and to restore constitutional order, noting that the UN was prepared to support a comprehensive dialogue.

West Darfur: Dozens killed in intercommunal violence

According to official information, at least 30 people were killed and 40 injured in West Darfur State on 05.12.21 when local Arab militias attacked the camp for internally displaced people in Kreinik and set fire to houses. The wave of intercommunal violence in West Darfur has already been ongoing for six weeks (cf. BN of 29.11.21), in the course of which at least 138 people have been killed and dozens injured, according to the medical committee of West Darfur. The violence is also driving people from their homes: According to the UN, more than 10,000 people have fled from Jebel Moon alone, 2,000 of whom have crossed the border into Chad. On 11.12.21 the Sovereignty Council resolved to dispatch a rapid response force of the Sudanese army to Darfur, in order to bring the situation there back under control and to provide civilians with protection. A force of 3,300 fighters and soldiers is planned, comprising 1,500 fighters from the Rapid Support Forces and 1,500 soldiers and fighters from the five most important groups which are party to the Juba Peace Agreement. They are also to be supported by secret service forces.

Syria

Idlib: Civilians injured in US drone attack

According to various reports, a drone attack took place near Mastoumeh, a village in the north-west of Idlib governorate, on 06.12.21. The US military stated that the attack targeted a high-ranking member of Al Qaeda.

According to the pro-opposition Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR), one fighter of Horas al-Din died in the attack. This is a group close to Al Qaeda which has broken with Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, the dominant group in Idlib. According to information from the SOHR, the man left the group a year ago but it is not clear whether he was still an active combatant.

A family travelling in a car was also hit by the impact of the fired rocket. Five members of the family suffered minor injuries and one minor was seriously injured.

Syria to host 2024 OAPC conference

The energy ministry announced on 09.12.21 that the annual conference of the Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries is to be held in Damascus in 2024. Qatar will host the 2023 conference. This marks a further step towards the normalisation of relations with the Arab states, after Syria was expelled from the Arab League in 2011.

Before the war broke out, Syria produced some 350,000 barrels of oil a day, over half of which it exported. Today, the average output stands at only around 24,000 barrels a day. Most oil fields are under the control of the Kurdish-led Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria. Damascus is reliant on oil imports from Iran to cover its own needs.

Togo

Journalists arrested

The editor of the newspaper L'Alternative, Ferdinand Ayité, was arrested on 10.12.21. He is accused of having insulted and slandered justice minister Pius Agbétomey and the minister of trade, industry and local products, Kodjo Adédzé. The accusations stem from a radio programme which was produced and broadcast online by L'Alternative, in which Ayité criticised the ministers. The editor of the Fraternité newspaper, Joël Egah, was arrested in the same matter on 10.12.21 and the executive editor of L'Alternative, Isidore Kouwonou, was placed under judicial supervision.

Court revokes HAAC ruling

On 09.12.21 the supreme court revoked the two-month ban which the High Authority for Audio-Visual Media and Communication (HAAC) imposed on publication of the La Symphonie newspaper on 03.11.21 (cf. BN of 08.11.21). The court found the necessary legal basis for the sanction to be lacking.

Turkey

Alleged members of the Gülen movement arrested

27 people were arrested in nationwide operations against the Gülen movement on 06.12.21. The chief public prosecutor's office in Istanbul issued arrest warrants for the suspects in connection with an investigation into suspected infiltration of the Turkish armed forces by the Gülen movement. The police launched operations in Istanbul and 13 other provinces to arrest the accused, who include actively serving soldiers. The suspects are among 47 individuals wanted by the authorities. According to reports in the media, the accused were identified by scrutinising telephone conversations between military officers who are believed to be in contact with the group and their civilian contacts within the Gülen movement. In addition, several of the accused are said to have been identified as a result of confessions by members of the Gülen movement who are already in custody. The individuals for whom arrest warrants have been issued include 15 officers, five non-commissioned officers, former cadets and six civilians who are accused of acting as supervisors within the group.

103 retired admirals indicted

On 07.12.21 the chief public prosecutor's office in Ankara brought charges against the 103 retired admirals who submitted the controversial Montreux declaration in April 2021, calling for prison terms of up to twelve years for the accused (cf. BN of 12.04.21). The retired admirals are charged with having committed a crime against the constitutional order.

Annual report of the Committee to Protect Journalists

On 09.12.21 the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) published its 2021 annual report on press freedom worldwide. The report states that the number of imprisoned journalists has reached a new global high this year, at 293. Following the release of 20 imprisoned journalists last year, Turkey occupies 6th place in the CPJ ranking. According to the report, 18 media representatives are currently imprisoned in Turkey.

Yemen

Drone attacks and air strikes continue

The Houthis attacked Saudi territory with almost 30 armed drones and a number of rockets between 06.12. and 08.12.21, including military and economic targets in Jeddah and Riyadh. Meanwhile, the anti-Houthi coalition stepped up air strikes on Houthi positions in the capital, Sanaa, and in the governorates of Al-Jawf and Marib between 06.12. and 12.12.21. According to the coalition, the strikes killed at least 200 Houthi fighters in Marib alone.

US navy stops Iranian arms shipment

The US Justice Department announced on 07.12.21 that the US navy had seized more than one million barrels of oil and weapons, including anti-tank missiles, on a routine operation in the Persian Gulf. The consignment, which the Justice Department claims was organised by the Iranian Revolutionary Guards, was concealed on four tankers and was intended for the Houthis.

Hodeida: 25,000 people displaced in November 2021

According to a report by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), some 25,000 people were driven from their homes in the port of Hodeida in November 2021 as a result of the fighting between the Houthis and the anti-Houthi coalition. More than half of the displaced people fled to areas which are controlled by the Yemeni government and its allies. Following the withdrawal of coalition troops from parts of Hodeida, Houthi rebels advanced further into the city, leading to fighting with the coalition troops.

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