



Briefing Notes

Group 62 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

3 January 2022

Afghanistan

Economic and humanitarian situation

The United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) said in its situation reports of 22.12.21 and 29.12.21 that efforts would be stepped up to assist more than 23 million people in 2022 in a bid to avert a humanitarian disaster and famine. It managed to provide assistance to approximately 15 million people in need in 2021. In addition, it said cash transfers would be increased - especially in urban areas - to support the local economy and keep markets afloat. Food is being distributed in all provinces. Efforts are also being made to get people into jobs, either by improving production conditions in agriculture (construction of ditches, roads) or by continuing training projects (e.g. car and mobile phone repairs). Notwithstanding this, the economic and humanitarian situation remain tense. The majority of households, for example, report that they can only get one day's work a week to earn a living, regardless of whether they are day labourers or in permanent employment. The worst drought in years is contributing to the fact that food cannot be produced in sufficient quantities and is therefore correspondingly expensive. WFP estimates that about US\$ 220 million per month will be needed to support those in need in 2022. Several analysts believe that the economic crisis in Afghanistan is not one that is mainly affecting the poor and vulnerable alone, nor can it be addressed through emergency food aid alone. They say that it is essential for the economy to get money - salaries, bank deposits, remittances - flowing again as soon as possible.

Medical care

According to the Afghan Ministry of Health, 21 out of 38 clinics that treat COVID-19 patients are closed due to a lack of funding. Talks are underway with various international donors to enable the COVID-19 clinics to reopen.

Taliban leader calls for amnesty to be observed

Following the circulation of a video showing a former security forces commander being beaten by Taliban, Mullah Akhundzada called once again on 30.12.21 for the general amnesty he announced to be respected and for an end to be put to extrajudicial punishment of former government personnel. Dozens of similar - and even more gruesome - videos and images are circulating on social media. Other videos on social media show killings and desecration of the bodies of civilians in Panjshir.

Attack on transgender person in Herat

According to a press report issued on 29.12.21, a transgender person was tortured by unknown individuals in Herat. Other transgender people in Herat have expressed concern about the lack of protection, saying they are in a tough situation. They say they have been abandoned by their families and that society does not accept them either. The report also quoted an Islamic cleric as saying that the harsh treatment of transgender people is against Islamic values.

Brazil

Flooding in the state of Bahia

After persistent heavy rainfall that began in November 2021, two dams burst in the north-eastern region of Bahia on 25.12.21 and 26.12.21, further exacerbating the situation. Twenty-one people have died and 358 have been injured in the floods over the past month. According to civil defence and government figures, in total, more than 470,000 people in 116 municipalities have been affected by the storms and floods, and more than 62,500 people have been rendered homeless.

Burkina Faso

People killed in attacks, military operations

On 01.01.22, unknown individuals attacked military and gendarmerie posts in the village of Gomboro (Boucle du Mouhoun Region). The attackers were driven back, 29 of them were killed or wounded.

Forty-one persons were killed in another attack on a convoy of members of the Volontaires pour la défense de la patrie (Volunteers for the Defense of the Homeland (VDP)) civilian defence force and civilians in the North Region on 23.12.21. Soumaïla Ganamé alias Ladji Yoro, a well-known leader of the VDP, was among the dead. The convoy had been travelling between the towns of Ouahigouya and Titao.

In the early hours of 24.12.21, unknown assailants killed three people in the town of Koflandé (Cascades Region). According to military sources, three members of the armed forces and several extremists were killed during military operations carried out in the Sahel region between 20.12.21 and 26.12.21.

Prison sentences following demonstration held on 27.11.21

On 22.12.21, a court in Ouagadougou handed down suspended sentences of six to 12-month prison terms to five leaders of civil society organisations who had been arrested in connection with a demonstration held on 27.11.21 (cf. BN of 06.12.21). The court also imposed fines of CFA Francs 300,000 (approx. EUR 457, as of 03.01.22). The accused were charged with taking part in an illegal demonstration and destroying public property.

Cameroon

Arrests following outbreak of violence in Far North Region

According to media reports, Cameroonian troops arrested hundreds of armed men believed to be responsible for the outbreak of violence in northern Cameroon (cf. BN of 13.12.21). Authorities say they also seized hundreds of weapons as well as cattle stolen during the conflict over scarce resources. According to the UN, the number of displaced persons has risen to over 100,000. Most of them have fled across the border into Chad.

Opposition supporters sentenced to prison

According to media reports, almost 50 activists, sympathisers and leaders of the opposition party Mouvement pour la Renaissance du Cameroun (Cameroon Renaissance Movement (MRC)) have been sentenced to between one and seven years in prison. They had been arrested on 22.09.20 during a rally organised by several opposition parties and were charged, inter alia, with rebellion. Among those convicted were Olivier Bibou Nissack, the spokesperson for party leader Maurice Kamto, and treasurer Alain Fogue. The convictions had taken place in the absence of the defendants' legal advisers. According to information provided by the MRC party, over 500 people had been arrested in the city of Douala in September 2020. 124 people are said to remain in custody.

Central African Republic

MINUSCA cracks down on armed group

The UN peacekeeping mission MINUSCA expelled 200 fighters of the rebel group Unité pour la paix en Centrafrique (Unit for Peace in the Central African Republic (UPC)) from Boyo (Ouaka prefecture) on 27.12.21. According to media reports, the town had been the target of violence on 06.12.21 and 07.12.21 when at least 15 civilians were

killed, others maimed, shelters destroyed and some 1,500 people were displaced. The victims reportedly belonged to the Peul Muslim ethnic group. The violence is said to have been perpetrated by an anti-Balaka group and on the same day also resulted in two deaths in a camp of Peul members 16 km east of Boyo.

China

Public shaming for people smuggling and violation of corona rules

On 28.12.21, armed police paraded four persons wearing handcuffs and full hazmat suits through the streets of the city of Jingxi (Guangxi Autonomous Region) in southern China. They are being accused of smuggling people out of Vietnam across China's borders which have been largely sealed because of the COVID-19 pandemic, thereby violating the measures to contain the pandemic. During the parade, the accused wore placards on their chests and backs displaying their photos and names, and part of the way, according to video footage, they travelled in pig transporters. Meanwhile, police forces used graffiti to mark the victims' houses as "people smuggling households" and affixed disciplinary notices to the outside walls. Practices that violate the dignity of offenders have been banned since the central government ordered local authorities to do so in July 2010. Local authority representatives responded to the sometimes sharp criticism of the incident in Jingxi on social media and also state media by saying it was an appropriate "disciplinary warning measure".

Hong Kong: independent online medium forced to close

On 29.12.21, security forces raided the office of the pro-democratic online Stand News, froze its assets and detained the editor-in-chief Patrick Lam, his predecessor Chung Pui-kuen and four leading members of the board. Lam and Chung have been accused of conspiring to publish seditious publications. The legal basis for this charge is provided by the Crimes Ordinance, a law dating back to the British colonial era, which has been increasingly used again in the recent past. Stand News announced on the same day that it would cease operations and dismiss all employees. In November 2021, the organisation Reporters Without Borders (RSF) nominated the magazine for the Press Freedom Award in the Independence category.

Colombia

Congress approves new security law

On 22.12.21, Congress approved a new security law (Ley de Seguridad Ciudadana) introduced by the government. According to media reports, the signing of the law by President Ivan Duque, which is necessary for its entry into force, is a mere formality. The law comprising 68 Articles is intended to enable expanded state intervention in the fight against crime and, according to Defence Minister Diego Molano, to improve the efficiency of the judiciary, among other things. Opponents of the law, however, criticise it as further criminalisation and stigmatisation of demonstrations and a form of civil society repression. The legal basis for privileged legitimate self-defence is controversial, as is the categorisation of obstructing state security forces during demonstrations as "acts of vandalism". The opposition senator Roy Barreras therefore announced his intention to file a complaint with the Constitutional Court on the grounds that the law "legitimises vigilante justice, legalises forms of urban paramilitarism and allows the shooting of young people".

Democratic Republic of the Congo

Life imprisonment for police officers accused of torture resulting in death, nationwide police violence

In a case of torture by police officers in Kinshasa (cf. BN of 20.12.21), the chief inspector responsible for ordering the torture and the perpetrators, among others, were each sentenced to life imprisonment; fines were also imposed on them.

According to press reports from December 2021, law enforcement officers are facing heavy criticism for the disproportionate use of police force in different parts of the country. In addition to the humiliating and violent arrest of the former governor of Congo-Central Province and the killing of a television director in Kinshasa by a

stray bullet, law enforcement officers had used force to disperse an unspecified number of demonstrations in eastern Congo, including the use of firearms, resulting in the death of several protestors.

Human Rights Watch (HRW) announced in a press release issued on 24.12.21 that the government led by President Felix Tshisekedi has been cracking down against protests increasingly throughout the country since 2020.

Citing eyewitnesses, HRW reported on 24.12.21 that on 20.12.21 law enforcement officers fired indiscriminately against protesters in the city of Goma in the province of North Kivu which is in a state of emergency. Riots broke out between the protesters and law enforcement officers and people on both sides were killed and injured. At least 17 people were reportedly arrested. Following a call for demonstrations by several civil society actors, people in Goma took to the streets to protest against the controversial state of siege in force in North Kivu since May 2020 and a bilateral police agreement with Rwanda. According to existing reports, the agreement is to provide for the deployment of Rwandan police forces on Congolese territory. Mistrust is rife among the population for several reasons in relation to the conflict that hark back to the past (cf. BN of 06.12.21).

North Kivu: suicide bombing on Christmas Day

According to media reports, at least eight people were killed and 20 others were injured in a suicide bombing targeting civilians in the town of Beni (North Kivu) on 25.12.21. The suicide bomber, who has not yet been identified, was prevented from entering the crowded building by security forces. The Congolese authorities are blaming the attack on the radical Islamic rebel group Forces démocratiques alliées (Allied Democratic Forces (ADF)). To date, the ADF has not commented on the attack. The USA had officially designated the ADF a foreign terrorist organisation with links to ISIS on 11.03.21. The ADF also calls itself the Islamic State's Central African Province (ISCAP). In June 2021, attacks using improvised explosive devices were carried out for the first time on Congolese soil (cf. BN of 28.06.21), which ISIS later claimed responsibility for, saying the attacks were explicitly aimed at members of the Christian faith.

Egypt

Activists sentenced to several years in prison for spreading fake news on social media

A special state security court in Cairo sentenced the well-known civil rights activist Alaa Abdel Fattah to five years in prison for endangering national security by spreading fake news on social media; on the same grounds, the court sentenced the blogger Mohamed Ibrahim, known under the pseudonym Oxygen, and the human rights lawyer Mohamed el-Baqer to four years in prison. Judgments handed down by the special court are not subject to appeal; they only have to be ratified by the President of the state. The three men had been held in pre-trial custody since 2019. In the case of Fattah, his family as well as international human rights organisations have complained about the life-threatening prison conditions.

El Salvador

Three women charged with homicide following miscarriage released

According to the human rights group ACDATEE, three women were released from prison on 23.12.21 who had been charged with homicide following a miscarriage. The women had served six, eight and 13 years respectively for aggravated homicide prior to their release. Abortion is illegal in El Salvador in all circumstances, and a woman who terminates a pregnancy faces up to eight years in prison. Judges, on the other hand, frequently find women guilty of serious homicide, a crime punishable by up to 50 years in jail. According to ACDATEE, fourteen additional women are still incarcerated for similar reasons.

Ethiopia

Ethiopian troops recapture areas in Amhara and Afar / air strikes in Tigray

While troops of the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) report a voluntary withdrawal from several towns in the Amhara and Afar regions, the Ethiopian government says that the regions bordering Tigray have been "cleared".

Following the withdrawal, aid supplies are once again reaching the Amhara region. However, the situation remains tense due to the lack of food.

Meanwhile, according to UN reports, dozens of people were killed in Ethiopian government air strikes in southern Tigray between 19.12.21 and 24.12.21. The towns affected included Alamat, Korem, Maychew, Mekoni, Milazat and the regional capital Mekele.

Tigrayan troops call for ceasefire / Ethiopian government approves bill to set up commission

The TPLF called for a ceasefire and negotiations in a letter to the UN Secretary General on 19.12.21. The TPLF's demands include the establishment of a no-fly zone for enemy aircraft over Tigray, the imposition of an arms embargo on Ethiopia and its allies, an UN-led review of the withdrawal of external forces from Tigray, the release of TPLF political prisoners and an independent inquiry into possible war crimes. The TPLF hopes that this will lead to an improvement of the situation in Tigray and the resumption of aid supplies to the region. The Ethiopian government has not yet commented on the demands.

The Ethiopian government has approved a bill to establish a national dialogue commission. Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed Ali is responding to increasing international pressure to launch negotiations to end the Tigray conflict. However, the commission rules out the participation of the TPLF.

Guinea

Transition following coup, further developments

On 25.12.21, the Prime Minister of the interim government, Mohamed Béavogui, proposed a plan for political reorganisation. This comprised five substantive priorities as well as the stages "formation of a transitional council", "drafting of a new constitution", "establishment of an electoral administration", "compilation of a register of voters", "organisation of the constitutional referendum" and "local elections, parliamentary elections and presidential elections". However, no timeline has been provided, meaning that the junta/interim government in power since the successful coup of 05.09.21 continues to fail to meet a key demand of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), which calls for elections to be held within six months. A coalition of civil society organisations made a proposal on 29.12.21 to draw up a schedule with elections to be held after a transition period of 24 months in total.

By contrast, the junta did comply with the ECOWAS demand to allow ex-President Alpha Condé to leave the country. On 31.12.21, it was announced that he would be allowed to go abroad for up to one month to receive medical treatment, or even longer if the need is certified by medical professionals.

Previously, two former Guinean rulers had returned from exile. On 22.12.21, Moussa Dadis Camara, who had seized power as head of a junta at the end of 2008 following the death of the long-serving president Lansana Conté until an assassination attempt on him on 03.12.09, arrived in Burkina Faso for the first time in around 12 years. He declared himself ready to face justice. He is accused of being responsible for the massacre in the Conakry stadium on 28.09.09. His successor Sékouba Konaté entered Guinea on 18.12.21. Konaté had facilitated free presidential elections, leading to Alpha Condé's first term in office at the end of 2010, but had subsequently been forced into exile.

India

Kashmir: ongoing skirmishes continue to claim lives

On 30.12.21, six suspected rebels, including two Pakistani nationals, and one Indian soldier were killed in two skirmishes in Indian-administered Kashmir.

According to media reports, at least 380 separatist militants, nearly 100 civilians and more than 80 Indian soldiers have been killed in the region since August 2019.

Kashmir: stampede at Hindu shrine

At least a dozen people were killed and more than a dozen were wounded in a stampede at the Hindu shrine Mata Vaishno Devi in the part of Kashmir that is administered by India on 01.01.22. The holy shrine attracts tens of thousands of pilgrims every day.

Punjab: explosion at court complex

At least two people were killed and another two were wounded in an explosion at a court complex in Ludhiana in the north Indian federal state of Punjab on 23.12.21. It is not known what motivated the attack.

Iran

COVID-19 pandemic: Omicron variant in 12 provinces

Referring to the spokesperson of the Information Centre of the Ministry of Health, Mohammad Hashemi, Iranian foreign media reported on 30.12.21 that the Omicron variant of the coronavirus had meanwhile been detected in a total of 43 people in twelve of the country's provinces. The provinces affected are Tehran, Khorasan-e razavi, Hormuzgan, Mazandaran, Isfahan, West Azerbaijan, Markazi, Alborz, Qom, Fars, Yazd and Bushehr. According to unconfirmed reports, the first cases are also said to have been reported in Shahr-e Kord (Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari Province). Media sources say the new corona variant has also spread to the south-western province of Khuzestan.

Acid attack on women in west Tehran

According to media reports, a serious acid attack was carried out on three women in a park in the Shariyar district in the western part of the capital province of Tehran. The perpetrator, who has since been arrested and is a 22-year-old man who had been recently released from a drug rehabilitation centre, stalked three women on 28.12.21 while they were doing their morning exercises and doused them with a corrosive liquid. The police say one of the women suffered burns to her hands and legs. The two other women's clothing was burned. Acid attacks have been carried out repeatedly on Iranian women in the past. Foreign media referred to data provided by the Ministry of Health, according to which between 60 and 70 women are the victims of acid attacks every year.

Arrest following Turban incident in Qom

According to media reports, a woman was arrested in the central Iranian city of Qom after getting into an argument with a mullah, knocking off his turban and trampling on it. The incident fuelled a heated discussion on social media. According to the report, the mullah had criticised the women on the street over her ill-fitting hijab, whereupon the woman lost her temper and attacked the mullah. The new secretary of the staff of the amr be ma'aruf va nahi az monkar (English: the practice of what is right and the prevention of what is wrong), Muhammad Taqi Hosseini, said that the woman had shamelessly attacked an authorised representative of the amr be ma'aruf and insulted the sacred rites of the clergy. A judicial indictment was therefore being prepared. The controversial practice of the amr be ma'aruf, which is also followed by the Iranian morality police, is enshrined in Article 8 of the Iranian constitution.

Political prisoner dies on hunger strike in Ahvaz prison

A political prisoner held in Sheiban prison in Ahvaz (Khuzestan) has died as a result of a week-long hunger strike. The man had announced the start of his hunger strike on 04.12.21 in protest against being denied a fair trial by the judicial authorities. The man had been sentenced to three years in prison by the Ahvaz Revolutionary Court for spreading propaganda against the regime, propaganda in favour of opposition groups and disturbing public opinion.

Iraq

Hostilities against ISIS

In a review of months from January to November 2021, the KRG's Peshmerga Ministry reported that in the first eleven months of last year, ISIS was responsible for 229 attacks in the disputed areas; 356 people died (ISIS casualties are often uncertain and not counted), 480 people were wounded, and 33 were abducted. Overall, there was an increase in ISIS activity in the disputed areas throughout 2021.

Election

On 27.12.21, the results of the election were finally confirmed by the Constitutional Court of Iraq. Various objections, mainly from the pro-Iranian Fatah Alliance, were unsuccessful. The election results remained essentially unchanged from the preliminary election results.

At least 20 people killed in shooting in Babil

On 30.12.21, twenty members of the same family died in Babil province under unexplained circumstances. The sequence of events and causes are completely unclear. The narrative of the security forces and the family members differ greatly. Security forces say they were called to a family residence which they surrounded before coming under fire; after forcibly entering the house, they say they found the dead bodies of several family members. They say these persons had been shot dead by a family member for whom a search warrant had already been issued. The perpetrator allegedly then killed himself. In addition, there are reports in the media, citing security circles, that the perpetrator had links to ISIS, although the arrest warrant did not make any reference to terrorist allegations. Family members, on the other hand, portray the situation as a police operation that got out of hand. They claim the family home was attacked with heavy weapons. A considerable number of children are among the dead.

Libya

Presidential elections delayed for the time being

On 22.12.21, the National Election Commission announced that the presidential elections scheduled for 24.12.21 would be delayed, shortly after the relevant parliamentary commission declared it impossible to hold the elections on that date. The Parliamentary Commission rejected the proposal of the National Election Commission to hold the presidential elections together with the parliamentary elections on 24.01.22 and called for the establishment of a new schedule containing defined stages within a constitutional framework to ensure an orderly electoral process and acceptance of the results. At the same time, it underlined its demand for a reshuffle of the executive. The parliamentary commission's proposals must now be discussed by parliament.

Mali

Interim government proposes delaying elections for up to five years

According to media reports, Mali's military interim government has proposed to the Economic Community of West African (ECOWAS) that democratic elections originally scheduled for February 2022 be delayed by up to five years. The foreign minister of the interim government, Abdoulaye Diop, announced this in a televised speech broadcast on 01.01.22. According to the military government, the proposal is adequate to implement political and institutional reforms. He said a coalition of ten political parties, on the other hand, had rejected the plan as unreasonable and unilateral. The announcement followed a four-day national forum on the country's return to civilian rule (assises nationales de la refondation) in the capital Bamako, at which, according to media reports, a proposal was made on 30.12.22 to delay elections for a period of six months to five years.

International pressure is being exerted on the military government led by Assimi Goïta, which has been in power since two consecutive coups were carried out in August 2020 and May 2021, to facilitate the transition to a civilian government. According to media reports, ECOWAS has already imposed sanctions on officials and threatened further sanctions if there are any further delays. The Economic Community of West African States has scheduled a summit on the situation in Mali for 09.01.22.

Mauritania

Peaceful protestors detained

Nine people (Peul and Haratin) were arrested during peaceful protests held in Ngawlè on 04.12.21. They were protesting, as they had done on 03.11.21 and 21.11.21, against the expropriation of the Peul. Fertile farmland of the Peul has been expropriated and sold to a foreign investor. In November 2021, at least 13 people were arrested and several injured during the protests.

Mexico

Eight journalists and media staff killed in 2021

According to the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ), a total of 45 journalists and media staff were killed worldwide in 2021, including eight in Mexico.

Mozambique

Tension in Niassa region

Attacks in the neighbouring region of Niassa have intensified since the insurgent troops from Cabo Delgado were driven out. According to the government, 4,000 persons have fled the region so far. Dozens of people have already been killed or abducted by insurgents in attacks on villages in Niassa.

Myanmar

Suspected massacre in Kayah State

The bodies of 35 people were found in several burnt-out vehicles in Hpruso township (Kayah State) on 25.12.21. According to reports that the UN considers to be credible, they are the bodies of civilian victims of military violence. Security forces allegedly arrested them on 24.12.21 and then killed, burned them or burned them alive. According to the humanitarian aid organisation Save the Children, the victims include women and children as well as two of the organisation's staff members who disappeared on their way back from a humanitarian mission in eastern Kayah. The rest of those killed were reportedly fleeing fighting in their villages. Myanmar state media reported that seven trucks carrying "terrorists" were fired upon when fighting broke out between military personnel and resistance forces in Hpruso township.

Clashes, attacks and unlawful killings

Between 17.12.21 and 28.12. 21, armed clashes occurred between Myanmar's armed forces (Tatmadaw) and ethnic armies or People's Defence Forces (PDF) in Yangon and in the districts of Loikaw, Shadaw (Kayah State), Tedim, Mindat (Chin State), Muse (Shan State), Gangaw, Pakkoku (Magway Region), Ye-U, Kalay (Sagaing Region), Mohnyin (Kachin State) and Myawaddy (Kayin State), causing heavy casualties on both sides. Dozens of civilians were killed, tens of thousands have fled, most of them from violence in Gangaw (13,000) and fighting between the Tatmadaw and the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) in Myawaddy near the Thai-Myanmar border (7,000). According to Thai authorities, the number of people who have fled to Thailand since 15.12.21 had risen to over 5,300 by 28.12.21. On 19.12.21, anti-junta militants known as Pa Kha Pha set fire to a police outpost in Mandalay, prompting security forces to respond with dozens of arrests. On the same day, a deadly knife attack against the family of a village administrator in Kalay (Sagaing region) led to security forces opening fire and 600 people fleeing in fear of retaliation.

Following Tatmadaw raids in Gangaw and Depayin (Sagaing Region), locals discovered the bodies of 12 people, including two PDF members and three children, between 19.12.21 and 21.12.21. Bullet wounds in the chest and back of the heads of the bodies indicate that they were executed by soldiers.

Nigeria

Lethal attacks in Zamfara State

According to media reports, so-called bandits killed seven to ten people and abducted 33 women in the north-western state of Zamfara. The bandits reportedly arrived on motorbikes and attacked several villages in Gusau Local Government Area (LGA) between 25.12.21 and 26.12.21, and also looted food supplies. Most of the residents of the affected villages had fled to the capital of Gusau.

On 29.12.21, according to media reports, the traditional ruler Umaru Bawan-Allah and three to four other people were killed by armed assailants in Bungudu LGA. The assailants allegedly kidnapped others and set fire to houses and vehicles.

On 01.01.22, two commanders of so-called bandits were killed by air strikes carried out by the Nigerian armed forces.

There has been an increase in the number of deadly attacks carried out by so-called bandits in the north-west in recent months. (cf. BN of 20.12.21).

Conflict between farmers and herders claim at least 45 lives

According to media reports, at least 45 people were killed in a conflict between farmers and herders in the central state of Nasarawa on 17.12.21. Dozens were also wounded. This was reported in a statement issued by the office of President Muhammadu Buhari on 21.12.21. According to local police, Fulani herders attacked farmers from the Tiv ethnic group, accusing them of killing a member of their group. The unrest continued until 19.12.21.

Conflicts have arisen time and again between nomadic herders and settled farmers particularly in the central states of Nigeria. According to reports, these conflicts involve the use of scarce resources such as land or water. According to media reports based on Armed Conflict Location and Event Data (ACLED), conflicts between farmers and herders claimed 8,434 lives between 2005 and mid-2021. The majority of violent attacks have reportedly taken place in the eastern Benue State, followed by Plateau, Kaduna, Taraba and Nasarawa States.

Deadly air strikes on jihadists

According to media reports, more than 100 fighters of the jihadist group Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) were killed in air strikes carried out by the Nigerian armed forces on 13.12.21. This is reportedly based on information the news agency Agence France-Presse (AFP) received from security sources and local residents on 21.12.21. The air strikes were carried out on three camps of the jihadist group in the district of Marte in the far north-east of the country. ISWAP commanders were also reportedly killed.

Pakistan

Local elections in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

At least five people were killed and 10 polling stations were set ablaze during local elections held in the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa on 21.12.21. Around 14 million people were called to vote in 17 districts. Elections to determine the makeup of subdistrict (tehsil) councils, as well as town and village councils in the province's remaining 18 districts, are to take place on 16.01.22.

Two people were shot dead when supporters of two rival candidates clashed with each other outside a polling station in Karak. Several armed men then raided the polling station and took away ballot boxes, along with ballots and stamps.

Two people were reportedly killed and four others were injured when their vehicle hit a roadside bomb in the Bajaur tribal district. The victims were representatives of the secular Awami National Party (ANP).

Another member of the ANP was shot before the election was held in the city of Dera Ismail Khan.

In another incident, at least one person was shot dead and two others were wounded when unidentified gunmen opened fire outside a polling station in the Kohat district. Police said the Kohat incident wasn't connected to the election, but it disrupted voting for several hours.

In the town of Darra Adam Khel, dozens of demonstrators set fire to 10 polling stations to condemn the central government's 2018 decision to merge the Federally Administered Tribal Area (FATA) with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province. Darra Adam Khel was part of FATA before the provinces merged.

In the Samari area of Kohat district, tribal elders of a religiously conservative community living there banned women and men from voting together, accusing the authorities of not having set up separate polling stations for women.

Entry and speaking ban for PTM leader

In a notification issued on 22.12.21, the leader of the Pashtun Tahaffuz Movement (PTM), Manzoor Pashteen, was banned from entering Pakistan-administered Kashmir for three months and from speaking at public meetings. The PTM is seeking clarification of human rights violations against ethnic Pashtuns and is seeking to locate missing persons believed to be held by the Pakistani intelligence services.

In December 2020, the government of the southwestern province of Balochistan had already imposed an entry ban on Pashteen. In March 2021, the authorities expelled him from the province where he had been attending a condolence ceremony.

Pakistan is home to some 35 million ethnic Pashtuns, mainly in the areas bordering Afghanistan, where Pakistan's armed forces have stepped up operations against the Pakistani Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) since 2003. Thousands of Pakistani Pashtuns have been killed and millions displaced as a result of operations carried out by the Pakistan army.

Bomb blast in Quetta

At least four people were killed and more than a dozen others were injured in a bomb blast in Quetta, the capital of the south-western province of Belochistan on 30.12.21. The explosion took place after an Islamist party convention. There was no immediate claim of responsibility. Militant separatist groups are active in the province.

Attacks on security forces in North Waziristan

Four Pakistani soldiers were killed in the tribal district of North Waziristan (Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province) on 30.12.21. Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) has claimed responsibility for the attack.

Since the end of the one-month ceasefire between the government and the TTP in early December 2021, attacks on Pakistani security forces have increased once again in North and South Waziristan as well as in the surrounding areas. On 29.12.21, a policeman was killed in North Waziristan by armed militants on motorbikes who managed to flee. One soldier was killed and seven others were wounded in a further incident on 24.12.21. According to unofficial data, 63 attacks were carried out against Pakistani security forces and civilians in North Waziristan in 2021.

Hindu pilgrims from India visit Pakistan

Hindu pilgrims from India entered Pakistan on 01.01.22 as part of a government-sponsored religious tourism initiative. A trip to Karak in northwest Pakistan is part of the four-day visit where a Hindu shrine was attacked by a mob in December 2020. In March 2021, Muslim religious and tribal leaders expressed regret over the incident and condemned the attack. Hindus make up just over two per cent of Pakistan's population of over 200 million.

Palestinian Autonomous Territories / Israel

West Bank: high level of violence and clashes

According to media reports, violent clashes erupted between Palestinians and Israeli forces on 26.12.21, among other incidents. The clashes took place after days of heightened tension in several locations in the West Bank, including near the settlement of Homesh in the north, which is unauthorised by the Israeli government. At least ten Palestinian men and women are said to have been wounded by live ammunition. A member of the Israeli military also suffered minor injuries. A Jewish Israeli was killed by a Palestinian gunman a few days earlier near this outpost (cf. BN of 20.12.21).

On 23.12.21, thousands of Jewish nationalists marched to Homesh to mark the end of the mourning period for Jewish Israeli who was killed. Another march was stopped by the Israeli forces on 25.12.21 in a bid to de-escalate tensions that were running high.

On 21.12.21, according to Israeli forces, a Palestinian attempted to carry out a car-ramming attack at a military checkpoint near the town of Jenin in the north of the West Bank. According to the report, the driver was stopped with live ammunition fired by military personnel. Palestinian media, however, reported that military personnel opened fire on the vehicle, killing the driver and causing the car to veer off course and crash into the checkpoint.

On 22.12.21, according to Israeli officials, a Palestinian man was killed by Israeli forces near al-Amari camp in Ramallah after he allegedly opened fire at Israeli military personnel from a passing vehicle. The Israeli military reportedly responded with live ammunition.

On 31.12.21, Israeli forces shot and killed a Palestinian who allegedly attempted to stab Israeli civilians and military personnel at a bus stop. According to the report, the attacker was stopped by the use of live ammunition as he left his car and approached the bus stop wielding a knife. Another person who was in his car was arrested.

Gaza Strip: cross-border gunfire

On 29.12.21, according to the Israeli Defense Forces, a civilian was wounded by gunshots near the Gaza Strip border, to which the military responded with tank fire on Hamas military positions in the Gaza Strip. Three Palestinians were wounded, according to the Ministry of Health in Gaza. Information on whether they were civilians or Hamas members was not shared.

On 02.01.22, the Israeli Defense Forces claim they carried out several air strikes against military targets in the Gaza Strip in response to two missiles fired from the Gaza Strip on 01.01.22 that crashed into the Mediterranean Sea. The target of the two missiles was initially unclear. These are some of the first cross-border air strikes to be carried out since the conflict broke out between Hamas and Israel in May 2021.

High-ranking meeting between Abbas and Gantz

On 28.12.21, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas and Israeli Defence Minister Benny Gantz met for talks in Israel. Gantz then decided on several confidence-building measures to improve the living conditions for Palestinians in the Palestinian Autonomous Territories. Among other things, the residence status of 6,000 Palestinian residents and 3,500 Palestinians registered in Gaza in the West Bank is to be legalised. In addition, further entry permits for Israel are to be issued to Palestinian business people and the Palestinian authorities under Abbas are to be granted a loan of ILS 100 million (approx. EUR 28.4 million, as of 03.01.22) from tax revenues.

Russian Federation

Court orders against Memorial human rights organisation

Memorial International, the country's oldest and best-known human rights group is to be dissolved. Russia's supreme court ordered the closure of Memorial International on 28.12.21. The umbrella organisation includes the regional departments and the Memorial Human Rights Centre. While Memorial International concentrates on historical investigations of human rights violations, the Memorial Human Rights Centre focuses, among other things, on human rights violations in the North Caucasus and the situation of political prisoners. On 29.12.21, a Moscow city court ordered the closure of the Human Rights Centre. Both orders were based on violations of the so-called Foreign Agents Law (cf. BN of 15.11.21). Memorial denies the allegations and has announced that it will appeal both court decisions.

Somalia

Security forces clash in Bosaso (Puntland)

In the port city of Bosaso, capital of the Bari region (Puntland), clashes that lasted several days broke out on 21.12.21 between security forces loyal to the Puntland government and the Puntland Security Force (PSF), an elite anti-terrorist brigade. At least 14 people were reportedly killed and at least 63 were injured among the security forces and civilians. According to official reports, thousands fled the fighting. The conflict began when Puntland's president Said Abdullahi Deni dismissed the head of the PSF, Mohamud Osman Diyano, on 24.11.21 and appointed Brigadier General Mohamed Amin Abdullahi as his successor. Diyano and his supporters say his dismissal and replacement are illegal.

AMISOM mandate extended

The UN Security Council decided to extend the mandate of the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) by three months until 31.03.22 in Resolution 2614/2021, adopted on 21.12.21. This decision is intended to avoid a vacuum, as Somalia and the African Union (AU) do not agree on whether the AU should withdraw completely or what the mandate should be in the future (cf. BN of 30.08.21). The UN Security Council has therefore urged all parties to reach an agreement before February 2022 so that a new mandate can begin in March 2022.

Power struggle between President Farmajo and Prime Minister Roble

On 27.12.21, President Mhamed Abdullahi Mohamed, known as Farmajo, announced that he would suspend Prime Minister Mohamed Hussein Roble over alleged corruption, even though the interim constitution does not empower him to do so. In addition, Farmajo accused Roble of corruption and withdrew his mandate to organise the elections.

Roble called this an attempted coup and accused Farmajo of sabotaging the elections. As a result, heavily armed groups patrolled Mogadishu. Soldiers loyal to Roble took up positions near the presidential palace, while others patrolled the streets. On 01.01.22, Roble set up a ministerial committee to investigate his attempted suspension. The relationship between Farmajo and Roble has long been difficult (cf. BN of 26.04.21 and 13.09.21), but recent developments have fuelled concerns about the country's stability. International observers have called upon both sides to resolve the dispute.

Sri Lanka

Stricter rules for international marriages

Since 01.01.22, foreigners are only allowed to marry Sri Lankan nationals with the permission of the Ministry of Defence if they have been issued with a so-called "security clearance report". To obtain this, they must, among other things, submit a police clearance certificate issued by their home country and undergo a medical check-up. According to official sources, this measure is aimed at curbing money laundering and drug trafficking. Parts of the opposition and civil society groups criticise the regulation as discriminatory, as it mainly affects Tamils. Most international marriages are between them, and the foreign partners are often descendants of people who fled the civil war.

Sudan

Ongoing protests and violence against protestors / prime minister resigns

The protests and demonstrations against the military coup and the agreement to reinstate Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok also continued at the turn of the year. The security forces cracked down repeatedly, sometimes using massive force, on people participating in the protests in which five people were killed and 297 people, including security forces, were wounded on 30.12.21. According to media reports, at least two people died during the most recent clashes between protestors and security forces on 02.01.22, a day on which protests were also held in the capital of Karthoum Omdurman, Port Sudan and Njala. They say thousands of people took part in the demonstrations in these locations despite enhanced security measures and a temporary suspension of mobile Internet services.

Prime Minister Hamdok announced his resignation on national television in the late hours of the evening of 02.01.22. The prime minister decided to step down because the political forces in the country are divided and the discourse on a compromise for the political transition between the military and civilian forces has failed. Hamdok sees the country at a dangerous turning point that has already been passed. He said he had not been able to keep his promise to avert a political catastrophe and was now drawing the consequences.

Several media as well as the United Nations Human Rights Office reported that 13 allegations of rape and gang rape have been made and there have also been reports of sexual harassment of women by security forces during the protests on 19.12.21 (cf. BN of 20.12.21). The UN has called for an independent investigation into these allegations, as well as an investigation into the injury and killing of demonstrators as a result of the use of force by security forces.

Syria

Latakia: suspected Israeli attack on port

Syrian media reported an overnight bombardment on the country's main port in Latakia on 28.12.21. According to the report, the missiles, which were reportedly fired over the eastern Mediterranean, hit the container terminal and started a fire that also damaged several adjacent buildings. There are no reports of casualties or deaths.

A similar, albeit less serious, attack on the same terminal had already been carried out on 07.12.21. An anonymous source, said to be familiar with the port's operations, told an international news agency that large quantities of Iranian arms shipments were said to have been stored in the terminal in question.

Idlib: air strike hits water supply pipelines

According to media reports, Russian warplanes dropped bombs over Idlib Governorate on 02.01.22, some of which hit a water pumping station in the capital of Idlib. A representative of the local water utility service reported that the pumping station was out of action as a result of the damage. A UN official confirmed the destruction of the plant and warned against attacks on civilian infrastructure.

Israel: plans to double population on the Golan Heights

Israel's Prime Minister Naftali Bennett announced on 27.12.21 an infrastructure programme aimed at doubling the Israeli population in the Golan Heights. The disputed territory first came under Israeli control in the so-called Six-Day War of 1967 and was eventually annexed in 1981. The annexation was recognised by the US in 2019, the only other country in the world to do so. The international community, however, still considers the Golan Heights to be part of Syria. The Syrian government has rejected the new plans.

Approximately 50,000 people live on the territory spanning around 1,200 square metres, half of them consisting of Jewish Israelis and the other half of Arab Druze, who used to belong to Syria and of whom only a small number have so far taken Israeli citizenship.

Bahrain reappoints ambassador to Damascus

The Gulf state appointed its first ambassador to Syria in more than a decade on 30.12.21. At the beginning of the Syrian conflict, Bahrain was one of the states supporting the armed opposition in Syria. The embassy in Damascus had already been reopened in 2018.

Togo

Journalists and activist provisionally released

The journalists Ferdinand Ayité and Joël Egah were released provisionally on 31.12.21. They had been detained on 10.12.21 after they had criticised two ministers in an online broadcast (cf. BN of 13.12.21).

The activist Fovi Katakou was released provisionally on 20.12.21 and placed under judicial control. He had been detained on 11.12.21 (cf. BN of 20.12.21).

Ukraine

Two new channels closed down

On 28.12.21, President Volodymyr Zelensky issued a decree banning with immediate effect the continued operation of the Ukrainian news channels Ukrlive.tv and Pershy Nezalezhny, which are considered to be pro-opposition. According to media reports, the broadcasting ban will last for five years. Last year, three news channels were closed down at Zelensky's instigation. They were close to the Opposition Platform - For Life party, which is considered to be pro-Russian (cf. BN of 08.02.21).

Venezuela

Political prisoners and prison conditions

According to the NGO Justicia Venezolana, political prisoner Igbert José Marín Chaparro has been on hunger strike since 21.12.21 in order to obtain the visit of independent organisations, such as the International Red Cross and a commission of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, to verify the cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment he and other prisoners say they have experienced in detention. On the same day, according to media reports, the son of the political prisoner Raúl Isaías Baduel (cf. BN of 18.10.21), who died in custody, Josnar Adolfo, was admitted to hospital to undergo surgery for injuries allegedly caused by torture in the Sebin intelligence service prison. According to his organisation and Amnesty International (ai), the health of Javier Tarazona, a human rights defender and director of the NGO Fundaredes, who was imprisoned for his work, is also deteriorating due to a lack of medical care (cf. BN of 05.07.21). According to the NGO Foro Penal, the number of political prisoners as of 28.12.21 was 244. A report published by the NGO Observatorio Venezolano de Prisiones (Venezuelan Prisons Observatory) on

21.12.21 also criticises the fact that at least 70 percent of the prisoners are severely malnourished and only about 12 percent of the detainees regularly receive three meals a day. Back in November 2021, more than 600 prisoners detained at a prison in the western state of Mérida had protested against the poor supply situation and lack of medical care by going on hunger strike. On 28.12.21, the director of the NGO Provea said in a television interview that there was evidence of secret detention centres in the country where prisoners were also being tortured and treated inhumanely.

Security situation

The Venezuelan Violence Observatory recorded a total of 11,081 violent deaths in 2021, which corresponds to an average of about 40.9 per 100,000 inhabitants. This represents a slight decrease in the number of cases compared to the previous year when 11,891 offences were recorded. It claims violence is particularly rampant in the capital district (77.9 per 100,000 inhabitants) and in the federal states of Miranda, Bolívar, Delta Amacuro und Aragua. In addition, the presence of armed groups continues in the Venezuelan-Colombian border region, where they often seize effective government power and replace the state's monopoly on the use of force. In addition, a total of 1,634 disappeared persons were registered in 2021.

Power cuts between January and November 2021

According to the Chairpersons of the Committee of People Affected by Power Outages, a total of 178,927 power cuts occurred in the country between January and November 2021, of which 22,978 occurred in November 2021 alone. They also spoke of an increasing deterioration of the national electricity system, which affects the economy and healthcare, among other things, and rejected the explanation often given by officials who blame power cuts on alleged terrorist attacks.

Vietnam

Independent journalists face prison sentence

On 31.12.21, a court in Hanoi sentenced the journalist Le Trong Hung to five years in prison, handing down a suspended sentence of a further five years. He had been charged with violating Article 117 (1) of the Vietnamese Penal Code which makes it a criminal offence to "create, store and disseminate information, documents and other material directed against the Socialist Republic of Vietnam". Hung had posted several videos on Facebook with content that was critical of the government. He is the co-founder of the independent social media TV station Chen Hung Viet Nam TV (CHTV) and had already been arrested on 27.03.21 after running for the National Assembly elections. He was not allowed to meet with his lawyer until 22.11.21.

Yemen

UN reduces food rations

The United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) announced on 22.12.21 that it would be reducing food rations for around eight million people in Yemen from January 2022. The reason given was a funding gap of more than US\$ 1 billion. The reduced rations correspond to half of the WFP minimum rations. A further five million people at acute risk of hunger and malnutrition will continue to receive full rations.

Air strikes against Sanaa airport

The anti-Houthi coalition led by Saudi Arabia carried out an air strike against the airport in Sanaa on 20.12.21. The coalition claimed that the airport's facilities were being used to launch cross-border drone and missile attacks into Saudi Arabia. The Houthis subsequently cancelled all flights until 28.12.21. Sanaa airport has been closed for commercial flights for years, although some UN planes as well as ambulances and planes carrying relief supplies are allowed to take off and land.

Missile and air strikes continue

According to the coalition, a military camp of the Houthis was damaged during air strikes carried out by the anti-Houthi coalition in Sanaa on 23.12.21. The Houthis, on the other hand, say that a hospital and a prison were hit.

After missiles fired by the Houthis killed two people in Saudi Arabia on 24.12.21, the coalition carried out further air strikes on the greater Sanaa area on 25.12.21, killing at least three civilians and three Houthi militants. For months, the Houthis have been launching drone and missile attacks on targets in Saudi Arabia, although these attacks very rarely result in fatalities. By contrast, the coalition has repeatedly carried out air strikes against targets in Sanaa in recent weeks.

Houthis seize ship

A spokesperson for the anti-Houthi coalition announced on 03.01.22 that the Houthis had taken control of a ship flying the flag of the United Arab Emirates. The incident occurred off the coast of the western Yemeni city of Hodeidah. According to the spokesperson, the ship was carrying medical equipment. The Houthis were ordered by the coalition to surrender the ship immediately.

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