



Briefing Notes

Group 62 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

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Afghanistan

Security situation

On 16.01.22, it was reported that the uprising by Uzbek Taliban against the arrest of a commander in Faryab province had ended. Nevertheless, on 17.01.22, the Taliban sent 2,500 troops into the adjacent, northern province of Sar-e-Pul. On 17.01.22, the Taliban raided caches of ammunitions belonging to the insurgent Hazara General Ali Poor in Wardak province. On 18.01.22, a magnetic mine attached to a Taliban vehicle exploded in the Punjab valley, killing seven Taliban fighters and injuring several others. The National Resistance Front of Afghanistan led by Ahmad Massoud has claimed responsibility for the attack. It claimed it had already attacked a Taliban checkpoint in Takhar province on 16.01.22, killing three people. The Taliban confirmed an attack had taken place but said there were no casualties. On 19.01.22, a Taliban commander, his son and three other civilians were shot dead in eastern Kunar province. The gunman is said to have defected from the Taliban to the Islamic State in Khorasan Province (ISKP). The ISKP claimed responsibility for an attack carried out on a minivan in the city of Herat on 23.01.22, in which six people were killed and nine others were injured.

Government leadership

On 18.01.22, the Taliban-appointed Interior Minister Sirajuddin Haqqani called on the police in Kabul to punish people only in consultation with the ministry, to respect the amnesty for former government employees and to release those who have been wrongly arrested. On 19.01.22, the Taliban held a preliminary economic conference at which Prime Minister Mullah Muhammad Hassan Akhund delivered his first public video address as Prime Minister. He described the sanctions against Afghanistan as human rights violations and asked for humanitarian aid. Deputy Prime Minister Abdul Salaam Hanafi stressed that Afghanistan should not be dependent on foreign aid in the future. Finance Minister Hidayatullah Badri spoke about customs and tax revenues which he said need to be increased. Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi solicited internal and international investment. Deborah Lyons, head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), praised the Taliban's initial successes in financing the state (saying that USD 1 billion had been collected through exports and state employees had been paid). In Paktia province, two musicians had their hair cut, were beaten up and had their musical instruments burnt by the Taliban on 18.01.22 for performing despite a general ban on music. In Uruzgan province, state employees were ordered on 17.01.22 to dress according to Islamic rules, to wear a turban and to stop trimming their beards. It is reported that the Taliban have banned Afghan publishers from printing books that are against Islamic law (despite guidelines being unspecific, these include books by the Iranian Abdul Karim Soroush and the Israeli Yuval Noah Harari, for instance). According to reports issued on 18.01.22, the Taliban are trying to gain control of Afghan embassies around the world. On 23.01.22, Taliban delegates met with Afghan NGO representatives and members of the US government in Oslo, Norway, for negotiations.

Economic and humanitarian situation

At least 26 people were killed and around 800 houses were destroyed in an earthquake in Badghis province on 17.01.22. A girl died in a landslide in Ghor province and three people died in a snowstorm in Badakhshan. On 23.01.22, it was reported that heavy snowfall in 15 provinces killed 42 people, injured 76 people and destroyed 2,000 houses.

On 18.01.22, the first polio vaccination campaign of this year began. A central money exchange market in Kabul where permanently installed money exchange offices and independent vendors did business was closed down on 18.01.22. The market was instrumental in determining the value of the afghani (AFN) against foreign currencies. There is no information available about whether and when the market will be reopened. According to a report issued on 19.01.22, about 500,000 people have lost their jobs since takeover. On 20.01.22, the EU initiated aid projects worth EUR 268 million in the country. Since 21.01.22, the EU has had a minimal presence in the country to coordinate the distribution of humanitarian aid. On 11.01.22, Australia was the first country to transpose UN Security Council Resolution 2615 adopted on 22.12.21 into national law. This provides for a humanitarian exemption to the sanctions regime established against the Taliban, enabling the provision of humanitarian aid to the country. On 21.01.22, US politicians wrote a letter to US President Joe Biden demanding that the frozen reserves be released. On 22.01.22, the Taliban said they had begun distributing Chinese humanitarian assistance supplies in the north of the country.

In a survey conducted between September and October 2021 on socio-economic living conditions among 300 representative Afghans (150 women, 150 men between the age of 16 and 35) from the three largest cities Kabul, Herat and Mazar-e Sharif (100 respondents from 10 communities in each of the above-mentioned cities) on behalf of the Austrian asylum authorities, the following results were obtained: approx. 70% of the respondents feel relatively safe in their community and said they had not experienced any crime or violence on the streets, approx. 65% of the respondents were unemployed (6.5% had lost their jobs since the seizure of power) and only 23% were continuously employed, approx. 90% of respondents had a salary of less than the equivalent of EUR 80 per month, only about 4% of them were able to provide enough food and other essential goods for their families to survive, about 60% had the opportunity to get vaccinated against COVID-19, about 40% had access to healthcare and between 60% and 75% had access to drinking water. The majority of respondents live in stone houses which they own (50%), apartments or mud huts (rents are around EUR 40 to EUR 80 per month, rents in Herat are cheaper than in Kabul) and only a very small number of respondents live in tents. About 50% said they have regular electricity, 30% have internet via smartphone and all dwellings have solid roofs, windows and doors. 50% said they have a stove, refrigerator and running water. According to the authors of the study, the results need be seen in the light of an economy in free fall.

Protests / arrests

On 17.01.22, doctors and other employees at a hospital in Takhar province protested because they had not received their salaries for six months. On the same day, two people were shot dead by the Taliban at a checkpoint in Herat. On 19.01.22, fruit sellers and cart drivers protested at the market in Khost against the places allocated to them. The Taliban opened fire on the protesters, injuring two of them. On 18.01.22, in Takhar province, a commander of a militia that supported the former government against the Taliban was sought out by the Taliban, beaten up and subsequently arrested. On the same day, several members of the Afghan offshoot of the transnational Islamist party Hizb ut-Tahrir were also arrested in the province. The Taliban are accusing them of collaborating with the ISKP. The Taliban arrested a suspect in response to the shooting of a woman at a checkpoint on 13.01.22. They said she had been killed by mistake and offered to pay her family US\$ 5,700 in compensation. Protests by women continue unabated. In addition to demanding access to the education system and labour market, some women are also demanding the reopening of the Ministry of Women's Affairs and the release of Afghan reserves by the U.S. On 17.01.22, UN human rights experts warned that women were being increasingly and systematically banned from public life by the Taliban. Many, according to a new Human Rights Watch report on Ghazni province, are in reality confined to their homes there. On 23.01.22, UNAMA expressed concern about the disappearance of several women human rights activists in Kabul. In response, the Taliban said that they were not responsible, but that they generally had the right to crack down on dissidents and detain protestors.

The Taliban rejected journalists' earlier criticism of media censorship, stressing that a free media landscape is important to them. They said there would be no censorship as long as the media adhered to the principles of Islam. On 19.01.22, the journalist and former director of Khawar TV was attacked with a knife at the door of his home in

Kabul. He sustained minor injuries. On 17.01.22, the Afghanistan Analyst Network reported that attacks against the Hazara ethnic group have been on the rise again since November 2021, following a decline shortly after takeover. A particular target for bombings in Kabul are the Town-Ace minivans that usually transport well-educated Hazara (journalists, government employees, NGO workers). For the most part, the Taliban assess the threat posed by the ISKP as low but are not in a position to efficiently provide security for the Hazara.

Angola

Journalists assaulted at taxi drivers' strike

According to the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) in Luanda, six reporters from the news outlets TV Zimbo and TV Palanca were assaulted during the taxi drivers' strike on 10.01.22 (cf. BN of 17.01.22) when they tried to cover the events. The unknown attackers had accused the reporters of bias towards the government. Both TV stations were nationalised in the summer of 2020. The CPJ sees the media workers as scapegoats for anger against the state. It fears a negative impact on media freedom ahead of elections due to be held in August 2022 and has called on authorities to protect media professionals in their coverage of protests and to investigate recent events.

Armenia

President Armen Sarkissian resigns

Armenia's President Armen Sarkissian unexpectedly announced his resignation on 23.01.22. He had been in office since 02.03.18 and has regularly criticised Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan in the past, especially during the six-week war with Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh in the autumn of 2020. He later voiced objections to Pashinyan's replacement of Armenia's military leadership. In connection with his resignation, Sarkissian referred to the limited powers of the President of the Republic. He said the President did not have the necessary tools to influence the fundamental processes of domestic and foreign policy in the current difficult phase for the country, but that the President's tasks were of a more representative nature. Sarkissian called for a constitutional reform so that the next president could have more influence on the country's development. It is unclear who will succeed Sarkissian.

Bangladesh

Another fire occurs in refugee camp

According to reports, a fire broke out once again at a refugee camp in Ukhiya, Cox's Bazar, on 18.01.22. Several people reportedly suffered minor injuries and at least 27 shelters were damaged or destroyed in the fire at Camp 5. This is the third fire to occur at refugee camps in the region this year (cf. BN of 10.01.22). A large fire that broke out in March 2021 killed at least 15 people and destroyed around 10,000 shelters, according to UN figures (cf. BN of 29.03.21).

Burkina Faso

Gunfire exchanges at military barracks

On 23.01.22, gunfire exchanges took place in several barracks. Two barracks in the capital Ouagadougou were affected, one of them near the presidential palace, as well as locations in Kaya (capital of the Centre-Nord Region) and Ouahigouya (capital of the Nord Region). Various sources believe the trouble was caused by mutinous soldiers. According to media reports, mutineers demanded, among other things, the removal of the military leadership and increased manpower in the battle against extremists. Protesters sympathetic to the military vandalised the campaign headquarters of the ruling party People's Movement for Progress (Mouvement du Peuple pour le Progrès (MPP)) in Ouagadougou on the same day and set fire to it before police dispersed them. On 23.01.22, Defence Minister General Aimé Barthélémy Semporé was quick to deny rumours on national television that President Roch Kaboré had been detained by mutineers. The motive behind the gunfire is still unclear. On the same day, government spokesman Alkassoum Maiga denied that the military had taken over the country.

Authorities imposed a nationwide overnight curfew from 8:00 pm to 5:30 am until further notice and said schools were to remain closed on 24.01.22 and 25.01.22. Access to mobile internet was reportedly suspended. Access to Facebook has been not possible at all, or to a very limited extent, since 10.01.22. Government spokesperson Alkassoum Maiga justified this on 19.01.22 on grounds of security and other concerns of national interest but did not provide any further details.

For months, discontent with the government has been growing in the country in the face of ongoing violence by extremist groups. Since 08.01.22, military personnel and civilians have been arrested on suspicion of plotting to overthrow the government (cf. BN of 17.01.22).

Protests

On 22.01.22, several hundred people demonstrated in Ouagadougou against the government, which has been accused of not being able to stop violence by extremist groups. Protesters erected barricades and threw stones. Security forces dispersed the protests forcibly using tear gas. The authorities had previously banned the protest for security reasons. Police also broke up demonstrations in Ouahigouya (Nord Region) and other cities on 22.01.22.

Soldiers killed in explosion and military operations

On 21.01.22, two soldiers were killed by an IED while travelling between Ouahigouya and Titao (North Region). According to military sources, about 20 members of extremist groups were killed or wounded and six security forces were killed as a result of operations carried out by security forces in the Sahel region between 10.01. and 16.01.22.

Cameroon

Journalist completes 2,000 days in prison without being convicted

According to information provided by Reporters Without Borders (RSF), 71-year-old Cameroonian journalist and former director general of the state broadcaster Cameroon Radio and Television (CRTV) Amadou Vamouké has completed 2,000 days in prison without being convicted. Vamouké had been arrested on 29.06.16 and charged with the alleged misappropriation of public funds. Since then, he has been subjected to a never-ending trial which has been adjourned a total of 90 times and is the longest trial conducted under Operation Sparrowhawk, which was launched to fight corruption. Critics have repeatedly accused the Cameroonian government of exploiting the anti-corruption campaign to get rid of personalities regarded as a nuisance.

Colombia

Indigenous minor and environmental rights defender killed, a total of nine social leaders killed in 2022

On 14.01.22, fourteen-year-old indigenous environmental rights defender named Breiner David Cucuñame and two other members of the indigenous Nasa were killed during an unarmed patrol to protect indigenous territories in Cauca. The NGO Association of Indigenous Councils of Northern Cauca (Asociación de Cabildos Indígenas del Norte del Cauca (ACIN)) is accusing FARC dissidents of the crime. According to the organisation Indepaz, including Libardo Castillo Ortiz who was murdered on 20.01.22 in Barbacoas, Nariño, nine social leaders and human rights defenders have already been killed in 2022, and a total of 1,295 since the peace agreement was reached with the FARC in 2016.

Conflict in Arauca – car bomb detonated

On 19.01.22, one person was killed and five others were injured when a car bomb detonated in Saravena in the department of Arauca. In addition, numerous shops and houses were damaged or destroyed by the explosion. On 20.01.22, the Colombian government therefore imposed night-time curfews in the municipalities of Arauca, Arauquita, Fortul and Saravena and adopted numerous other security measures. According to Defence Minister Diego Andrés Molano, intelligence information had revealed that the perpetrators of the attack were FARC dissidents, allegedly from Frente 10, who had been embroiled in intensified turf wars with the ELN for supremacy on the border with Venezuela for several weeks.

Cuba

Mass trials and sentences against participants in July protests

Between 11.01.22 and 15.01.22, three mass trials were once again held in the cities of Havana, Santa Clara and Holguín against a total of 57 people, including several minors, for their participation in the July 2021 protests (cf. BN of 19.07.21). The public prosecutors are demanding substantial prison sentences of up to 30 years. According to the NGO Justicia 11J, first trials took place in December 2021, some of which ended with very high prison sentences. According to the NGO, a total of 158 people are accused of sedition, and more than 700 people remain in prison. According to the NGO Cubalex, a total of 1,339 people were arrested during the July 2021 protests, and 94 more were arrested during the protests announced for 15.11.21. Amnesty International say the standards of fair trial are often not respected in these summary proceedings. In this context, experts also speak of trials and long-term sentences that are intended to act as a deterrent and thus nip further protests in the bud.

Democratic Republic of the Congo

Violent dispersal of several, diverse political protests

According to reports broadcast the Okapi radio station created by the UN, police forces used force to break up several political protests in a number of different cities during the week of 17.01.22 to 30.01.22. Dozens of people were injured and several arrests were made.

On 18.01.22, police forces in the capital Lubumbashi of Haut-Katanga province allegedly used disproportionate force against an authorised demonstration by the former ruling alliance Common Front for Congo (Front commun pour le Congo (FCC)) led by former President Joseph Kabila. Fifty protesters were reportedly injured, several seriously, and at least 10 people were arrested. The protesters had demanded the release of Pastor Daniel Ngoy Mulunda, a former chairperson of the Independent National Electoral Commission (CÉNI) and a close associate of Kabila, who they consider to be a political prisoner and who had been sentenced to three years in prison for incitement to hatred. The politician Moise Katumbi from the party Together for the Republic (Ensemble pour la République) which belongs to the current parliamentary coalition Sacred Union of the Nation (Union Sacrée de la Nation (USN)), and other political and civil society actors criticised the excessive use of force against the peaceful protesters. Tear gas and live bullets were used, they said.

On 20.01.22, police forces in the capital Kinshasa used force against peaceful protesters belonging to the political party Nkita, who demanded the resignation of the government and the Prime Minister Sama Lukonde because of the shortage of supplies the population faces. Several people were injured and arrested. On 20.01.22, police forces in the Isangi territory of Tshopo province used disproportionate force against peaceful protesters from the youth association Youth Dynamics in the territory of Isangi (Dynamique des jeunes dans le territoire d'Isangi), who were demanding the resignation of the local administrator. Several people, including the journalist Justine Lifimbo, who had intended to report on the banned youth demonstration, were temporarily arrested. According to the NGO Observatory of Press Freedom in Africa (L'Observatoire de la liberté de la presse en Afrique), the journalist had to undergo medical treatment after being released from police custody.

On 22.01.22, police forces had used disproportionate force, including tear gas and rubber bullets, to suppress civil society protests in the provincial capital of Goma (North Kivu), which had been banned in advance by the authorities. Lobby groups, youth groups and civil movements, including the protest movement Fight for Change (Lutte Pour Le Changement (LUCHA)), Cri du peuple and Véranda Mutsanga, had protested against the growing insecurity in the provincial capital and for an end to be put to the state of siege declared in May 2021 and considered ineffective in the provinces of North Kivu and Ituri where militia violence is rife. At least four people were reportedly arrested.

Ethiopia

Army threatens to enter Tigray

In an interview held with the state-owned TV station Fana, Ethiopian Defence Forces' Deputy Army Chief, General Abebaw Tadesse, stated on 21.01.22 that Tigray is part of Ethiopia and there will be no peace until the Tigray

People's Liberation Front (TPLF) has been eliminated. He ruled out negotiations with the TPLF and threatened to seize the regional capital Mekelle.

It is unclear to what extent the threat also reflects the attitude of the Ethiopian government, which has not yet responded to requests for comment. The TPLF's spokesperson, Getachew Reda, could not be reached for comment on the statements either.

UNHCR concerned about the humanitarian situation of Eritrean refugees in Tigray

UNHCR is deeply concerned about the deteriorating conditions for the approximately 25,000 Eritrean refugees in the Mai Aini and Adi Harush refugee camps in Tigray who reportedly face a lack of food, medicine and access to clean water. The first deaths are reported to have already occurred there. Due to the poor security situation in the region, UNHCR has hardly any access to the refugee camps.

Gambia

Inauguration of President Barrow, improving the living conditions of the population

On 19.01.22, President Adama Barrow, who had been confirmed in office on 04.12.21 with 53% of the votes cast, was sworn in for a second five-year term. On 28.12.21, the Supreme Court had dismissed the election petition filed by the main opposition United Democratic Party (UDP) alleging irregularities, as well as a subsequent application by the UDP for a review of the ruling on 18.01.22. The UDP under Ousainou Darboe is still refusing to recognise the election results. In his inaugural address, President Barrow pledged good governance, respect for guarantees under the rule of law and the promotion and protection of basic human rights. He announced the drafting of a new constitution that would include, among other things, limits on a president's ability to be re-elected. President Barrow did not indicate whether such term limits would apply retroactively or would allow him to run for two more consecutive terms as president. According to press reports, tackling high youth unemployment and the cost of living, which has been rising steadily since 2017, improving health care and increasing agricultural production to combat food insecurity in the country are among the biggest challenges facing the president in his new term of office. Citing unspecified statistics, the Gambian news portal The Point states that youth unemployment is currently at 41.5%.

Guinea

Ex-President leaves the country

On 17.01.22, former President Alpha Condé, who was ousted in a coup on 05.09.21, travelled to the United Arab Emirates for medical treatment. The interim government had already granted him permission to leave the country on 31.12.21 (cf. BN of 03.01.22). According to media reports, Condé's departure coincided with an order issued by the Attorney General's Office to initiate investigations into crimes committed during his term in office from 2010 to 2021.

Transitional parliament convened

According to media reports, the President of the ruling junta National Committee of Reconciliation and Development (Comité national du rassemblement pour le développement, (CNRD)), Mamady Doumbouya, convened the transitional parliament, called the National Transitional Council (Conseil National de Transition (CNT)) on 22.01.22. Doumbouya appointed Danso Kourouma, a civil society figure who had advocated for a third mandate for Alpha Condé, CNT president. Another 81 people belong to the CNT. They represent business and workers' associations as well as political parties. The CNT is expected to play an important role in organising the return to civil order. This means that together with the leading CNRD and a transitional government led by Prime Minister Mohamed Béavogui, three essential bodies now exist in the country's current political configuration.

Iran

Trade unionist arrested

According to media reports, a teachers' union activist was arrested in Tehran on 19.01.22 and taken to Evin Prison to serve a six-month prison sentence. The man is reportedly the secretary of the Teachers' Union of Iran. He had already been arrested in mid-February 2019 for his trade union activities in connection with a protest held in front of the parliament building in the capital and was later sentenced to two years' imprisonment by the 26th branch of the Revolutionary Court. The prison sentence was reduced to six months shortly afterwards during appellate proceedings. The exact wording of the charges was not disclosed. In the past two months, there have been repeated protests by teachers demanding an increase in their salaries (cf. BN of 13.12.21).

Human rights campaigner sentenced to eight years in prison

During a hearing that lasted only five minutes, human rights campaigner Narges Mohammadi was sentenced to eight years in prison, 70 lashes and is banned from communicating by telephone for two years, after being held in pre-trial detention for two months. This was reported by Iranian foreign media, citing the activist's husband. No details about the reasons for the sentence, which was handed down in the absence of the defendant, were disclosed. Mohammadi had already been sentenced to 30 months' imprisonment and 80 lashes for propaganda against the Islamic Republic on 27.05.21 (cf. BN of 31.05.21) but had not yet begun serving the sentence before she was re-arrested on 16.11.21 (cf. BN of 22.11.21) and transferred to Evin prison. Before the new sentence was announced, Mohammadi had been transferred to the Qarchak women's prison in Varamin (south of Tehran). During her pre-trial detention, she was confronted by intelligence officers who accused her of spying for Saudi Arabia because she had been co-nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize with a Saudi women's activist. Narges Mohammadi is the deputy head of the Centre of Defenders of Human Rights and is involved with the bereaved families of the victims of the November 2019 riots. She also fights against the practice of incommunicado detention to extort confessions for politically-motivated criminal proceedings.

Poet opposed to Iran's regime arrested while trying to cross the border

The poet Qasem Bahrami, known under the pseudonym Sheyda-ye Hamadani, who is opposed to Iran's regime was arrested while trying to leave the country near the city of Maku. Citing a news agency close to the Basij, Iranian foreign media report that he was arrested while trying to cross the border into Turkey on 15.01.22. The regime critic was accused of trying to leave the country with the help of splinter groups allied with foreign intelligence services. He was also accused of deliberately insulting sacred principles in order to gain notoriety and obtain asylum status. The poet had been arrested in Mashhad on 15.09.21 after posting a critical video on social media (cf. BN of 04.10.21) but was later released on bail.

Journalist and trade union activist receives prison sentence

According to media reports, a business journalist in Tehran was sentenced on 20.01.22 to a total of four years and three months in prison, three years and seven months for charges of conspiracy and collusion against national security, and eight months for spreading propaganda against the regime. The man had taken part in a rally in support of the workers of the Haft Tappeh sugar cane company (cf. BN of 22.03.21 and 31.05.21) that took place in front of the Ministry of Justice building in Tehran in 2021. After his arrest, he was released from Evin prison on bail of 500 million toman (approx. EUR 1,570, as of 24.01.21).

Iraq

ISIS attack against Iraqi forces in Diyala

In the early hours of 21.01.22, ISIS fighters broke into a barracks of the Iraqi military and killed eleven soldiers. The incident occurred in the al-Azm district in Diyala province and is the deadliest attack to have been carried out against Iraqi forces in months. ISIS has claimed responsibility for the attack. The Iraqi military carried out air strikes against ISIS targets in Nineveh Governorate on 23.01.22, killing three suspected ISIS fighters.

Lebanon

UNRWA appeal for donations

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) appealed to the international community on 19.01.22 for urgently needed funding to continue providing assistance to Palestinian refugees in Lebanon. The severe economic crisis in Lebanon has exacerbated the situation of Palestinians on the ground, according to UNRWA, particularly affecting access to food and medical care.

Mexico

Three journalists murdered

On 17.01.22, the journalist Alfonso Margarito Martínez Esquivel was found shot dead in Tijuana. According to a colleague, he had already applied for admission to a protection programme for journalists in December 2021 due to threats he had previously received. He had mainly reported on police and security issues in the border city. On 23.01.22, Lourdes Mandonado who was shot dead in Tijuana was the third journalist to be assassinated in Mexico in 2022. The journalist José Luis Gamboa was stabbed to death in the state of Veracruz on 10.01.22, under as yet unexplained circumstances. He had reported mainly on corruption and drug violence on his website Inforegio. NGOs were quick to criticise published hypotheses on alleged motives for murder in the former and latter cases and call for an unbiased investigation that takes into account the victims' journalistic activities as a motive.

Myanmar

Security situation

On 16.01.22, junta troops attacked six villages in Myaing Township (Magway Region) and raided four others. They set fire to and destroyed many houses, causing thousands of people to flee. In Latyetma village, locals found the remains of three people killed by junta forces during a raid on 11.01.22. According to local media reports, about 800 Myanmar military (Tatmadaw) soldiers have been deployed to Myaing to clear villages, have been destroying property and carrying out arrests since 10.01.22. The aim of the campaign, which had been extended to 20 villages by 18.01.22, was to locate People's Defence Forces (PDF) camps and break resistance to military rule, they said.

According to a statement issued by the underground National Unity Government (NUG), NUG forces carried out attacks on members, infrastructure and businesses of the ruling State Administrative Council (SAC) in five townships in Yangon between 08.01.22. and 16.01.22. A non-commissioned officer and a member of the council were reportedly killed and other military personnel injured.

In Naypyidaw, the Fight for Justice-Tatkon group killed a retired military captain on 16.01.22.

The military killed six civilians, including two children, in air strikes on Nan Mae Khon town and a refugee camp in Hpruso (Kayah State) on 16.01.22 and 17.01.22. More than 20,000 people fled. The SAC cited reports that PDFs were planning to carry out attacks on military positions in Loikaw from Nan Mae Khon as the reason for the action. On 19.01.22, PDF groups attacked a government office in Loikaw, Kayah State, killing 15 Tatmadaw soldiers, according to their PDF's own sources. Junta spokesperson Zaw Min Tun confirmed PDFs had carried out several attacks on military installations in Loikaw but did not comment on casualties.

Junta forces shot dead four civilians and arrested five others during a raid in Lezin (Monywa Township, Sagaing Region) on 17.01.22. Tatmadaw soldiers torched San Myo village in Gangaw (Magway) on 18.01.22 following clashes with local PDFs, destroying over 100 houses. In Pinlebu Township (Sagaing), the Pinlebu PDF stormed the police station and a military camp on the same day, resulting in skirmishes between the military and the PDF with deaths and injuries on both sides. In Madara (Mandalay Region), Madara PDF troops attacked nine military vehicles with landmines on 18.01.22, injuring several soldiers. Following the attack, junta forces opened fire in Bo Kone village, killing two civilians, including one child. In Yinmabin (Sagaing), a group of three PDFs reportedly managed to free five captured civilians on 19.01.22 after several days of fighting with security forces.

Four out of 13 people abducted by junta forces from Letpan village (Natogyi commune) on 18.01.22 died at an interrogation centre in Mandalay. Relatives suspect torture as the cause of death.

According to reports by the Shan Human Rights Foundation, the military laid landmines near oil and gas pipelines in Hsipaw (Shan State) to protect a pumping station from attacks by opponents of the regime.

As a result of the fighting between the Tatmadaw and an alliance of the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) and local PDFs, which has been ongoing since mid-December 2021, it is estimated that up to 50,000 people from Myawaddy, Kawkareik and Hpapun townships have been displaced in Kayin State. The number of people displaced across the Thai border fluctuates between 3,000 and 5,000 daily. In Chin State, fighting between the military and PDFs, which has been occurring daily since 08.01.22, had displaced hundreds of people from Falam Township and at least 3,000 from Matupi Township by 20.01.22, including about 400 to neighbouring India.

In a report published on 17.01.22, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) classified the security and humanitarian situation in Myanmar as unstable and documented an intensification of clashes and increase in civilian casualties in Kayin and Kayah states and Magway and Sagaing regions. In December 2021 alone, armed clashes were reported in ten townships (Kale, Kanbalu, Kani, Kyunhla, Mingin, Monywa, Pale, Tabayin, Taze and Ye-U) in Sagaing. The report says the security situation has also deteriorated in Chin State. As of 27.12.21, an estimated 320,900 people had been displaced throughout Myanmar due to clashes following the military coup on 01.02.21. This brings the total number of internally displaced persons to approximately 661,000.

Freedom on the press

On 18.01.22, security forces in Dawei (Tanintharyi region) arrested a female reporter, a male reporter and an office worker from the news organisation Dawei Watch. On the day of the arrests, Dawei Watch had reported that over 60 people had been killed and over 900 arrested in Tanintharyi since the coup.

Nigeria

Military: around 24,000 persons surrender within eight months

24,059 persons designated as terrorists or family members of terrorists by Nigerian government agencies, specifically 5,326 men, 7,550 women and 11,183 children, surrendered to the military in north-eastern Nigeria between May 2021 and the beginning of January 2022. This was revealed in media reports citing official data from the Nigerian Defence Headquarters (DHQ) on counter-insurgency and other internal security operations on 06.01.22. All of them were duly registered and handed over to the relevant authorities. DHQ further says that the military rescued 729 kidnap victims and killed 1,910 terrorists, armed bandits and other criminals across the country during the above-mentioned period. In addition, a large number of people were killed in military air strikes. Hundreds of people were also arrested and stolen goods such as weapons, ammunition, fuel and livestock were confiscated.

North-East: children abducted

According to media reports, jihadists abducted more than a dozen children in an attack on a village in Borno State on 20.01.22. The incident took place in the village of Piyemi, near Chibok. According to a source, the kidnap victims are 13 girls and seven boys between the age of 12 and 15. According to eyewitness reports, the attackers also killed the local vigilante commander and another person, set fire to buildings and looted shops. The town of Chibok hit global headlines in 2014 after Boko Haram attacked a school there and abducted 276 girls. More than 100 of them are still in the hands of the kidnapers or are considered to be missing (cf. BN of 23.08.21).

Minister of the Interior: shoot to kill order for anyone involved in jailbreaks

Addressing prison staff in Ibadan, southern Nigeria, on 17.01.22, Interior Minister Rauf Aregbesola called on prison guards to shoot to kill those involved in jailbreaks, according to media reports. He justified the action by saying that breaches of security were unacceptable. In 2021, armed groups in Nigeria attacked various prisons and allowed many inmates to escape. Observers counted a total of around 5,000 freed inmates or inmates who escaped as a result of the attacks on prisons during this period. These events resulted in the deaths of both prison guards and prisoners. For instance, the escape of over 1,800 inmates on 05.04.21 from a prison in Owerri, Imo State (cf. BN of 12.04.21) and of over 250 inmates on 28.11.21 in Jos, Plateau State, hit the headlines (cf. BN of 06.12.21).

Pakistan

Attack on security forces in Islamabad

In the late hours of the evening of 17.01.22 and in the early hours of 18.01.22, two militants of the Pakistani Taliban, Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), carried out a raid on a police checkpoint in the Pakistani capital Islamabad. In the gun battle that ensued, the two attackers and a one policeman were killed and two other policemen were injured. Attacks on security forces have been rare in Islamabad so far.

Death penalty for blasphemy

On 19.01.22, a court in Rawalpindi (Punjab) sentenced a Muslim woman to death and gave her a lengthy prison sentence for blasphemy. The woman had been found guilty of sending a text message insulting the Prophet Muhammad.

Bomb blast in Lahore

On 20.01.22, at least two civilians were killed, two dozen people were injured and several shops were destroyed in a bomb explosion at a busy shopping market in Pakistan's second largest city, Lahore (Punjab). The Baloch Nationalist Army (BNA), a Baloch militant separatist group, claimed responsibility for the attack. The BNA was formed from a merger of the former Baloch Republican Army and the United Baloch Army.

Palestinian Autonomous Territories / Israel

East Jerusalem: eviction and house demolition in Sheikh Jarrah

According to media reports, clashes broke out on 17.01.22 between the Israeli police and residents of the East Jerusalem neighbourhood of Sheikh Jarrah and their supporters during the forced eviction of the house of a Palestinian family of 15. Several family members had barricaded themselves inside and on top of the house to prevent eviction and demolition. The father of the family threatened to burn the house down. The house has been under threat of eviction since 2017. After the family refused to comply with the eviction orders, the Israeli military stormed the house on 19.01.22, arrested several family members and activists and demolished the house. The municipality plans to build a school on the site.

Administrative detention extended for a Palestinian suffering from an autoimmune disease

On 18.01.22, the family of a young Palestinian man announced that an Israeli court had extended his detention for the fourth time until mid-May 2022. He has been in administrative detention since 22.01.21 and just turned 18 in the week of his detention was re-extended.

According to his family, he suffers from the neuromuscular disorder myasthenia gravis, which manifests itself in severe muscle weakness. He also had a lung tumour removed a few months before he was arrested. The family have expressed concerns about their son's health.

The Israeli military justified the administrative detention of the man, saying he is suspected of involvement in terrorist activities, but, citing classified information, did not provide further details on the charges and has not yet filed any indictments.

Various organisations, including UNRWA as well as the European Parliament Delegation for Relations with Palestine (DPAL), have called for the release of the young man on humanitarian grounds. The practice of administrative detention is highly controversial and detention without charge for long periods of time has been repeatedly criticised by human rights organisations.

Russian Federation

Prison sentences for Jehovah's Witnesses

On 20.01.22, the Seversk City Court, Tomsk Region, sentenced a member of the Jehovah's Witnesses religious community to seven years' imprisonment followed by two years' parole-like police control and a five-year ban on publishing educational content for organising activities of an extremist association (Article 282.2(1) of the Russian Criminal Code). According to the investigating authorities, under the leadership of Yevgeny Korotun, religious

services were held in the local congregation and the proselytising of new members was organised. Two other Jehovah's Witnesses were accused of involvement in extremist activities (Article 282.2 para. 2) in connection with participation in communal religious services and received prison sentences of three and four years respectively. As early as 17.01.22, a Jehovah's Witness in Pavlovsky, Krasnodar region, had been sentenced to two years' imprisonment after teaching fellow believers how to study the Bible.

According to Human Rights Watch, the number of Jehovah's Witnesses has reached a new high since the denomination was banned in 2017, with more than 80 people currently in detention.

Sierra Leone

Sierra Leone marks 20 years since the end of the civil war

Dozens of people attended a ceremony held near the capital Freetown on 18.01.22 to mark the 20th anniversary of the end of the civil war in their country. The conflict, largely financed by so-called "blood diamonds", had claimed the lives of tens of thousands of people. The use of child soldiers was widespread. Around 70 activists gathered in Lungi on the anniversary for an event organised by the Centre for Memory and Reparation. According to Agence France-Presse (AFP), they marched carrying flags from Sierra Leone and lit a flame. Sierra Leone is still recovering from civil war and is one of the poorest countries in the world. Its economy was also affected by the Ebola epidemic that hit West Africa between 2014 and 2016.

Somalia

Attack on a restaurant in Mogadishu

On 18.01.22, a suicide bomber killed at least five people when he blew himself up at a busy restaurant in the Wadajir district of Mogadishu. At least 14 other people were injured. Security forces and civilians had gathered at the restaurant. Al-Shabaab has claimed responsibility for the attack.

A few hours after the first attack was carried out, a second car bomb detonated in the same neighbourhood. There are no reports of fatalities or injuries.

Drought

The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) said on 20.01.22 that more than 3.2 million people have been affected by the worsening drought in several parts of the country as a result of another failed rainfall season in late 2021. It says there is a high risk that the next rainy season could also fail at the beginning of 2022. The drought has led to resource conflicts that have already claimed at least 15 lives and injured others. In addition, thousands of people have been displaced.

Raid at radio station, staff detained

On 21.01.22, seven journalists were arrested during a raid on the local independent radio station "Hiiraan Weyn" in Beledweyne and the radio station was briefly closed down after conducting interviews with the local armed resistance opposing the Hirshabelle authorities. The journalists were held for several hours and were denied contact with their families and lawyers before they were released without charge.

South Sudan

New peace agreement

The government (Sudan People's Liberation Movement-In Government, (SPLM-IG)) and the opposition sub-group Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army - the breakaway Kit-Gwang faction (SPLM/A-IO Kit-Gwang) signed a peace agreement on 16.01.22. In this context, a first delegation of the Agwelek Division belonging to the SPLM/SPLA-IO Kit-Gwang travelled to Juba for a meeting with President Salva Kiir on 20.01.22. In the following two days, further delegations travelled to Juba, including General Simon Gatwech Dual, who commands the SPLM/A-IO Kit-Gwang. The peace agreement that has now been concluded is based on the revived 2018 peace agreement and provides, among other things, for the future integration of the SPLM/A-IO Kit-Gwang forces into

the South Sudan People's Defence Forces (SSPDF). In addition, the land of the Shilluk tribe is to be returned according to the colonial borders of 1956.

Critics consider the departure of the Kit-Gwang faction from the SPLM/A-IO and the commencement of the peace agreement to be extremely difficult, since so far, the formation of a unified army has failed primarily due to the merging of the different command structures and power structures of the participating armed forces. Now another command structure has been added with the Kit-Gwang faction, which has made it even more difficult to reach a consensus. Moreover, the split from the SPLM/A-IO is not conducive to a united approach.

Sudan

Protests continue

On 17.01.22, new protests were held in the capital Khartoum, in Omdurman and in Wad Madani in the south of the country. According to media reports, the security forces used tear gas, live ammunition, water cannons and stun grenades. The Central Committee of Sudanese Doctors say seven demonstrators were fatally wounded by shots fired by security forces. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCHR) condemned the use of force against protesters and called for those responsible to be brought to justice. More than a quarter of those injured were said to have been injured by the targeted firing of tear gas cartridges, which violates international operational standards. Due to the massive use of force and live ammunition, the group Forces for Freedom and Change (FFC) called for two-day civil disobedience and the commemoration of the protesters killed from 18.01.22. Following the call, many shops remained closed. Protesters also set up roadblocks, some of which were set on fire. Security forces again reacted with the use of tear gas.

On 19.01.22, the U.S. envoy to the Horn of Africa and the US Assistant Secretary of State for Africa arrived in the capital for talks. The U.S. made it clear that it will continue to withhold the currently frozen aid payments to Sudan until the violence against protesters has ended and a civilian-led transitional government is in place. During protests held the same day, another protester was killed by the use of live ammunition in Omdurman. Since the coup on 25.10.21, seventy-two people have been killed and more than 2,000 have been injured during protests. According to the information available to UNICEF, nine children have been killed and 13 injured during the demonstrations so far. In total, UNICEF is currently investigating more than 120 serious violations against children.

On 21.01.22, more than 50 Sudanese judges presented a joint statement condemning the violent actions of the security forces, calling for a judicial review of the incidents and rejecting the military's involvement in government. The perpetrators of the violence are to stand trial. On the same day, demonstrations took place in Khartoum to commemorate the victims of the repression. To this end, the protesters gathered in front of the homes of the deceased persons.

Syria

North-east: coordinated attack on prison detaining ISIS fighters

In the early hours of 20.01.22, a large number of fighters attacked the Gweiran detention centre in Hasakah, where thousands of suspected jihadists are being held. The Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) on the ground say this is the largest attack carried out by ISIS militia since the so-called caliphate was defeated militarily about three years ago. According to the SDF, the attackers first detonated a car bomb at the entrance of the prison and then opened fire on the security forces. Dozens of people, including members of the security forces, ISIS fighters and civilians, were killed in the ensuing fighting which spread to the surrounding neighbourhood. By the evening of 21.01.22, the attackers still had about a quarter of the prison under their control. A statement issued by the SDF reported that the remaining attackers entrenched in the prison had taken to using more than 600 underage boys who were in the prison's rehabilitation wing as human shields, making it difficult for the SDF to recapture it. ISIS also released a video in which more than a dozen people from the civilian prison staff were paraded as hostages.

On 23.01.22, US attack helicopters flew attacks on the prison, killing an unknown number of assailants and/or inmates. It has not been possible to fully recapture the prison to date.

Some prison inmates reportedly managed to escape during the fighting which lasted several days. It could not be confirmed how many people were taken back into custody immediately after escaping.

Parallel to the attack in Hasakah, a similar attack occurred in the Iraqi province of Diyala. According to Iraqi media reports, several dozen escaped prison inmates from Syria were arrested while trying to cross the Syrian-Iraqi border.

Afrin: at least four people killed in missile attack

According to first responders and medical teams on the ground, a missile strike on the outskirts of Turkish-occupied Afrin on 20.01.22 killed at least four people and injured more than a dozen others. No one has claimed responsibility for the attack. The Turkish military subsequently opened fire on SDF positions.

Idlib: cold snap and snowstorm claim lives in refugee camps

A UN spokesperson announced on 20.01.22 that at least one child had died in a refugee camp in Qastal Miqdad when the tent he was in collapsed under masses of snow. The mother of the child is reportedly in intensive care. According to the UN spokesperson, two other children were also hospitalised suffering from hypothermia. According to the UN, more than 400 families have been affected by the snowstorm. Abraz camp further north had to be evacuated.

Turkey

Suspected members of the Gülen movement arrested

On 14.01.22, a total of 51 out of 78 people wanted by the authorities in operations against the Gülen movement were arrested in 28 provinces. The suspects are accused of being members of secret networks of the movement under the command of the gendarmerie forces. According to media reports, the detainees include several military officers as well as 47 cadets.

Extension of imprisonment for Osman Kavala

On 17.01.22, a court in Istanbul decided to extend the imprisonment of Osman Kavala who has been held without conviction since October 2017 on the grounds that he financed anti-government protests in 2013 and was involved in the attempted coup in 2016. The European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) had first classified Kavala's detention as politically motivated in December 2019. The Council of Europe, which Turkey joined in 1950, subsequently launched formal infringement proceedings against Turkey in December 2021. At the hearing on 17.01.22, attended by observers from the EU and nine Western countries, a panel of three judges rejected Kavala's release by a majority vote and scheduled the next hearing on his detention for 21.02.22.

Report on KHKs

On 18.01.22, a joint report by the NGOs Arrested Lawyers Initiative and Human Rights Defenders was published, which found that persons affected by the Turkish government's personnel "purge" of state institutions after the failed coup of 15.07.16, as well as their family members, continue to face discrimination in many areas. The report "Turkey: No Country for the Purge Victims" states, based on official data, that between 2016 and 2018, during the state of emergency, the Turkish government issued 32 decrees dismissing 125,678 people from public services. However, former civil servants were not only dismissed, they were also banned from working in the public sector again and from obtaining a passport. In addition, the government is said to have made it difficult for them to work in many areas of the private sector. Among other things, they are said to have been barred from working as lawyers, accountants, architects, engineers, laboratory technicians and building inspectors. According to the report, dismissed civil servants are not allowed to work in private educational institutions, as workplace doctors or as occupational safety specialists.

Journalist arrested for insulting the President

On 22.01.22, popular TV presenter Sedef Kabas was arrested for insulting the president. According to media reports, Kabas was arrested in Istanbul after she allegedly said in a live interview on 21.01.22 in reference to President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan that "When cattle go into a palace, they don't become the king; the palace becomes a barn ". In addition, Kabas is said to have subsequently posted her comment on social media.

Venezuela

Troop reinforcements in the border area, clashes between FANB and so-called Grupos Tancol

On 17.01.22, according to government reports, additional units of the National Bolivarian Armed Forces of Venezuela (Fuerza Armada Nacional Bolivariana (FANB)) were deployed to the state of Apure in the Venezuelan border area to combat armed terrorist groups from Colombia involved in drug trafficking (Terroristas Armados Narcotraficantes Colombianos, so-called Grupos Tancol) after members of civil society said in a radio appeal that 50 armed ELN combatants had taken over the Colombian village of La Gabarra in the border area. On 21.01.22, according to media reports, a total of two combatants, allegedly of Colombian origin, were killed and five others were arrested and handed over to the Venezuelan justice system during clashes between FANB and the Las Botas Negras guerrillas in the town of Santa Lucía in the state of Zulia. According to Globovisión, the criminal group is involved in drug trafficking, vaccine smuggling, kidnapping and contract killing.

Yemen

Anti-Houthi coalition: air strikes hit prison and telecommunications building

On 21.01.22, the anti-Houthi coalition led by Saudi Arabia carried out air strikes in the city of Saada in northern Yemen. A migrant remand prison was one of the targets hit, killing at least 82 people. The majority of the casualties are African migrants, including women and children. UN Secretary-General António Guterres has called for an investigation into the air strikes.

On the same day, three children were killed in a coalition air strike on a telecommunications building in the port city of Hodeida. The internet has been down in large parts of the country since the attack, affecting the work of aid organisations on the ground, among others.

Houthi attacks on the UAE

Several drones and missiles hit facilities of the oil company ADNOC in Abu Dhabi and at Abu Dhabi airport on 17.01.22. Three ADNOC employees were killed in an explosion that occurred on ADNOC's premises. A fire broke out at the airport. The Houthi rebels have claimed responsibility for the attacks. Missile and drone attacks by the Houthis against targets in Saudi Arabia are almost a daily occurrence, but the attacks on targets in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) are new. The attacks have been condemned by the international community, and US President Joe Biden has announced that he will consider reclassifying the Houthi movement as an international terrorist organisation.

Air strikes in Sanaa

On 18.01.22, the anti-Houthi coalition led by Saudi Arabia carried out air strikes against Houthi targets in the capital Sanaa. Among other things, the house of a high-ranking Houthi military official was hit, killing 14 people, including civilians. At least six more people were killed in further air strikes carried out in Sanaa the same day. With a death toll of around 20, these are the deadliest air strikes to have hit Sanaa since 2019. The air strikes came the day after the Houthis attacked targets in Abu Dhabi.