



# Briefing Notes

## Group 62 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

7 February 2022

### Afghanistan

#### Security situation

The Russian Presidential Envoy to Afghanistan, Zamir Kabulov, told the Russian news agency TASS on 01.02.22 that a major domestic offensive by opponents of the Taliban in the spring of 2022 could not be ruled out. The National Resistance Front (NRF) had already announced this for the end of winter (cf. BN of 31.01.22).

According to a report issued on 30.01.22, police and government buildings in the districts of Dara in Panjshir and Salang in Parwan province were hit by missiles. The Taliban police chief from Parwan has blamed the NRF for the attacks. However, local Taliban representatives in Panjshir province have denied the two incidents.

According to unconfirmed reports on social media, two Taliban fighters were killed by the Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP) in Kunar province on 31.01.22. It was reported on 04.02.22 that since the Taliban came to power, separatist fighters from the Pakistani province of Balochistan, who previously used Afghanistan as a safe haven, are increasingly being apprehended by the Pakistani government with the help of the Taliban in Afghanistan. On 07.02.22, about 50 ISKP fighters surrendered to the Taliban in Nangarhar province. On the same day, the Taliban contradicted a UN report according to which Al-Qaeda members are becoming more active and are now able to move more freely in Afghanistan.

#### Government leadership

According to the report issued on 31.01.22, the Taliban are planning to set up a commission after the visit of Pakistan's national security adviser to Kabul. This commission will deal with the situation on the border with Pakistan. The main issue is the construction of a border fence by Pakistani authorities.

The Taliban reopened state universities in Laghman, Nangarhar, Kandahar, Nimruz, Farah and Helmand provinces on 02.02.22. Other universities in the other provinces are to be reopened on 26.02.22. Women have also been allowed back in, but very few women reportedly came. Al Jazeera and other witnesses reported that a small group of women wearing full-body veils or burqas entered Laghman University on 02.02.22. Taliban fighters guarded the entrance with a machine gun mounted on a tripod. Journalists were not allowed inside the university and students were warned by the Taliban not to talk to the press. Men and women are to be taught separately.

The Taliban decided at its 22nd cabinet meeting held on 01.02.22 that tax revenues are only to be transparently channelled through banks and that bus routes are to be reopened for citizens between Jalalabad and Peshawar, as well as from Kandahar to Quetta. In Paktika province, citizens hoisted the old flag of the republic again in shops and markets on 01.02.22 after the Taliban's press spokesperson reportedly announced on Twitter that the old flag may possibly be used again as the national flag. Taliban on the ground removed the flag but did not administer any beatings.

On 02.02.22, the Taliban announced that the issuance of passports in Punjir province would be suspended for a fortnight. The reasons given were technical problems and orders issued by the central government. The Taliban told a press conference on 03.02.22 that they had issued 759,000 electronic identity cards (eIDs) to citizens over the past five months. They say 16,000 eIDs are issued each day at 20 distribution centres across the country.

### **Economic and humanitarian situation**

The state-owned oil production company Spinzar in Kunduz reactivated about 3,000 workstations on 02.02.22 with the help of the Ministry of Finance.

A representative of the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare said on 01.02.22 that currently only nine of the 68 state orphanages were open. The orphanages are to be reopened once funds are available. Thirty-six private orphanages are still operating.

According to a report issued on 03.02.22, about 230 professors and lecturers at universities have left Afghanistan since takeover. Most of them had been teaching at Kabul University.

Also on 03.02.22, the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) reported in its 54th quarterly report to US Congress that 50 percent of the population are facing "a tsunami of hunger". He said that on 03.02.22, the US government had allowed international banks to transfer funds to Afghanistan for humanitarian reasons. On 06.02.22, it was reported that 74 children had died of measles in Badakhshan province.

On the same day, the New York Times reported that the Afghan health system was on the verge of collapse. On 05.02.22, the Turkish Red Crescent announced that it will be delivering 800 tons of humanitarian aid to Afghanistan.

### **Protests / arrests**

According to reports issued on 01.02.22, the Taliban in Kabul and Jowzjan provinces have threatened shopkeepers selling women's underwear with arrest, claiming the sale violates Sharia law.

On 01.02.22, the UNHRC called on the Taliban to immediately release six women who disappeared after taking part in protests. On the same day, activist and journalist Mursal Ayar was arrested by the Taliban in Kabul for participating in women's protests.

Also on 01.02.22, a journalist was arrested and beaten up by the Taliban in Kabul for reporting on the reopening of the universities. On 31.01.22, Islam Hejam and Wares Hasrat, two journalists from the ArianaNews television station, were arrested by the Taliban. The arrests came a day after a guest had criticised the Taliban regime during a debate broadcast live by ArianaNews. A clip of the debate was widely circulated on social media. Amnesty International and UNAMA urged the Taliban to release them immediately. This happened on 02.02.22. Reporters Without Borders reported on 05.02.22 that journalists were being increasingly discriminated against by the Taliban. Since the takeover of power, about 50 journalists have allegedly been imprisoned. They say 318 media outlets have been closed down in the past six months and only about 2,300 journalists (out of a former total of approximately 5,000) are still working.

The activist Fayaz Ghor was arrested in Herat on 03.02.22. Former government employees and army veterans have protested because they have not received their pensions since the Taliban took over. The Taliban have said that they will take care of the matter.

On 05.02.22, a professor in Kapisa province resigned from his post because he had been accused of blasphemy by other professors. He had spoken out against ethnic discrimination in the country.

The Taliban reached an agreement with Qatar's government on 02.02.22 to continue offering evacuation flights from Kabul. According to the New York Times, over one million Afghans have emigrated in the past four months (mainly to Iran and Pakistan).

## **Angola**

### **Freedom of the press**

The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) has reported that the government is charging journalists with defamation or slander. Angola is the country where this charge is most frequently used against journalists, according to CPJ's Africa Programme Coordinator in a media report. On 28.01.22, it was reported that three journalists from the Catholic radio station in Huambo had been summoned for reporting on the sale of arms by a police commander but had subsequently refused to reveal their source.

In addition, they say the freedom of information of the population was restricted when private TV channels were closed down. On 12.01.22, it was announced that the channel ZAP Viva, whose activities on the Angolan market had been suspended since April 2021 (cf. BN of 26.04.21), would be closed down and any remaining employees dismissed. Management of the companies ZAP Media, in which Isabel dos Santos, long claimed to be the richest woman in Africa and daughter of former president José Eduardo dos Santos, holds shares (which were seized in

December 2019), and Finstar have been transferred to the Ministry of Telecommunications, Information Technologies and Social Communication (MINTTICS).

## **Bangladesh**

### **Buddhist monk murdered**

According to media reports, the principal and monk of a local Buddhist monastery was murdered in the city of Khagrachhari (Chittagong Division) in south-eastern Bangladesh on 31.01.22. The perpetrators, so far unknown, allegedly stole valuables from the monastery. The following day, a human chain and protest was held in the city by monks from various Buddhist organisations and the local population. They demanded a quick and thorough investigation into the case.

## **Brazil**

### **Murders of transgender people and transphobia**

According to a report issued by Transgender Europe (TGEU), a total of 125 transgender people were killed in Brazil between October 2020 and September 2021. This number represents one-third of all transgender murders committed worldwide during this period. According to TGEU, transgender women were affected in the vast majority of all registered cases, and according to the NGO Antra, a disproportionately high number of black transgender people were also killed in Brazil. Although a law was adopted in 2019 that classifies homophobia and transphobia as a criminal offence, NGOs say it is not being properly enforced. Numerous cases of violence, insults and threats motivated by homophobia and transphobia are still being registered annually, and there is a high number of unreported cases. The measures against the pandemic have also further increased the social exclusion of LGBTIQ people.

## **Burkina Faso**

### **Military junta established**

The military rulers of the Patriotic Movement for Preservation and Restoration (Mouvement patriotique pour la sauvegarde et la restauration (MPSR)) published a "fundamental law" (Acte fondamental du MPSR of 29.01.22) on 31.01.22. On the basis of this law, the junta says it will guarantee the continuity of the state pending the establishment of transitional bodies. The statement did not give a timeline for the transition period. The document comprising 37 Articles lifts the suspension of the Constitution (cf. BN of 31.01.22) imposed by the coup organisers, except for provisions that contradict the document. The document guarantees fundamental constitutional rights such as freedom of movement and freedom of the press, the independence of the judiciary and the presumption of innocence. It defines the MPSR as a transitional government. It designates the coup leader, Lieutenant Colonel Paul-Henri Sandaogo Damiba, as President of the MPSR, President and Head of State of Burkina Faso, and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces. According to another statement released by the MPSR on 31.01.22, the Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces, General Gilbert Ouédraogo, has been removed, as has the Director General of the intelligence service (Agence nationale de renseignement (ANR)) François Ouédraogo. The latter is considered to be a close confidant of the deposed president Roch Marc Kaboré. His resignation was one of the demands made by mutineering soldiers on 23.01.22 (cf. BN of 24.01.22). On 02.02.22, Major General David Kabré was appointed Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces. Lieutenant Colonel Mahamadi Bonkougou was appointed head of the ANR intelligence service by decree on 04.02.22.

On 02.02.22, the junta lifted the night-time curfew imposed on 24.01.22. Festive events remain banned after midnight during the week and after 02:00 a.m. at weekends. Burkina Faso's land borders were also reopened on 02.02.22.

On 03.02.22, junta leader Damiba established a commission by decree to prepare documents and an agenda for the transitional phase. The commission, consisting of 15 members, is to present results in a fortnight.

On 04.02.22, Damiba established a joint supreme command for all security forces, National Theatre Operations Command (Commandement des opérations du théâtre national, COTN), for the first time by decree. The military,

gendarmerie, police, customs, water and forestry administration as well as the Volunteers for the Defense of the Homeland (Volontaires pour la défense de la patrie (VDP)) will be under its command. The leaders are Lieutenant Colonel Bamouni Yves Didier and Lieutenant Colonel Roméo Djassanou Ouoba. The task of the High Command is to develop, organise and support operations to secure the national territory. It will also coordinate civil defence and can seize and deploy services, persons and goods needed to conduct operations. It is empowered to take all measures necessary for defence and security, including restrictions on freedom of movement and prohibitions (on use) of certain means of travel.

#### **National response to the coup of 24.01.22**

On 01.02.22, junta leader Damiba met with representatives of the main political parties of the deposed government and the opposition. With the exception of the camp of the deposed President Kaboré (Mouvement du Peuple pour le Progrès, MPP), which did not comment on the meeting, the parties expressed their support for the MPSR.

A civil society group called the Citizens' Group in Support of the Operationalisation of the Transition (Groupe de Citoyens d'Appui à l'Opérationnalisation de la Transition (GCAOT)) appealed to the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) on 03.02.22 not to impose sanctions (see below), but to support the MPSR during the transitional phase, which they say will lead to elections. The majority of the population, the trade unions, the political class and religious authorities have welcomed the steps taken by the MPSR.

The coup of 24.01.22 interrupted a trial that had been ongoing since October 2021 against those allegedly responsible for a 1987 coup against then-President Thomas Sankara and for his assassination. In response to the overruling of the constitution by the MPSR coup organisers on 24.01.22, the court stayed the proceedings until further notice on 31.01.22. The court decided to resume the trial on 02.02.22 because the MPSR reinstated the constitution that very day (see above).

#### **International response to the coup of 24.01.22**

The African Union (AU) announced on 31.01.22 that it was suspending Burkina Faso's membership

An ECOWAS delegation met in Ouagadougou on 31.01.22 for talks with the military junta. The delegation also met the deposed President Kaboré and said he was well and in good spirits. They say he has access to medical care and his family are allowed to visit him. Kaboré is under house arrest in a villa in Ouagadougou, the exact whereabouts of which has not been disclosed. Leading military leaders of the ECOWAS states had already met with the military junta in Burkina Faso on 29.01.22. ECOWAS Commission President Jean-Claude Kassi Brou spoke out against imposing new sanctions against the junta at an ECOWAS summit held in Accra (Ghana) on 03.02.22. He said the military was willing to work with ECOWAS to restore constitutional order. The junta was asked to present a reasonable roadmap for this.

#### **People killed in military operations**

The military announced on 31.01.22 that a total of 163 extremists had been killed or injured in the Centre-Nord region between 15.01.22 and 23.01.22 as part of Operation Laabingol, about 60 of them in cooperation with French units of Operation Barkhane. The extremists killed include a leader named Mdouli alias Abdramane. A member of the Burkinabe armed forces was also killed. The French military had already announced that 60 extremists had been killed in the joint operations carried out on 30.01.22 (cf. BN of 31.01.22).

#### **Fatalities in attacks**

Four members of a military unit escorting a convoy of vehicles were killed when an improvised explosive device detonated in the vicinity of Thiou (Nord region) on 24.01.22. One soldier died the same day in an attack perpetrated by unknown persons on a military unit near Filakoro (Sud-Ouest region). This was announced by the military on 31.01.22.

## **Burundi**

### **Albino child abducted and murdered**

On 29.01.22, a four-year-old albino child was abducted in Bujumbura and killed in Cankuzo province, 230 km away. On 30.01.22, two men suspected of the crime were arrested after a tip-off brought them to the attention of the police. The bones of the child were found on the person of the two men. A third suspect managed to escape.

Since 2008, around 20 albinos have been killed in Burundi and parts of their bodies and organs have been sold off for witchcraft practices. Albinism is considered to be a metabolic disease, as a result of which those affected are conspicuous mainly because of their very light skin and hair. In Burundi, among other places, albinos are frequently killed in order to use parts of their bodies (limbs, bones, organs) for witchcraft practices. Depending on what country they are in, these people or the body parts used in witchcraft practices are said to bring good luck or bad luck.

## **China**

### **Hong Kong: arrests made after protest announcement**

According to media reports, well-known activist Koo Sze-yiu was arrested in Hong Kong on 04.02.22, after announcing the previous day that he would stage a protest on the opening day of the 2022 Winter Olympics. The activist, who is over 70 years old, was arrested on charges of "attempting to commit a seditious act". Four other people were reportedly arrested in the course of the investigation.

## **Colombia**

### **New anti-drug strategy announced**

On 03.02.22, Defence Minister Diego Molano presented the government's new "Esmeralda" anti-drug strategy in Cartagena. Within the framework of this strategy, control on cyber presence is to be strengthened in order to contain drug trafficking more effectively, for example by blocking financial transactions of criminal groups. Artificial intelligence is also to be used to monitor more closely the sale and trade of chemical ingredients needed for drug production. Colombia is one of the world's largest cocaine producers, and various non-state armed groups are involved in this illegal business, including the ELN guerrillas, various FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) dissident groups and paramilitary groups such as the Self-Defense Gaitanistas of Colombia (ACG), or criminal gangs and transnational cartels. Although the area under cultivation was reduced in 2020, production still increased to 1,228 tonnes per year.

### **Government legally obliged to protect former FARC fighters**

In a ruling published on 28.01.22, the Constitutional Court ordered the government to protect the "fundamental rights to life, personal liberty and peace" of former FARC fighters who laid down their arms in the wake of the 2016 peace agreement. So far, 300 former FARC fighters have been murdered. The Chamber has declared an "unconstitutional situation" due to violations of security guarantees and insufficient action by the state against these persons, and has obliged the government as well as the National Protection Unit (Unidad Nacional De Protección, UNP), which is responsible for the corresponding programmes, to take various measures. A new special chamber of the court (Sala Especial de Seguimiento) is to monitor the implementation of the verdict in the future and review the state's progress with regard to the protection of former FARC fighters.

### **Violence in the Cauca Region: human rights defenders killed and massacred**

According to the NGO Indepaz, the indigenous social leader Ovidio Alemeza Yantén is the 20<sup>th</sup> human rights defender and social leader (líder social) to be assassinated in Columbia in 2022 and the sixth in the Cauca department. He was shot dead in El Tambo, Cauca. In addition, four massacres were carried out in Cauca between 01.01.22 and 05.02.22 in which 13 people were killed. Two incidents have occurred leading to mass expulsions and three people have been abducted. Various FARC groups are active in the region, including the Segunda Marquetalia and the Comando Coordinador de Occidente with other sub-groups, as well as the ELN guerrillas.

## **Democratic Republic of the Congo**

### **Haut-Katanga: Bakata-Katanga driven out of Mitwaba**

Citing military sources, media reported on 02.02.22 that the Congolese armed forces had succeeded in ousting the separatist armed Mai-Mai group Bakata-Katanga (B-K) under the command of Kyungu Mutanga Gédéon, which had invaded the capital Mitwaba of Haut-Katanga province on 29.01.22. The invasion of the B-K had displaced the urban population. The aim of the B-K had been the secession and foundation of an independent "Katanga" state which in its final borders is to cover the region of the former Grand-Katanga (territorial areas of today's provinces: Haut Katanga, Lualaba, Haut-Lomami and Tanganyika). In the following days until 03.02.22, tensions continued to build on the ground. During their retreat from the city, the B-K used civilians as human shields. Figures on possible casualties or deaths are not known.

### **Ituri: renewed CODECO attack on IDP camp; deterioration of the security situation**

According to media reports, at least 62 people were killed and 42 others were injured in an attack carried out by suspected militia from a faction of the ethnically aligned Cooperative for Development of the Congo (Coopérative de développement du Congo (CODECO)) on the Plaine Savo IDP camp in the Djugu territory of Ituri province between 01.02.22 and 02.02.22. CODECO had previously become embroiled in fighting with the Congolese armed forces not far from the IDP camp, had been pushed back in the process and had discovered the IDP camp as a target for attack during their retreat. The intervention by the multinational troops of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) probably prevented a major bloodbath. The militia attack reportedly caused significant displacement among the residents of the camp and the surrounding area. Older estimates by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) on 02.02.22 indicate that more than 35,000 people have been internally displaced. The Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) states that Plaine Savo IDP camp hosts over 24,000 of the estimated 1.7 million internally displaced people in the province of Ituri where a state of emergency has been declared. The CODECO factions are being accused of carrying out several attacks on IDP camps in Ituri with varying degrees of occupancy in 2021 (cf. BN of 06.12.21). Tom Peyre-Costa of the NRC says that there has been an increase in attacks by armed groups on the civilian population and especially targeting refugees in IDP camps. According to Pierre Boisselet, coordinator of the US monitoring group Kivu Security Tracker, the security situation in Ituri continued to deteriorate in the second half of 2021. During this period alone, more than 800 civilians were killed in Ituri. The various CODECO factions operating mainly in Djugu (Ituri), together with the radical Islamic group Allied Democratic Forces (Forces démocratiques alliées (ADF)) operating in parts of Ituri and the province of North Kivu, as well as the Mai-Mai groups present in these two and other conflict provinces, are among the deadliest armed groups in eastern Congo.

### **Kivu provinces: Attacks by armed groups trigger waves of displacement**

According to media reports, several thousand people fled to Uganda following an attack perpetrated by suspected ADF rebels in the Ruwenzori sector of the territory of North Kivu province, where Nabil, Kamango and Jiapande are located.

Fighting between Burundian armed forces and the Burundian rebel group Red Tabara in the Uvira territory of South Kivu province, which civil society organisations say began in mid-December 2021, have reportedly led to more than 80,000 people being internally displaced. The fighting between foreign forces on Congolese territory has depopulated 80 villages alone. The provision of basic services to internally displaced persons in the places of refuge must be called into question. In the territories of Uvira and Fizi (South Kivu) which have been affected by violence, 80% of the villages in the plateaus have been depopulated as a result of fighting between rival armed groups on the one hand and between the Congolese armed forces and the various armed groups on the other.

### **Ituri, South-Kivu: increase in the various types of food insecurity**

A press release published on the Reliefweb portal on 02.02.22 and issued by the NRC indicates that almost three million people are currently facing acute food insecurity in Ituri province alone. The UN's Radio Okapi reported on 03.02.22 that more than half of the population of South Kivu Province is food insecure. The DRC continues to have the highest levels of acute food insecurity in the world. According to supranational reports, an estimated 27 million people in the DRC were acutely food insecure as of November 2021 (cf. BN of 15.11.21).

## **Gambia**

### **UN: fight against female genital mutilation**

Citing a joint statement by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) on 05.02.22, several Gambian media report that progress has been made in the fight against the widespread practice of female genital mutilation in The Gambia. Between 2010 and 2018, the rate of circumcision among girls aged zero to four years decreased by 10% to 27%. In the meantime, 49% of women openly oppose the practice of female genital mutilation. However, greater efforts are needed to enforce laws protecting women and girls and to invest in prevention, protection and care services, among other things.

## **Guinea-Bissau**

### **Alleged coup attempt fails**

On 01.02.22, the government palace, which houses several ministries and where a cabinet meeting was being held in the presence of President Umaro Sissoco Embaló and Prime Minister Nuno Gomes Nabiam, was the target of an unsuccessful attack perpetrated by unknown gunmen. The attackers were wearing uniforms and/or plain clothes, according to different eyewitness reports cited by the media. Eleven people, including soldiers and paramilitaries and four civilians, were killed in the five-hour clash with the attackers, according to the government. Cabinet members were not amongst them. It is reported that some arrests were made.

According to Embaló, who spoke out the same evening, he and the ministers were targeted by the gunmen. He linked the alleged coup attempt to his fight against corruption and drug trafficking. The country is considered to be a hub for the international cocaine trade. The government has set up a commission of enquiry. However, no concrete actors were named to begin with. The media began to speculate that other backgrounds, such as a terrorist attack may have been behind the assault. Embaló has also been accused of cooperating with drug cartels. According to these accusations, his fight against drug trafficking is only a smokescreen for the international community. It was only on 28.01.22 that some of the ministers were appointed following a cabinet reshuffle pushed through by the president without consulting the prime minister. The president has also been at loggerheads with parliament, the National Assembly. The Assembly had refused to deal with his proposals for a constitutional change towards a more presidential system. Embaló defended himself against speculation that the coup might have been staged to provide a smokescreen for internal cleansing. There were also voices from the opposition that feared a "witch hunt" was imminent. On 05.01.22, government spokesperson Fernando Vaz stressed that the attempted coup d'état was carried out by a group of military officers and paramilitaries, specifically those involved in drug trafficking, supported by mercenaries and the rebel group Movement of Democratic Forces of Casamance (Mouvement des forces démocratiques de la Casamance (MFDC)), which is fighting for the independence of the southern part of Senegal bordering Guinea-Bissau.

The alleged coup attempt has been condemned by the international community. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) will deploy troops to stabilise the situation. The membership of three of its member states, Mali, Guinea and Burkina Faso, has been suspended respectively due to successful military coups. It is feared that other countries in the region might follow suit. ECOWAS troops only left Guinea-Bissau in 2020 after being stationed there in 2012 following a successful military coup. That coup was the fourth successful coup to be carried out since the former Portuguese colony gained independence in 1974. In addition, there have been a number of coup attempts.

## **Iran**

### **COVID-19 pandemic**

Iran is currently in the throes of its sixth wave of coronavirus, with an average of 35,000 people officially testing positive per day, a record new high in the number of infections. However, a representative of the Ministry of Health has admitted that the actual number of cases could be about five times higher than the official figures released by the ministry. On the national coronavirus warning map, 120 cities and districts are now flagged red. Areas in the central highlands, the capital Tehran and the region along the Gulf coast in the south have been particularly hard

hit. According to the head of Beheshti Medical University, 48% of the population in the capital province have contracted the Omicron variant of the virus so far. The high proportion of children infected continues to be particularly noticeable; children under the age of ten account for 20% of new hospital admissions. Distance learning will take place in the regions particularly affected from 05.02.22 to 14.02.22. Beyond that, however, no further measures will be taken to contain the virus. So far, according to official statistics, 6,446,404 people are believed to have been infected nationwide, with the official death toll rising to 132,563, out of a total population of 85,694,229 people.

#### **Further arrests and imprisonments following protests by teachers**

After a two-day sit-in strike by teachers in various cities, Iranian foreign media report that nationwide strikes resumed on 31.01.22. Protests are reported to have taken place in a total of 11,000 schools in over 300 towns and villages. This is the largest strike ever to be organised by teachers in the history of the country. Protests by teachers have been taking place regularly since December 2021, with many teachers being arrested in the process (cf. BN of 13.12.21, 10.01.22 and 24.01.22). Rallies took place in front of the parliament building in Tehran and in front of the local offices of the Ministry of Education in the provincial towns. The rallies in Shiraz reportedly took place under a large deployment of security forces. A total of 10 people were arrested throughout the country. Nine people were released shortly afterwards and are now awaiting trial. One person was reportedly taken to an unknown location. A leading member of the Teachers' Union Coordinating Council has reportedly been sentenced to four years and six months in prison by Karaj Revolutionary Court. The protesters are demanding an increase in teachers' salaries. Arrests of teachers' representatives and politically motivated criminal proceedings are also being criticised.

#### **Prison conditions: women's rights activist threatened following prison protest**

Foreign media claim that the well-known women's rights activist, Soheila Hijab, who is being held in detention has been threatened with further prosecution and transfer to a different prison and has been beaten up in Kermanshah prison (western Iran). It was reported that on 02.02.22, the woman, along with other inmates of the women's department, protested against the quality of food and food rations in detention by refusing to accept them. The prisoners have also been threatened with bans on contact and visits.

Soheila Hijab, a women's rights activist, has been serving a five-year prison sentence since 2021 on charges including spreading propaganda against the regime, conspiracy against national security and inciting protests. She was previously transferred from Qarchak prison south of Tehran to Sanandaj prison in Kurdistan province.

#### **Honour killing in Ahvaz**

In the south-western Iranian city of Ahvaz (Khuzestan), a man murdered and beheaded his underage wife with the help of his brother-in-law. Afterwards, he marched through the city carrying the head of the 17-year-old murder victim. A video of this event provoked many reactions on social media. According to media reports, the young woman was murdered in the late afternoon of 05.02.22. The local news agency Rokna was subsequently closed down by the Commission for Press Supervision on the grounds of continued breach of law due to the dissemination of news content and for disseminating offensive video and film material. The case has since been referred to the Media and Culture Court. In Iran, honour killings, especially those occurring in marginalised areas, repeatedly hit the headlines. In 2021 alone, around 60 predominantly underage women were reportedly killed by their husbands or other male family members. In this particular case, the girl was married off to a cousin when she was 12 years old. She had fled to Turkey following arguments with her family but was brought back to Iran some time ago by her own father and reconciled with her husband. The perpetrators have since been arrested, according to media reports.

## **Iraq**

#### **Turkish air strikes near Makhmour refugee camp**

On 01.02.22, the Turkish military carried out air strikes in the immediate vicinity of the Makhmour refugee camp south-west of Erbil and PKK positions in Sinjar. Eight people were killed and 17 others were injured, including civilians. The Turkish Defence Ministry confirmed the air strikes and described them as the launch of a new security operation against the PKK in Iraq and Syria.

### **Transgender woman murdered**

On 31.01.22, the body of Doski Azad, a transgender woman, was recovered in a village near Dohuk after a relative notified the police. The alleged perpetrator is the victim's brother, who is said to be living in Germany. He reportedly had travelled to Iraq for a brief stay and has since left the country for Turkey. Azad is said to have received threats from her family and tribe for some time because she had been living as a woman. So-called honour killings based on gender identity are not uncommon in the Autonomous Region of Kurdistan either and perpetrators are rarely prosecuted.

## **Kyrgyzstan / Tajikistan**

### **Armed clashes along the border between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan**

On 27.01.22, armed clashes erupted between border guards of the two countries in the area of Tort-Kocho and Chyr-Dobo in the Kyrgyz-Tajik border region. Eleven Kyrgyz and two Tajik nationals were killed.

Both countries had earlier accused each other of starting the fighting. According to the Kyrgyz side, Tajik border guards blocked the Batken-Isfana highway (towns of the Kyrgyz oblast of Batken) in the Tort-Kocho area, and after initial negotiations and the reopening of the road, the latter opened fire on the Kyrgyz side. According to the Tajik side, the conflict began with the violent blocking of a truck by 50 residents of the Kyrgyz village of Aksaj, with Kyrgyz border forces being the first to open fire. On 28.01.22, both sides agreed to a complete ceasefire, the withdrawal of additional forces and equipment from the borders and the resumption of traffic on the highway. The situation has stabilised since then.

The unclearly demarcated border is particularly important for the development of armed conflicts in the border area. Almost half of the border has not yet been marked. In some villages, houses on Kyrgyz and Tajik territory are close to each other. In addition, there are two Tajik enclaves on Kyrgyz territory. Against this background, conflicts over land, water and illegal border crossings have already increased in the past. Ethnic differences may also play a role in this.

## **Lebanon**

### **Protests against rising prices**

On 02.02.22, transport companies began a strike in Beirut, scheduled to last three days, to protest against rising fuel prices and the poor economic situation in general. The road blockades caused considerable traffic disruption. However, the strike ended the same evening and no violent incidents were reported.

## **Mexico**

### **Fourth journalist to be killed in January 2022**

On 31.01.22, Roberto Toledo was the fourth journalist to be killed in January 2022, when he was shot dead in Zitácuaro, Michoacán. According to his employer Monitor Michoacán, he had been included in a protection programme by the national human rights authority after previously receiving death threats for research he conducted into corruption, yet even this could not prevent his death. According to Reporters Without Borders, Mexico is the deadliest country in the world for journalists, with significant impunity and insufficient prevention and protection programmes. According to local NGOs, the state protection mechanism introduced in 2012 is underfunded and understaffed, implementation of approved measures is sometimes slow, and networking with other authorities for prevention purposes is low. Since the mechanism was introduced, 14 participants in its programme for journalists have been killed, media reports say.

### **16 killed in clashes between criminal groups in Zacatecas**

On 05.02.22, sixteen people were killed in clashes between criminal groups in two municipalities in the state of Zacatecas, according to official reports. Investigations have been launched. In Zacatecas, violence has continued in recent weeks despite a new security plan implemented by the central government in November 2021 and reinforcements of police and the military in affected communities.

## Montenegro

### Unstable government toppled by vote of no confidence

According to a recent media report, Parliament withdrew its confidence from the government of Prime Minister Zdravko Krivokapic in a no confidence motion tabled on 04.02.22. The motion of no confidence had been tabled on 19.01.22 (cf. BN of 31.01.22) by the previous smallest coalition partner of the government, the party bloc "Black on White", led by the previous deputy prime minister Dritan Abazovic and supported by the opposition. A majority of 54 MPs in the 81-seat parliament, including eleven MPs from the Democratic Montenegro Party (DPS), which is also in government, as well as the votes of the opposition Democratic Party of Socialists of Montenegro (DPS) and the Black on White Alliance, voted in favour of the motion. The MPs of the largest government coalition partner, the Democratic Front (DF), as well as the Socialist People's Party (SNP), had boycotted the vote of no confidence. In a previous parliamentary vote, Krivokapic's government motion to shorten the legislative period with the aim of holding new elections was rejected, also with votes from the defected "Black on White" bloc. According to reports, the country is still in a phase of political instability. According to the constitution, President Djukanovic can now propose a new prime minister-designate, provided he has the support of a majority of 41 MPs in parliament. Deputy Prime Minister Dritan Abazovic had announced to the media that he would start negotiations within the government majority on the formation of a new government and, in case of failure, said he would call early elections.

## Myanmar

### One year anniversary of the military coup on 01.02.22

According to various reports, a few small protests took place against the military regime and silent strikes were held in many cities across the country on the first anniversary of the military coup. In Yangon (Rangoon), Mandalay and Naypyitaw, among others, the streets were deserted between 10:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m., shops were closed and people did not go to work. The strike ended in communal clapping. Reports indicate that between 10 and 30 people were subsequently arrested in Yangon for joining in the clapping. Prior to the strike, pressure was put on shop owners by the junta to open their shops and arrests were announced for anyone participating in the silent strike. According to a report issued on 03.02.22, over 100 people were arrested between 27.01.22 and 02.02.22 for speaking out on social media in support of the silent strike. Pro-military rallies and events organised by the military were reported in Yangon, Mandalay and Naypyitaw, among other places.

According to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP), the number of people killed as a result of police and military violence since the military coup on 01.02.21 has risen to at least 1,519. No less than 8,977 people are currently being detained for political reasons and arrest warrants have been issued for 1,974 others (as of 04.02.22). The UN has said that the number of internally displaced persons had risen to over 400,000 as of January 2022. It is estimated that around half the population now lives in poverty and more than 14.4 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance and protection (cf. BN of 10.01.22). On 31.01.22, the US, UK and Canada imposed sanctions on several supporters of the military leadership, members of the judiciary and entities accused of providing financial support to the military leadership.

### Security incidents

Two people were killed and 38 were injured in a grenade attack carried out against participants of a pro-military demonstration in the town of Tachileik (Shan State) on 01.02.22. So far, no one has claimed responsibility for the attack. Several explosions took place in eleven townships of Yangon the same day for which the underground National Unity Government (NUG) has claimed responsibility. The attacks were aimed at 24 junta targets, including Myanmar military soldiers (Tatmadaw), an air force lieutenant colonel, security posts and administrative buildings. According to a report issued on 31.01.22, more than 30 soldiers were killed in Magwe, Sagaing and Taninthary regions, as well as in Chin, Shan and Kayah states between 28.01.22 and 31.01.22 when several violent clashes erupted between Tatmadaw troops and People's Defence Forces (PDFs) and in raids by PDFs. Between 01.02.22 and 03.02.22, the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) and local People's Defence Forces (PDFs) attacked several Tatmadaw military bases and a police station in Kachin State and northern Shan State. There is no reliable information available on the number of people killed or injured. Armed clashes between Tatmadaw troops and Chin

National Army (CNA) and Chinland Defence Force Thantlang (CDF) were reported on 01.02.22 in Thantlang Township, Chin State. Previously, Tatmadaw soldiers reportedly destroyed over 90 houses and a church in the township 30.01.02 and 01.02.22. According to reports, most residents have fled the fighting which occurs almost on a daily basis.

In Loikaw Township, Kayah State, the bodies of seven civilians suspected to have been killed in raids carried out by military troops were found in Yeyo and Bado villages on 28.01.2012. A total of 23 civilians were reportedly killed by Tatmadaw soldiers in the township in January 2022. Forty-five people were reportedly killed by the Tatmadaw across Kayah State, in air strikes, bombardments and massacres. On 01.02.22, it was reported that villagers found the partially charred remains of five civilians in Pauk and Myaing Townships (Magway region) on 23.01.22 and 27.01.22. Junta troops burned down twelve houses and stores of rice in three villages in Depayin Township (Sagaing Region) on 30.01.22 and 31.01.22 after two soldiers had been killed in an attack carried out by the Depayin PDF. Several thousand people are reported to have fled from a total of nine villages in the region. According to reports released on 03.02.22, Tatmadaw soldiers burned down at least 400 houses in two villages in Pale Township (Sagaing Region) on 31.01.22.

### **New charge against Aung San Suu Kyi**

On 04.02.22, another charge of corruption was brought against ousted de-facto head of government Aung San Suu Kyi in connection with a donation made to the Daw Khin Kyi Foundation. A few days earlier, she had been formally charged with fraud in the 2020 general election (cf. BN of 31.01.22). Suu Kyi now faces trial in more than ten cases. She had already been sentenced to a total of six years' imprisonment in December 2021 and January 2022.

## **Nicaragua**

### **Various educational institutions lose legal status**

On 02.02.22, the Sandinista-dominated National Assembly once again revoked the legal status of 16 non-profit organisations, including 14 educational institutions, such as the Politécnica de Nicaragua (Upoli). They were accused of not publishing financial reports on time or not notifying personnel changes in the boards of directors within the given deadline. After the closure of the independent universities, teaching there is to continue for the time being under the supervision of the National Council of Universities (CNU); students have criticised this step. The number of organisations that have had their legal status revoked since 2021 is now 77.

## **Nigeria**

### **Deadly attacks in several states**

Armed men on motorbikes attacked the communities of Galadima Kogo and Galkogo in Niger State on 29.01.22 and 30.01.22, killing dozens of people and abducting many others, according to media reports. The attackers also looted and set fire to buildings. The incidents occurred two weeks after a military operation had been carried out against so-called bandits in the area. It is reported that many residents left the area while others paid money to the armed groups active in the area to avoid being attacked by them. There have also been reports of fatal attacks carried out on localities in Katsina and Kaduna states at the end of January 2022.

### **Terrorist financing: investigations against over 100 companies**

According to recent media reports, Nigerian authorities are investigating 123 companies suspected of providing financial support to the Islamist groups Boko Haram and Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP). Lai Mohammed, Minister for Information and Culture, officially announced on 03.02.22 that 45 people had been arrested and a total of over 500 people were being investigated by the authorities. The companies as well as individuals are being accused of supporting the terrorist organisations Boko Haram and ISWAP, which are mainly active in the north-east of Nigeria, directly with money or by assisting with money laundering.

### **Kaduna State: journalist and government critic released from pre-trial detention**

Luka Binniyat, a freelance Nigerian journalist and spokesperson for the Southern Kaduna People's Union (SOKAPU), was released from three months of pre-trial detention on 03.02.22 on payment of bail to the amount of

NGN 1 million (approx. EUR 2,100, as of 07.02.22), according to media reports. Binniyat also had to provide two sureties by persons who reside in Kaduna State and possessed properties there. Law enforcement authorities accuse Binniyat of aiding and abetting the offences of cybercrime under Nigeria's Cybercrimes Act. He is specifically accused of publishing an article criticising as inadequate the Kaduna state government's response to attacks perpetrated on towns in southern Kaduna in September 2021, including the so-called Madamai massacre in which dozens of people were killed (cf. BN of 04.10.21). Nigeria ranks 120th among 180 countries in the Reporters Without Borders (RSF) World Press Freedom Index 2021.

#### **Lassa fever: emergency operations centre activated**

According to a report released by the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) on 26.01.22, Nigeria has activated an Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) in response to the recent Lassa fever outbreaks in some parts of the country. It says the centre will help to improve diagnostic and treatment capacities and coordinate countermeasures. In the previous three weeks, 115 infections were confirmed in 11 states, including 26 deaths. Up to 5,000 people die of Lassa fever each year in West Africa.

## **Pakistan**

#### **Fatal attack on Christian priest in Peshawar**

On 30.01.22, a priest serving a Christian community in Peshawar, capital of the north-western province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, was killed and one of his travelling companions was seriously injured after an attack carried out by unknown, suspected Islamist perpetrators. Two weeks earlier, a Muslim religious scholar was also shot dead by unidentified gunmen in Peshawar.

#### **Attacks in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa**

On 31.01.22, two policemen who were controlling traffic were shot dead by unknown gunmen passing on a motorbike in Hangu district. On 27.01.22, in the same district, armed perpetrators stormed the premises of an oil production company and shot a security guard dead. On 25.01.22, a police officer escorting a polio vaccination team was attacked and killed by unknown perpetrators in the neighbouring district of Kohat.

On 05.02.22, three soldiers were killed and four injured in an attack on a security post in Kurram district on the border with Afghanistan. The assailants reportedly fled to Afghanistan. Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) has claimed responsibility for the attack.

#### **Offensive on two military bases in Balochistan**

On 02.02.22 and 03.02.22, Baloch Liberation Army (BLA) separatists attacked two military bases in the south-western province of Balochistan. According to Pakistan's Ministry of the Interior, nine insurgents and four soldiers were killed in the first attack carried out in Naushki district and six separatists and three soldiers were killed in the second night-time attack in Panjgur district. According to divergent information provided by the Home Minister of Balochistan province, five security force members were killed and 12 were wounded in Naushki, while seven soldiers were killed and 12 were wounded in Panjgur. The BLA said in a statement it issued that its suicide bombers had detonated explosives-laden vehicles at the entrance to the bases, killing more than 50 soldiers. According to a press release issued on 05.02.22, 20 insurgents were killed in a subsequent military operation. A week earlier, Baloch militants killed 10 soldiers in an attack perpetrated on an army post near the Chinese-built deep sea port in Gwadar. Pakistan is accusing India of supporting the separatists. The increase in attacks in Balochistan is also being blamed on the return of ethnic Baloch from Afghanistan, who no longer felt safe there since the Taliban took power in Afghanistan in August 2021. Fearing persecution, they have returned to the Pakistani province of Balochistan and the neighbouring Iranian province of Sistan Balochistan. On 22.01.22, a well-known Baloch activist who had fled to Afghanistan like thousands of other Balochs was killed in Kabul.

#### **Explosion at coal mine in Balochistan**

Four workers were killed in a methane gas explosion at a coal mine near Quetta, capital of Balochistan province, on 05.02.22 and six others were rescued from the partially collapsed mine. Compromised safety conditions and the lack of proper training for mine workers result in frequent accidents. In 2021, 237 miners were killed in mine

explosions, mainly in Balochistan, according to a report issued by the Central Mine Labour Federation. Since the beginning of 2022, twenty-one people have been killed in accidents in Pakistani mines, according to the report.

## **Russian Federation**

### **Chechnya - tighter crackdown on anti-government forces**

A Duma deputy and confidant of Chechen President Ramzan Kadyrov publicly threatened on 02.02.22 to rip the heads off exiled human rights activist Abubakar Yangulbayev, until recently a lawyer for the Russian NGO Committee Against Torture, and his family, and declared a blood feud. According to media reports, Yangulbayev's mother was forcibly taken from the city of Nizhny Novgorod to Chechnya, some 2,000 km away, by Chechen security forces on 20.01.22 and detained for allegedly attacking a police officer. The action is said to be related to Yangulbayev's demands for Kadyrov's removal and the alleged involvement of family members in the popular anti-government Telegram channel 1ADAT.

According to press reports, dozens of critical activists and bloggers have been abducted by Chechen authorities in recent weeks, sometimes from other parts of Russia.

## **Saudi Arabia**

### **Dawoud Al-Marhoon released**

On 02.02.22, Saudi authorities released Dawoud Al-Marhoon, who had previously been sentenced to death for his participation in a political demonstration - despite being a minor.

Al-Marhoon was 17 years old when he was arrested in 2012 during anti-government protests organised by the Shiite minority. In 2015, he and two other minors, Ali Al-Nimr and Abdullah Al-Zaher, were sentenced to death. However, this sentence was commuted to ten years' imprisonment in February 2021 after King Salman declared that the kingdom would no longer impose the death penalty on people who committed crimes as minors. Al-Nimr, who was released in October 2021, is the nephew of the influential Shiite cleric Nimr Al-Nimr, who was executed in 2016. Al-Zaher was released in November 2021. Saudi Arabia is among the countries with the highest number of executions in the world. Sixty-nine executions were carried out in 2021 alone.

## **Senegal**

### **Fighting between MFDC rebels and members of the armed forces**

Various media have reported, citing military sources, that on 24.01.22, four members of the Senegalese armed forces were killed and seven others were captured by the MFDC rebels during clashes between the rebels of the Movement of Democratic Forces of Casamance (Mouvement des forces démocratiques de la Casamance (MFDC)) led by Salif Sadiò and the Senegalese forces of the contingent of the peacekeeping mission of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in The Gambia (ECOMIG) beyond the Senegal-South Gambia border (Foni region). One person was killed and three others were arrested on the rebel side. The fighting was preceded by the involvement of Senegalese ECOMIG forces in the fight against illegal logging in the region. Journalist Gaustin Diatta has told German broadcaster Deutsche Welle that after years of calm between the Senegalese armed forces and the MFDC rebels, the situation could come to a head again and jeopardise the chance of a lasting peace agreement in the Casamance region. He said there had not been an incident of this magnitude for years.

The leader of the MFDC faction, Salif Sadiò, accused ECOWAS of dragging Gambia into the conflict. He said Gambian involvement in the conflict or attacks on MFDC facilities by Senegalese soldiers stationed in The Gambia could have serious consequences and lead to the death of innocent civilians.

### **No decriminalisation and no increase in penalties for homosexuality**

According to media reports, President Macky Sall reiterated at a meeting with the Association of Imams and Ulamās on 27.01.22 that there would be no decriminalisation of homosexuality during his presidency and that he had already expressed this on several occasions to foreign leaders and vis-à-vis the EU, among others.

On 05.01.22, the National Assembly had rejected a bill introduced to increase the penalties for homosexuality. The rejection was justified by the fact that homosexuality is already subject to severe punishment. In addition to homosexuality, the bill had also addressed "lesbianism, bisexuality, transsexuality, intersexuality, bestiality, necrophilia and other similar practices". The proposed tightening of the law against homosexuals was the result of an initiative put forward by eleven MPs, at least one of whom belonged to the camp of President Macky Sall, and who had the backing of religious leaders and associations in Senegal, with its society that is almost religiously homogeneous.

## **Somalia**

### **Clashing between rival clan militia**

At least 10 people were killed and 15 were wounded in fighting between militias of the Ayr and Marehan clans in Balanbal district (Galgaduud region) on 01.02.22. Both sides allegedly used rocket-propelled grenades, anti-aircraft guns and assault rifles. It is not clear what sparked the clashes. In the past, there have been repeated disputes between the two clans over grazing rights and water wells, among other things.

### **Five al-Shabaab insurgents sentenced to death**

On 01.02.22, a military court in the town of Galkayo (Mudug region) sentenced five al-Shabaab insurgents, all aged between 18 and 21, to death. They are accused of murdering ten people, including two members of parliament and three senior military officers. Two other defendants of the same age were sentenced to life imprisonment.

### **Man executed by al-Shabaab**

Al-Shabaab media report that a man was executed by a firing squad of the organisation in Bula-Fulay (Bay region). He was accused of spying for the Ethiopian National Defence Forces (ENDF) and South-West Somalia regional troops based in the area. Hundreds of civilians watched the execution.

### **Ten killed in landmine explosion**

On 04.02.22, at least ten civilians, including five women and four children, were killed and others injured when a minibus drove over a landmine near Kismayo and exploded. So far, no one has claimed responsibility for the attack.

## **South Africa**

### **Amendment to the criminal code**

President Cyril Ramaphosa signed into law three new pieces of legislation on 31.01.22 to combat gender-based violence and provide more protection to victims of such violence. The amendments to the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters) expand the ambit of the crime of incest and introduce a new offence of sexual intimidation. According to press reports, the amendments to the law aim to change the way government agencies, law enforcement and the courts deal with cases of violent crime in South Africa, particularly violence against women and the vulnerable.

## **Sudan**

### **Protests continue / political situation**

For nine days, protesters have been blocking the connecting road between Sudan and Egypt, which is located in the north. Several barricades are blocking the passage mainly of Egyptian vehicles transporting Sudanese goods and livestock to Egypt. Many of the protestors view the export of livestock and other agricultural goods as benefiting the military and its affiliated companies.

On 04.02.22, the Sudanese Professionals Association (SPA), one of the groups that has been instrumental in organising the current protests and which had played an important role in the protests against Al-Bashir, announced that it would refuse to accept an invitation to talks extended by the UN Special Envoy to Sudan. Talks with representatives of the military were also planned in this framework, which were to be facilitated by the UN

mission UNITAMS. The SPA stated that the UNITAMS mission had failed to take a clear stand against the military coup. Furthermore, they say UNITAMS had basically accepted the coup organisers with its actions.

During a meeting held in El-Fashir, North Darfur on 02.02.22, General Al-Burhan commented for the first time since the coup in October 2021 on a possible transfer of power to a civilian government. He sees two possibilities for this. Either power could be transferred through elections, or through a national charter. Al-Burhan added that power would only be transferred through elections or a national agreement if the entire population demanded it. Regarding the security forces' violent crackdown on protesters, Al-Burhan stated that the security forces had the duty and responsibility to maintain security and order and to protect the country.

The meeting was attended by Al-Burhan and other members of the current government to discuss the implementation of security arrangements and a compilation of joint forces in Darfur. According to the Central Committee of Sudanese Doctors, five people who participated in rallies against the meeting were injured. According to the report, the security forces cracked down on protestors using metal chains, tear gas and batons. Some were also beaten with rifle butts. The Central Committee criticised the renewed targeted use of tear gas, which was fired directly at the protestors. In addition, several arrests were reportedly made.

### **Arbitrary arrests**

According to reports, security force members continue to arrest many people arbitrarily. On 01.02.22, members of various lawyers' associations protested in front of the public prosecutor's office against this practice and demanded the release of political prisoners. The authorities are focusing above all on members and sympathisers of the so-called resistance committees, which organise the protests against the military-led government. At the moment, the resistance committees are mainly decentralised, with almost every neighbourhood having its own committee. In order to achieve better organisation and a firmer basis, the drafting of a comprehensive and common charter for all resistance committees has been announced.

### **Fighting in Darfur**

On 05.02.22, an armed group attacked a former site of the hybrid African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur UNAMID, intent on looting. Fighting broke out between the attackers and the joint forces deployed to Darfur by the government and other allied groups. The armed group carrying out the raid only recently split from the government's joint forces. The Darfur region has experienced repeated attacks and raids on World Food Programme warehouses and bases of the former UNAMID mission in recent days and weeks. The suspension of UNAMID activities and an agreement between the government and several rebel groups have led to increased power struggles in the region in recent months. This development is being facilitated by the very slow progress in replacing the withdrawn UNAMID peacekeepers with joint forces.

## **Syria**

### **Northwest: ISIS leader dies in US special forces operation**

The ISIS leader Abu Ibrahim al-Hashimi al-Qurayshi was killed on 03.02.22 during a special forces operation carried out by the U.S. army in Atmeh, a small town between the governorates of Aleppo and Idlib, close to the Turkish border in north-western Syria. The U.S. army reportedly deployed two dozen special forces, helicopter gunships, combat drones and attack jets. During the operation, according to U.S. reports, ten civilians, including eight minors, were successfully evacuated from the ground floor of the house where al-Qurayshi was hiding. As the raid unfolded, the target, who was on the third floor, reportedly detonated an explosive device, ending his own life as well as that of his immediate family members. Rescue workers on the scene stated after the operation that at least 13 people had been killed, including women and children.

Al-Qurayshi's real name was Amir Muhammad Said Abdel-Rahman al-Mawla. The nom de guerre "al-Qurayshi" is often chosen in reference to the historical Quraysh family, to which the Prophet Mohammed also belonged. The later rulers of the Islamic dynasties (caliphates) also claimed the name to justify their actual or supposed descent from the Quraysh family.

Al-Qurayshi, a native of Iraq, was declared ISIS leader in 2019 after his predecessor Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi was killed in a similar US army operation, also in north-western Syria. The U.S. had put a US\$10 million bounty on al-

Qurayshi's head. He allegedly shared responsibility for the kidnappings, mass murder and human trafficking of the Yazidi minority in northern Iraq and masterminded several of ISIS global terrorist attacks. Until the fall of Saddam Hussein, al-Qurayshi served in the Iraqi army for a short time and then completed a master's degree in Islamic studies. In 2008, he was held in U.S. custody for an unknown period of time after participating in kidnappings and targeted killings as an al-Qaeda member in Mosul, Iraq.

### **Close to 80 targets bombed by Turkish military in northern Syria and northern Iraq**

The Turkish Defence Ministry announced on 02.02.22 that around 60 warplanes and drones had attacked positions held by the Kurdish PKK ((Kurdistan Workers' Party) and YPG (People's Defense Units) militias. The military operation was dubbed "Winter Eagle" ("kış kartalı") and reportedly targeted hideouts, ammunition depots and training camps in the Sinjar Mountains, the Karacak region in northern Iraq and the Derik region in northern Syria. According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, at least four people were killed. Turkish combat drones reportedly also fired two missiles at a power station near the Syrian town of Malikiyah, killing not only the guards but also civilians. The Kurdish-led administration in north-eastern Syria has condemned the military operation and accused Turkey of deliberately timing it shortly after a major ISIS offensive.

### **Al-Bab: at least seven killed in artillery fire**

At least seven people were killed and 29 injured in Turkish-occupied al-Bab in northern Syria on 02.02.22, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights. The attack was reportedly carried out by Kurdish militias from neighbouring areas.

## **Tajikistan**

### **Prosecutions after protests in Gorno-Badakhshan**

Following protests for greater autonomy in the remote province of Gorno-Badakhshan (cf. BN of 20.12.21), the authorities are taking law enforcement action against so-called informal leaders and influential figures. Meanwhile, three locals have been charged with inciting ethnic hatred and other serious crimes. Prosecutors announced on 02.02.22 that Mahmadoqir Mahmadoqirov, one of the local leaders, had been charged with insulting and using force against a government representative and inciting ethnic hatred. The same day, the Public Prosecutor's Office in Dushanbe, the capital of Tajikistan, announced that activist Amriddin Alovatshoev, an anti-government activist, had been extradited from the Russian Federation. He is accused of organising protest rallies and provoking anti-government sentiment from abroad. A total of three people were killed and at least 17 injured during the protests.

## **Togo**

### **Opposition members arrested**

As was announced on 03.02.22, five people arrested in Lomé during the early hours of 28.01.22 were transferred to the civil prison in Lomé. The persons concerned are Sébabé-Guéffé Tchassanti Nouroudine, the deputy treasurer general of the opposition party Parti National Panafricain (PNP), a Togolese by the name of Alfa Ibrahim (a member of the PNP in Germany), who resides in Germany and recently arrived in the country, as well as Boukari Abdoulrazak, Amadou Abdoulrachid and Banka Alidjénou. They are accused of glorifying crimes and forming a criminal organisation.

## **Tunisia**

### **President dissolves Supreme Judicial Council**

Over the weekend (05.02/06.02.22), President Kais Saied announced the dissolution of the Supreme Judicial Council (Conseil supérieur de la magistrature, (CSM)), which he has accused of being corrupt and of significantly delaying the investigation into the assassination of the left-wing activist Chokri Belaid in 2013. The date 06.02.22 marked the ninth anniversary of the activist's death, and demonstrations were held in his memory.

The 45-member council was created in 2016 to oversee the independence of the judiciary. Saied announced plans to re-establish and reorganise the judicial council.

The head of the Supreme Judicial Council, Youssef Bouzakher, said on 06.02.22 that the President's decision was illegal, adding that the council's work would continue.

According to observers, the President's decision to dissolve the council is aimed primarily at the moderate Islamist Ennahda party, which has exerted a strong influence on Tunisian politics and formed the government during the time of the assassination and the installation of the judicial council.

## Turkey

### **ECHR ruling on the lifting of MPs' immunity**

On 01.02.22, the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) ruled that the lifting of immunity and the trial of 40 MPs from the Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP), including imprisoned former HDP co-chairs Figen Yüksekdağ and Selahattin Demirtaş, constituted a violation of freedom of expression. The ECHR ruling also states that the decision to lift the MPs' parliamentary immunity is a violation of the Turkish constitution. Legal representatives of Demirtaş are now demanding that all imprisoned MPs be released from prison, that trials which have ended be reopened and that current judicial proceedings be stopped.

### **A number of migrants found dead**

On 02.02. 22 and 03.02.22, nineteen migrants were found dead near the town of Ipsala in Edirne province about 10 km from the Greek border. Turkish Interior Minister Süleyman Soylu stated that they had frozen to death. The origin of the persons and the circumstances that led to their deaths have not yet been fully clarified, but the Turkish government accuses Greece of push-backs, which allegedly exposed the migrants to the cold and caused them to freeze to death.

### **Council of Europe infringement proceedings**

Due to Turkey's refusal to implement a 2019 judgment of the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) and release the imprisoned Osman Kavala, the Committee of Ministers, the statutory decision-making body of the Council of Europe, launched infringement proceedings against Turkey on 03.02.22. The Committee decided on 02.02.22 to refer the case of Kavala v Turkey back to the ECHR for a legal opinion on whether Turkey has met its obligations to implement the judgment. If the ECHR confirms that Turkey has failed to implement the judgment, the Committee of Ministers may take additional measures against Turkey – such as suspending Turkey's voting rights in the Council of Europe.

## Ukraine

### **OSCE assessment of the security situation, expansion of armed forces planned**

Despite the Russian troop concentration on the Ukrainian border, there have been no changes in the security situation in the regions monitored by the organisation in Ukraine so far, according to OSCE data of 05.02.22. However, the number of ceasefire violations on the line of contact with the separatist areas in eastern Ukraine remains high, despite a slight decrease compared to 2021; on average, the OSCE monitoring mission has recorded more than 200 violation incidents per day so far this year. According to UN figures, a total of 25 civilians were killed and 85 injured in the conflict zone in 2021. On 01.02.22, President Volodymyr Zelensky signed a decree on planned restructuring of the Ukrainian armed forces. According to the presidential administration, the armed forces are to be increased by 100,000 servicemen and women, salaries are to be raised, and the armed forces are to be transformed into a professional army with the abolition of compulsory military service as of 01.01.24.

## **United Arab Emirates**

### **Drone attack on Abu Dhabi foiled**

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) Ministry of Defence announced on 02.02.22 that it had intercepted and destroyed three drones in Emirati airspace. The Iraqi militia group Awliyat al-Waad al-Haq (True Promise Brigades) claimed responsibility for the drone attacks the same day, citing Abu Dhabi as the target. The reason given was the UAE's policy in Iraq and Yemen. The True Promise Brigades reportedly have links to Kataib Hezbollah, an influential Iraqi militia backed by Iran. This is the fourth attack by missiles and drones to be carried out on the UAE within the space of a few weeks and the first from the north. The first three attacks were carried out by the Iranian-affiliated Houthis from Yemen to the south.

## **Venezuela**

### **Increased cost of living**

On 27.01.22, peaceful protests took place in Caracas against the high cost of living in the country. According to the Venezuelan Observatory of Finance (Observatorio Venezolano de Finanzas, (OVF)), the price of the food basket in foreign currency reached a new high of US\$365 for a family of five in January 2022, representing a rise of 75% in the past two years. Neither a worker's salary of around US\$80 in the greater Caracas area nor a manager's salary of around US\$210 can pay for the full basket of goods. The current minimum wage is seven bolívars (VED, equivalent to about US\$1.55, as of 07.02.22).

## **Yemen**

### **Clashes in Hajjah**

The Yemeni military says it took control of the Harad district in the north-western Hajjah Governorate on 04.02.22. The announcement came the day after the Houthis conceded the loss of the Shabwah Governorate in the south.

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