



# Briefing Notes

Group 62 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

21 February 2022

## Afghanistan

### Security situation

The Taliban established three new military units with approximately 4,400 troops in the border provinces (Farah, Badghis and Badakhshan) in the north-east, west and north of the country on 16.02.22. The Taliban also established a new special military unit with 200 soldiers on 13.02.22.

Residents of villages on the border with Pakistan in Kunar province report that they were forced to leave their homes due to rocket fire from Pakistan.

It is reported that a woman and a man were publicly stoned to death by the Taliban in Nasi district, Badakhshan province, on 14.02.22 as punishment for having "illegal relations".

Residents of Panjshir province report frequent harassment by the Taliban, such as arbitrary house-to-house inspections and violent attacks which are causing more and more people to leave the province. One example was given in which 26 out of 40 families from a village in Rokha district have left their homes.

On 15.02.22, a doctor was killed by unknown armed men in Baghlan province. The Medical Association of Afghanistan has reported that attacks against doctors are on the rise. Two people died in an armed clash that erupted at the private home of a high representative of the former government on 13.02.22. According to official sources, the clash escalated from what had begun as a family conflict. A car carrying family members of former commander Habib Afghan was attacked by unknown gunmen in Kapisa province on 14.02.22. Five people died in the clash. Two people were arrested. According to unconfirmed social media reports, Taliban leader Qari Baryal had ordered that the commander's house be evacuated.

### Government business

Six months after the takeover by the Taliban, over 80 cabinet members and provincial governors are Pashtuns and Taliban members. Hazaras and women have no positions in the cabinet and no posts as governors. It is also reported that the Taliban are removing non-Pashtuns (especially Hazaras) and women from public posts and are filling these posts with Pashtuns (e.g. in the Kabul Directorate General of Oil and Gas, at the Directorate General of Transport). In Bamyán province, the director and vice-chancellor of the university, both Hazaras, have been removed. The traffic police in Parwan province report that they have collected AFN 2.3 million (approx. EUR 22,000, as of 21.02.22) in the past eleven months. Despite this, the employees have not received any wages for the past seven months. The Taliban have announced that they will pay the wages promptly. Thirty employees of the traffic police in Balkh province have left their jobs because they have not received their salaries for seven months.

### Economic and humanitarian situation

On 14.02.22, the Taliban government released a statement condemning the U.S. decision to distribute half of frozen funds to victims of the 9/11 attacks and announced that they would be changing their policy towards the U.S. if the decision is not reversed. On 15.02.22, money exchangers in Kabul and several other cities protested against the

American decision and women's rights activists wrote an open letter to U.S. President Joe Biden, asking him to reconsider the decision.

At a meeting held between EU representatives and the Taliban government in Doha, the EU pledged further humanitarian support. This includes US\$ 11 million for the education sector. The Taliban delegation also met with representatives of the Gulf states on 14.02.22.

On 20.02.22, the Taliban Ministry of Education announced that the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) would pay US\$ 100 per month for almost 200,000 public school teachers.

### **Arrests / media / migration**

On 14.02.22, a BBC journalist who had been arrested with eight other colleagues in Kabul a week ago was reportedly released by the Taliban. The family of a former employee of the Ministry of Defence states that he was arrested by the Taliban on 12.02.22 without a court order and was released five days later. The Taliban have denied the allegations and have said they will investigate the incident.

According to women's rights activists, two women were arrested by the Taliban on 13.02.22 – one of them with her two children. Details surrounding the detention of the four activists lasting several weeks, released on the same day, remain unclear as the Taliban have not issued a statement, and the women claim to have been pressured into not issuing any statements. Unverified videos purporting to show women's confessions coerced by the Taliban after protests are circulating on social media.

It is reported that more than 300 media outlets, including at least 86 radio stations, have stopped broadcasting since the Taliban seized power. More closures are expected due to the lack of international funding, the dire economic situation and political restrictions.

The demand for smugglers who help people cross the borders into Iran and Pakistan illegally is increasing. Many people have become smugglers because of the difficulties in obtaining passports and applying for visas. At the same time, as the borders with the two countries have become more secure, people smugglers have doubled and trebled their prices.

The U.S. Department of Defence reported on 21.02.22 that about 50 of the Afghans they evacuated to the U.S. are considered to be a potential security threat there.

## **Angola**

### **Drought in the southern provinces: outlook**

The Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO) has stated that 1.58 million people in the southern provinces are facing acute levels of food insecurity. Among them, 417,000 people are in an emergency situation (IPC phase 4 of 5). The southern provinces of Angola are experiencing the fifth consecutive year of drought conditions. In 2022, 400,000 children are projected to be acutely malnourished. UNICEF claims that there is a massive lack of funding to provide for the people. In Cunene province, the government is supporting returnees from Namibia. Temporary camps have been set up. These families urgently need better hygiene and nutrition services (cf. BN of 26.07.21, 27.09.21 and 17.01.22).

## **Burkina Faso**

### **Head of the military junta appointed President**

Lieutenant Colonel Paul-Henri Sandaogo Damiba was sworn in as President on 16.02.22 barely four weeks after the coup took place (cf. BN of 07.02.22 and 14.02.22). Thousands of protestors gathered in the capital to show their support for the military. Many waved Russian flags and held anti-France banners.

### **Several villages in the east threatened by armed groups**

According to witnesses, nearly all the villages around the municipality of Pama, which is located about 100 km from Fada N'Gourma, were attacked by armed groups who ordered the inhabitants of Tibadi, Folpodi, Bonkada and Oumpoundeni to leave their villages within 24 hours on 13.02.22. The people had fled to the municipality of Pama, the only safe town in the area. Telephone networks and facilities have reportedly been destroyed by armed groups.

### **Town of Djibo faces renewed jihad threat**

Since 17.02.22, armed groups in the north of the country have been demanding that the population in several locations in the periphery of the town of Djibo (Soum province) vacate these locations and have been threatening violence. According to a native of the region, residents of several suburbs of Djibo municipality were given an ultimatum and were forced to flee to the city centre.

Transport companies have been banned from going to Djibo and from leaving the town, even though there is a military camp in this town. Buses coming from Ouagadougou are stopped about 50 km before Djibo. No one is allowed to leave the town of Djibo. Facilities of the state-owned electricity company and telephone systems have been destroyed.

## **China**

### **Hong Kong: election postponed**

Due to the current sharp rise in COVID-19 case numbers, the election of Chief Executive Carrie Lam's successor has been postponed from March 2022 until 08.05.22. The city of seven million reported 6,067 new infections on 20.02.22.

## **Democratic Republic of the Congo**

### **Rise in humanitarian needs**

According to consistent projections, an estimated 27 million people in the Democratic Republic of the Congo will continue to need some form of humanitarian assistance in 2022, with 8.8 million people said to be in need of acute assistance. The number of people dependent on humanitarian assistance has increased sharply compared to previous years. In 2021, the figure was 19.6 million, in 2020, the figure stood at 15.6 million.

### **Eastern Congo: conflicts between population groups, Hema and Lendu ethnic groups**

On 17.02.22, the NGO Alert International highlighted the ongoing conflicts between local communities and an increase in violence in the conflict-ridden provinces in the east of the country. While the International Committee of the Red Cross most recently reported on growing inter-communal tensions and violence in parts of South Kivu province (cf. BN of 14.02.22), the UN Human Rights Office warned of an escalation of long-standing tensions and violence between ethnic Hema herders and Lendu farmers in Ituri province. The factions of the militia Cooperative for Development of the Congo (Coopérative pour le développement économique au Congo (CODECO)), which is mainly composed of ethnic Lendu and considers itself to be the protector of this ethnic group, are said to be responsible for a growing number of attacks on internally displaced Hema (cf. BN of 07.02.22). Press coverage from February 2022 included repeated reports of attacks by CODECO militia in Djugu Territory. According to a Congolese MP, CODECO militia attacks are increasing exponentially. Civil society sources in Djugu stated on 19.02.22 that, among other things, at least 165 civilians had been killed and several abducted in the various attacks perpetrated by CODECO militia in Djugu Territory in February 2022 alone.

## **Ethiopia**

### **State of emergency ended**

On 15.02.22, parliament voted for an early end to the six-month nationwide state of emergency that had been declared in November 2021 and which, among other things, allowed for people to be detained without a court order on suspicion of terrorist activities (cf. BN of 08.11.21). Thousands of ethnic Tigrays were subsequently arrested (cf. BN of 22.11.21).

The government is hoping that the lifting of the state of emergency will lead to a revival of the country's economic and foreign relations. The conflict in northern Ethiopia has led to a severe economic crisis. The U.S. and the EU cut assistance funds, and the inflation rate was around 35% in 2021.

### **ai reports gang rapes by Tigrayan militias**

Amnesty International (ai) has again accused the Tigray Defence Forces (TDF) of serious human rights violations in a report published on 16.02.22. The TDF are said to be responsible for arbitrary killings and sexual violence against the civilian population in the areas under their temporary control in the Amhara region. As early as November 2021, ai and Human Rights Watch had documented sexual assaults by TDF fighters. In each case, these allegedly involved acts of revenge for resistance offered by Amhara militias (cf. BN of 13.12.21).

### **UN reports fatalities in attack on refugee camp**

At least five people were reportedly killed and several women were kidnapped in an attack carried out on the Barahle refugee camp on the border between the Afar and Tigray regions. Eyewitnesses and representatives of the regional government in Afar hold the TDF responsible for the incident, which the UNHCR says occurred on 03.02.22. Thousands of Eritrean refugees who had been housed at the camp have fled since the attack, UNHCR claimed on 18.02.22. Fighting between the TDF and Afar forces continues in the region in north-eastern Ethiopia.

## **Ghana**

### **Several journalists arrested and assaulted**

According to media reports, three journalists have been arrested or detained in Ghana since the beginning of February 2022. Blessed Godsbain Smart, a presenter who criticised the government on Onua TV, was arrested by the police on 02.02.22, the second time in less than three months, on unspecified extortion charges. Oheneba Boamah Bennie, a journalist working for the private radio station PowerFM, was given a two-week prison sentence for, among other things, insulting President Nana Akufo-Addo on 08.02.22. Radio presenter Kwabena Bobbie Ansah was arrested for spreading fake news and offensive conduct on 10.02.22. He alleged on social media that the two wives of the president had fraudulently obtained state-owned land to build the headquarters of a foundation. Furthermore, on 03.02.22, reporter Eric Nana Gyetuah was physically assaulted and injured by police officers when he tried to film a group of detainees. In the view of the NGO Reporters Without Borders, these incidents show an increasing threat to freedom of the press in a country where they say arrests of journalists had actually become the exception.

## **India**

### **Families demand release of three Kashmiri students**

The families of three Kashmiri students who have been imprisoned for several months for celebrating the Pakistani cricket team's victory over India in a tournament in the United Arab Emirates in WhatsApp messages are demanding their release. In October 2021, the three students who are all in their early 20s were arrested in Agra in the northern state of Uttar Pradesh on charges of sedition. The three students were enrolled at a university in Agra under a special scholarship programme meant for students from the conflict-torn region. They were charged with "cyber terrorism, sedition and promoting enmity". They faced a hostile crowd outside the court in Agra. Many lawyers refused to represent them. According to family members, bail hearings have been postponed at least eight times. India's defeat also resulted in attacks being carried out on dozens of Kashmiri students in the western state of Punjab.

### **38 death sentences for bombings in 2008**

An Indian court on 18.02.22 sentenced 38 people to death and imposed life sentences on 11 others in connection with a series of bombings that were carried out in Ahmedabad in the state of Gujarat in 2008, killing 56 people and injuring 200. The defendants were found guilty of murder and criminal conspiracy. In the July 2008 attacks, around 20 bombs were set off within an hour at several different locations in Ahmedabad, including markets, buses and public buildings. The militant Islamist group Indian Mujahideen had claimed responsibility for the attacks at the time, saying that they had been carried out in retaliation for the religious riots that took place in Gujarat in 2002, leaving 1,000 people dead.

## **Iran**

### **Prison sentence against two Christian converts**

Christian organisations and Iranian foreign media report that Iran's Supreme Court has dismissed a petition to review a court sentence handed down against two converts to Christianity. This upholds a four-year prison sentence handed down to a Christian man and a two-year sentence handed down to a woman. The man has been serving time in Evin Prison since January 2022. The woman was summoned to start her prison sentence after the decision. The two defendants had been arrested in Rasht (Gilan province) in northern Iran in February 2020. The original verdict was issued in August 2020 by the 26th branch of the Revolutionary Court. The defendants had been charged with membership of groups that have the aim of undermining the country's security. An appeal had already been rejected by the Revolutionary Court in September 2020.

As recently as 24.11.21, the presiding judge in a revision case at the 28th branch of the Revolutionary Court had ruled that involvement in house churches and Christian missions were not criminal offences under the Iranian Criminal Code (ICC/5th Book of 1996) and thus did not constitute actions against Iran's national security (cf. BN of 13.12.21).

### **Revocation of death sentences**

According to media reports, the first branch of the Supreme Court overturned the death sentence of a 34-year-old man and commuted it to a blood money penalty, saying that after more than 18 years, Iran's health department could no longer provide expert opinions regarding the mental maturity of the perpetrator at the time of the crime. According to the statements of the co-defendant, the death of the victim had not been caused intentionally. The accused was 15 years old at the time of the crime and had spent almost 19 years in prison.

According to a report issued by Human Rights Activists in Iran (HRANA) on 20.02.22, two men sentenced to death in two separate cases in Kermanshah (western Iran) and Aq Qala (Golestan province, northern Iran) were released with the consent of the families of the murder victims. In the case in Kermanshah, the alleged perpetrator had been sentenced to death in 2019. Afterwards, the authorities had lobbied the family of the murder victim for more than two years for a pardon. He has now been released without conditions. In the second case, the pardon came about through the mediation of a Sunni cleric.

### **Mourners attending a memorial service for deceased writer arrested**

According to foreign media reports, security forces cracked down on mourners attending a memorial service in Tehran for the writer Baktash Abtin, who died in custody on 08.01.22. At least six people were arrested and others were driven out of the cemetery. The funeral service and the subsequent burial in January 2022 had already taken place amid high presence of security forces (cf. BN of 10.01.22). The Iranian Writers' Union accused the judiciary of the premeditated murder of Abtin as he had been deprived of medical treatment for a long time while he had been in detention.

### **Further charges against detained human rights activist**

According to media reports issued on 18.02.22, a publicist and human rights activist who has been detained since 2018 has been re-arraigned on charges of spreading propaganda against the regime. Referring to information provided by a former fellow prisoner on social media, the man was reportedly brought from Rajaei Shahr detention centre in Karaj on 17.02.22 to a hearing at the local Revolutionary Court. The activist is an academic and founder of a publishing house for textbooks. He began serving a six-year prison sentence in 2018 for, among other things, publicly advocating women's protests against dress codes (hijab). Foreign media report that the detainee refused to attend previous court hearings in order to protect employees of his publishing house and to protest against the charges. In addition, in 2019, he criticised the prison conditions political prisoners face in Tehran's Evin prison in an open letter he wrote to the judiciary and prison administration, and he organised prisoner protests. This led to his transfer to Rajaei Shahr prison in Karaj. In December 2021, the activist published a letter in memory of two victims of the November 2019 protests. One reason for the new charges is the accusation that he published the commemorative letter online. The official content of the charges has not been disclosed yet.

## **Iraq**

### **Aftermath of the massacre in Babil on 30.12.21**

After 20 people were killed in a massacre in Babil (cf. BN of 03.01.22 and 10.01.22), the first verdicts in the case were handed down by the court of first instance on 13.02.22. Security forces had opened fire on an apartment complex after an informant had claimed that two wanted terrorists were in the building. It transpired shortly afterwards that the informant was involved in a family feud and for this reason provided false information to the security forces. He and one of the officers responsible have now been sentenced to death by hanging in Babil. The sentence is not yet final.

## **Kazakhstan**

### **Situation remains volatile**

In the wake of the nationwide protests against the Kazakh leadership that took place in January 2022 (cf. BN of 10.01.22 and 17.01.22), the situation stabilised owing to the rigorous crackdown by security forces, external support and domestic political changes. However, the overall situation remains volatile, with a progressive consolidation and expansion of the influence of President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev and his associates to the detriment of Nursultan Nazarbayev and his supporters becoming increasingly apparent. This has been highlighted in particular by the replacement of key political and state officials, the removal of certain rights and offices held by Nazarbayev, and Tokayev's assumption of the chairmanship of the state party Nur-Otan. International observers continue to express concern about the security forces' crackdown on protesters and report credible evidence that arbitrary arrests, torture and other abuses may have been carried out by security forces. Against this backdrop, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet, several UN human rights experts, the U.S. and the EU Human Rights Commissioner have called for an independent investigation into the events of January 2022. Human rights organisations in particular advocate that an internationally led inquiry be carried out, a suggestion that has been rejected by the Kazakh leadership, which has so far promised a purely national investigation of the events.

## **Kuwait**

### **Anti-transgender law unconstitutional**

On 16.02.22, the Constitutional Court declared Article 198 of the Criminal Code, according to which "imitation of the opposite sex" is punishable with imprisonment for up to a year, unconstitutional. The court based its decision on the fact that the relevant law does not specify what constitutes an "imitation of the opposite sex" and does not include clear and objective criteria. It therefore threatens individual personal freedom. Amnesty International has welcomed the court's decision, and conservative MPs have announced their intention to take legal action against the court's decision.

## **Lebanon**

### **Incidents along the border between Israel and Lebanon**

On 17.02.22 and 18.02.22, two incidents occurred in the area spanning the border between Lebanon and Israel, each involving a drone from Lebanon entering Israeli airspace. The drone on 17.02.22 was possibly shot down, while the drone from the following day returned to Lebanon. Hezbollah had announced shortly beforehand that it was now able to manufacture military drones in Lebanon and also to equip thousands of precision-guided missiles. It is unclear to what extent this statement reflects real capabilities. However, the Israeli side has been concerned about such a development for some time.

## Mali

### Jihadists killed in military operation

According to reports issued by the Malian army, 57 jihadists and eight soldiers were killed and 14 injured in a military operation that took place in the north of the country. Earlier, on 18.02.22, unknown gunmen allegedly attacked government troops in the Archam region near the border with Burkina Faso and Niger. Days earlier, violence against civilians had been perpetrated in the area. Jihadists are said to have killed at least 40 civilians whom they accused of belonging to a rival group.

## Myanmar

### Fighting and attacks in Mon, Yangon, Magway, Chin, Mandalay, Sagaing, Shan, Kachin

On 08.02.22 and 09.02.22, two military-appointed community leaders were killed in Kyaikto (Mon State) and Yangon. In Yangon's South Dagon Township, unidentified persons carried out attacks on an office of the pro-military Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) and a district administration office on 14.02.22. Another attack on an administrative building was documented in North Okkalapa on 15.02.22.

According to reports issued on 17.02.22, a combination of the Yaw Defence Force and the Myaing People's Defence Force (PDF) attacked a police station in Gangaw (Magway Region) on 10.02.22, fuelling clashes the same day and the following day. Around 20 security force members and one PDF member were killed, according to the resistance groups. On 16.02.22, members of the military-backed Pyu Saw Htee militia raided two villages in Pauk Township, Magway, looting and destroying several houses. The raid was preceded by an attack perpetrated by the guerrilla group Anonymous Special Task Force on a house belonging to Pyu Saw Htee leaders, in which two people died.

On 13.02.22, the Myanmar Army (Tatmadaw) set fire to more houses in the town of Thantlang in Chin State. Since September 2021, more than 900 of Thantlang's approximately 2,300 buildings have been destroyed as a result of a total of 25 arson attacks. The entire population of 8,000 to 10,000 people have fled fighting between the Tatmadaw and resistance forces. Access and supply routes cut off by the military make it impossible for them to return.

PDF members killed two soldiers and injured others in an attack carried out on a military checkpoint in Singu (Mandalay Region) on 14.02.22. Members of the Natogyi Township PDF fired mortar shells at security forces guarding an off-take station of the oil and gas pipelines to China near Natogyi (Mandalay) the same day. On 15.02.22, security forces raided Natogyi and arrested 24 people on charges of belonging to or funding the PDF. The Natogyi Township PDF operates under the opposition shadow National Unity Government (NUG), which was formed by ousted democratically elected MPs. Those arrested were known locally to support Aung San Suu Kyi's National League of Democracy (NLD) party.

According to media reports issued on 14.02.22, junta forces burnt down large parts of Mote Thar and Mauk Tet villages in Mingin commune (Sagaing region) during a raid carried out on 10.02.22, killing four civilians. The raid was preceded by an attack perpetrated by the local PDF on a nearby military outpost. In Taze Township (Sagaing), the Tatmadaw destroyed around 80 houses in four villages when they carried out arson attacks in the first half of February 2022. In Khin U (Sagaing), junta forces dressed in plain clothes killed 14 members of a local PDF, including two young men aged 15, on 17.02.22. In Kalay (Sagaing), resistance forces carried out attacks on a military camp on 12.02.22, 14.02.22 and 17.02.22. According to a Chinland Defence Force (CDF) spokesperson, the troops stationed there allegedly put pressure on the civilian population to form pro-junta militias.

On 15.02.22, Myanmar Army troops occupied the town of Moebye in southern Shan State. On 16.02.22, fighting broke out there between the Tatmadaw troops and an alliance of several local PDFs, including the Karenni Nationalities Defense Force (KNDF). In the process, at least 15 PDF members had been killed and several civilians injured, some seriously, by 18.02.22 in attacks delivered from the air and with tank ammunition. The junta forces are also reported to have suffered casualties. The military has cut the telephone lines and internet connection to Moebye.

Tatmadaw troops clashed with the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) in Swamprabon (Kachin State) on 15.02.22.

## **Niger / Nigeria**

### **Seven children killed in air strike**

According to media reports, seven children were killed and five others were injured in an air strike carried out in the southern region of Maradi, Niger, not far from the border with Nigeria, on 18.02.22. According to the governor of Maradi, Chaibou Aboubacar, the attack was actually aimed at so-called bandits, who are being held accountable for deadly attacks and kidnappings in north-western Nigeria. However, he said there was no evidence so far that the deadly attacks had been carried out by the Nigerian military. The Nigerian Major General Jimmy Akpor (Director of Defence Information) had stated that the Nigerian Air Force does not operate outside its own borders as a matter of principle and that the incident was being investigated.

## **Nigeria**

### **Fatalities in attacks in several states**

An attack was carried out by unknown individuals on motorbikes, killing 18 people and injuring others in Kadaddaba locality in the north-western state of Zamfara on 18.02.22. Similar attacks have been carried out in Zamfara and towns in other states in the region recently (cf. BN of 17.01.22 and 14.02.22).

In south-eastern Nigeria, at least eight people died in an attack on a cattle market in Abia State on 15.02.22. The unknown gunmen also killed many cattle and caused damage to property. The day before, three policemen had been killed in an attack on a police station in the neighbouring state of Ebonyi by unknown persons. The previous week, unknown assailants had killed at least seven police officers at two checkpoints in the south-eastern state of Enugu, according to media reports.

### **Latest figures on economic performance**

Nigeria's economy grew by 3.40% in 2021, according to the National Bureau of Statistics. This is the strongest growth in eight years. The latest figures also show that economic performance has recently been boosted by the non-oil sector, especially agriculture, which showed growth of 4.73% in 2021. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has forecast gross domestic product (GDP) growth of 2.7% for both 2022 and 2023 (cf. BN of 31.01.22). Nigeria's economy is the largest in Africa, according to the IMF.

### **Government creates 750,000 jobs for young people**

The Federal Government has created 750,000 jobs to lift young Nigerians out of unemployment. This was indicated in media reports referring to a statement issued by the Director General of the Bureau of Public Service Reforms (BPSR) on 13.02.22.

### **Success story in the fight against corruption**

Nigeria's Independent Corrupt Practices and other related offences Commission (ICPC) seized cash and assets worth a total of NGN 166.51 billion (about EUR 351 million, as of 21.02.22) from corrupt individuals between 2019 and mid-2021. According to an official statement issued by the ICPC on 06.02.22, this is many times more than what the agency had set as a target under its 2019-2023 strategic plan. Nigeria currently ranks 154th in Transparency International's global corruption index.

A web portal was recently created that allows Nigerians to report their experiences of corruption and track the processing of these reports online (cf. BN of 31.01.22).

### **Latest UNHCR figures on IDPs and people seeking protection in Nigeria**

According to the latest UNHCR figures, Nigeria is home to more than 3 million internally displaced people (IDPs) and almost 80,000 people seeking protection from other countries. A UNHCR overview issued on 08.02.22 puts the number of IDPs in the north-east of Nigeria at 2,200,357 and in the north-west and north-central zones of the country at 983,701. Regarding the reasons for internal displacement in the north-east, the differentiation is as follows: 93% of those affected have been displaced by the volatile terrorist situation, 6% due to local clashes and 1% by natural disasters. The total number of refugees and asylum seekers residing and registered in Nigeria is

reported to be 79,365, including many from Cameroon and the Central African Republic, but also from many other countries of origin.

## **North Macedonia**

### **Threat to ultra-orthodox Jewish group requires police protection**

According to a recent media report, on 15.02.22, police took 38 members of an ultra-conservative Jewish group that had moved to the city of Kumanovo via Bosnia-Herzegovina to a hotel in Skopje. The members of the group had previously stated that they had been the target of attacks by residents in Kumanovo. The police, who had called on the population to show tolerance and solidarity, had also pointed out that the Jewish group was composed of Canadian, U.S. and Belgian citizens who were residing in the country lawfully and temporarily in accordance with the law.

## **Pakistan**

### **TV producer shot dead in Karachi**

On 18.02.22, a television producer working for a private news channel was shot dead in his car in Karachi (Sindh) by gunmen on motorbikes. According to witnesses, the victim was caught in the middle of an attempted street robbery. No other possible reasons were given. The largest city in the south of Pakistan, which has about 15 million inhabitants, is known for its high crime rate.

### **Court acquits man convicted of honour killing**

Muhammad Waseem, the brother of a former Pakistani social media star who had initially confessed to the honour killing of his sister, was acquitted by a court in Multan. He had retracted his confession but was sentenced to life imprisonment in 2019.

The murder sparked outrage throughout Pakistan where hundreds of women are killed every year by male relatives for purportedly bringing "shame" to the reputation of a family. The act also led to amendments to laws on honour killings. Baloch had become known for her posts on Facebook. Waseem said at the time that he had no remorse because his sister's behaviour had been intolerable.

### **Government tightens cybercrime laws**

Pakistan's government intends to take action against defamation and fake news on social media by adopting stricter laws. According to a press release issued by the Ministry of Justice on 20.02.22, a tightening of the law has been enacted, according to which defamation of personalities and institutions, especially the military, can in future be punished with prison sentences of up to five years. The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) has criticised the amendment as undemocratic. It will be used to crack down on dissenters and opponents of the government. The 2016 cybercrime laws have been amended several times, most recently in 2021, allowing authorities to access user data.

## **Russian Federation**

### **Opposition politician Navalny on trial again**

After Alexei Navalny was sentenced to around two and a half years in prison in February 2021 for violating the conditions of a suspended sentence (cf. BN of 22.02.21), a second criminal trial against the government critic began on 15.02.22. In a new trial, the prosecution accuses him of collecting and embezzling donations under the pretext of fighting corruption with his Fund for Combating Corruption (FBK), which is now banned in Russia as extremist. According to Russian criminal law, this can result in a prison sentence of up to ten years. In addition, Navalny is charged with contempt of court in connection with a hearing in 2021; the penalty carries a sentence of up to six months' imprisonment. In a statement, Amnesty International said it sees the trial as an attempt to keep the opposition politician in prison beyond 2023. Contrary to the usual procedure, the trial will not take place in the competent district court in Moscow, but under conditions that are, according to media reports, more difficult for

the defence at the high-security prison camp of Pokrov, where Navalny is currently being detained. A third investigation for founding an extremist organisation is still pending.

It was only in January 2022 that Navalny and around ten people from his circle were added to the list of terrorists and extremists by the state financial supervisory authority. According to press reports, persons classified accordingly can now only access their accounts, which were subsequently blocked, with prior authorisation from the authorities.

## **Somalia**

### **Attack against freedom of the press following attack on police building**

The Haram'ad anti-terrorist police unit was criticised for arresting four journalists when they reported on an attack perpetrated by al-Shabaab on several police buildings in the Kahda neighbourhood in Mogadishu on 16.02.22. The reporters, who work for private media, had previously conducted interviews with interlopers about an attack. Several heavily armed al-Shabaab fighters had stormed the compound with the help of a vehicle loaded with explosives. Five people, including two girls, were killed and at least 16 civilians were injured in a gunfire exchange with security forces. The journalists' union is calling for the officers to be prosecuted. Several Somalia-based embassies have also condemned this restriction on freedom of the press.

### **UN: acute food insecurity due to prolonged drought**

According to UNICEF's latest food security report, half of the under-fives, more than 1.4 million children, are likely to suffer from acute malnutrition due to the ongoing drought. Three consecutive seasons of failed rains combined with ongoing conflicts in many parts of Somalia have left a quarter of the population needing immediate food assistance, it says. Water prices have risen by up to 72% in the last quarter in some of the worst affected regions.

### **Suicide bombing in Beledweyne (Hiiraan province)**

At least 15 people, mostly civilians, were killed in a suicide attack at a restaurant in Beledweyne. At least 20 others were injured. Al-Shabaab has claimed responsibility for the attack. The security situation in the city is currently tense, as elections for the national parliament are due to take place there in the next few days. A large number of security force members are therefore on the ground.

## **South Sudan**

### **Security situation**

In a report released on 17.02.22, the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) stated that cases of violence against civilians reported for 2021 had decreased by 42% compared with the previous year. A total of 3,414 civilian victims of killings, injuries, abductions and conflict-related sexual violence were documented for 2021. The previous year, UNMISS reported 5,850 civilian victims. For 2021, most victims were registered in the context of conflict within the country. Warrap State recorded the highest number of incidents at 24%, Western Equatoria State 19%, and Jonglei State and Greater Pibor Administrative Area 17%, respectively.

Due to the resurgence of violence in some parts of the country, UNMISS has urged the government to investigate and prosecute such violations.

The UN also condemned the killing of two humanitarian workers and the prevalence of violence in general. On 10.02.22, a nurse was killed in Warrap State, in the disputed region of Abyei, in the course of fighting in the area. The same day, a humanitarian aid worker in Unity State was caught in the crossfire of armed combat and fatally shot. On 12.02.22, a clearly identifiable vehicle belonging to an aid organisation was shot at on its way to a health centre. Three people inside the vehicle were seriously injured. According to UN figures, 130 humanitarian aid workers have been killed since 2013.

The ongoing violence, as well as repeated threats, against workers from humanitarian aid organisations is severely affecting the work of these organisations.

## Sudan

### Protests continue

On 14.02.22, the regular Monday rallies took place again. According to the media, thousands of people took part in the protests against the military government dubbed the "March of Millions" in the cities of Khartoum, Omdurman and Port Sudan, among others. According to the Central Committee of Sudanese Doctors, two protestors were shot by security forces, one of them fatally. At least 80 people have been killed in the course of protests against the military government. Security force spokespersons again stated that they did not use live ammunition against demonstrators. In addition, they said that at least 102 security force members had been injured and that the entrance to the parliament building had been destroyed by the protestors.

The demonstrators demanded the release of the detained activists. According to a group of lawyers allied with the protestors, more than 100 political prisoners have been arrested and detained without charge in the past week.

More demonstrations took place against the military's coup on 20.02.22. They coincided with the visit of a UN human rights expert. Thousands of people reportedly took to the streets in Khartoum and marched to the presidential palace. Security forces used tear gas to disperse the protests, injuring several protestors.

### Arrests

The military government is increasingly cracking down on opposition politicians and activists. The latest arrests have included many members of the Sovereign Council, as well as the chairpersons and vice-chairpersons of the Empowerment Removal Committee (ERC). The ERC was established by Abdallah Hamdok to remove remaining privileges granted by the Al-Bashir regime to its supporters. The military government had previously suspended the ERC, thus terminating its work. The numerous arrests also affect journalists and humanitarian workers.

The media have also reported that the ongoing arrests of opponents of the military government have been accompanied by the increased rehabilitation of former supporters of the Al-Bashir regime. Most recently, Taha Osman, a member of the ERC and a leading figure in the political party Forces of Freedom and Change (FFC), was arrested on 17.02.22.

This action by the military government has provoked international criticism. The so-called Troika (U.S., UK, Norway) as well as Canada, Switzerland and the EU have issued a joint statement condemning the military government's actions. They have also urged the military government to honour its stated commitment to constructively engage in a facilitated process to resolve the prevailing crisis. In addition, they have called for an end to the state of emergency that has been in force since 25.10.21.

## Syria

### Damascus: soldier killed in attack on military bus

According to state media reports, an explosive device attached to a military bus detonated on 15.02.22. One soldier was killed, and eleven others were wounded. The explosion occurred at rush hour near Umayyad Square, a major transport hub in the capital Damascus. So far no one has claimed responsibility for the attack.

### Idlib: four killed in government attack on fuel market

According to the opposition-affiliated Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR), four people were killed in shelling carried out by Syrian government forces on a company's fuel market in the Tirmanin area, in the north of Idlib governorate, on 16.02.22.

### Sweida: increase in crime and lawlessness

According to media reports, crime continues to increase in Sweida governorate. Local media reported more than 29 people killed in various incidents in January 2022. The local population accuses the government of lacking authority to enforce laws and justice and even of supporting gangs loyal to the government that take advantage of the lawlessness that sometimes prevails.

As a sign of civil disobedience and as a protest against the poor economic situation, the lack of adequate state services and the government's reduction of subsidies for many families, the population in Sweida blocked main roads and closed official offices in February 2022.

## Togo

### **Opposition member released from prison early**

According to media reports, opposition activist Paul Missiagbeto was released early from prison on 11.02.22 after serving nine months of his sentence. Missiagbeto is a member of the party Patriotic Movement for Democracy and Development (Mouvement Patriotique pour la Démocratie et le Développement (MPDD)) and an advisor to opposition politician Agbéyomé Kodjo, who as the MPDD candidate lost the February 2020 presidential election to incumbent Faure Gnassingbé. Missiagbeto was arrested on 17.05.21 and sentenced to four years' imprisonment, two of them suspended, on 27.08.21 on charges including disturbing public order. He is alleged to have spread fake news on social media (cf. BN of 30.08.21).

## Tunisia

### **State of emergency extended**

On 18.02.22, President Kais Saied extended the state of emergency until 31.12.22. Tunisia has been under a state of emergency since 2015, and it has been extended repeatedly.

## Turkey

### **Journalist shot dead**

According to media reports, on 19.02.22, Güngör Arslan, editor-in-chief of the local internet newspaper Ses Kocaeli, was shot in front of the editorial building in the city of Izmit in Kocaeli province in western Turkey and succumbed to his injuries in hospital. Police arrested a suspect but did not initially give any details of his identity or motives. The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) demanded that the authorities clarify whether the attack was related to his journalistic work. Reporters Without Borders also demanded a comprehensive clarification and referred to recently published articles in which Arslan made corruption allegations against the mayor of the municipality in Izmit led by the ruling AKP party.

### **Syrians naturalised**

Interior Minister Süleyman Soylu stated on 17.02.22 that there are currently approximately 3.7 million Syrian refugees with temporary protection status in the country, and 193,293 of them, including 84,152 children, had been granted Turkish citizenship by 31.12.2021. Soylu also stated that 37,418 of the Syrian migrants had criminal convictions in 2020 and 50,231 in 2021.

## Ukraine / Russian Federation

### **Deterioration of the situation in eastern Ukraine, humanitarian situation**

According to media reports, the tense situation in the conflict-ridden area in eastern Ukraine has further escalated (cf. BN of 14.02.22). In its daily report of 19.02.22, the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission registered a total of 1,566 ceasefire violations on the line of contact, including 1,413 explosions. The de facto authorities in the non-government-controlled parts of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions ordered the evacuation of civilians to the Russian Federation on 18.02.22 and declared a general mobilisation the following day; men between the ages of 18 and 55 are not to be allowed to leave the region. According to media reports, a total of 700,000 people are to be evacuated from the Donetsk region to the Russian Federation. The Ukrainian military says that two members of the Ukrainian armed forces were killed and four others wounded near the contact line on 19.02.22. The parties to the conflict have accused each other of using heavy weapons in violation of the provisions of the 2015 Minsk Agreement, which has not yet been implemented. Meanwhile, international diplomatic efforts continue amid a feared military escalation caused by the concentration of Russian troops on the Ukrainian border. According to EU Commission estimates, between 20,000 and over one million people from Ukraine could seek protection in the EU in the event of a military escalation. According to a UN report released on 11.02.22, the number of people in Ukraine in need of humanitarian assistance is estimated to be around 2.9 million for the current year, of whom approximately 54% are

women and girls. The main causal factors cited in this context are the ongoing armed conflict in eastern Ukraine and movement restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which particularly affect the population close to the line of contact in the non-government-controlled parts of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions. According to UNHCR, the movement of people along the line of contact is currently only possible at two of a total of seven crossing points.

## **Vietnam**

### **HRW: freedom of movement of activists systematically restricted**

In a report published on 17.02.22, the NGO Human Rights Watch (HRW) details how the Vietnamese government systematically restricts the right to freedom of movement of activists working in the field of politics and human rights. Between 2004 and 2021, HRW documented over 170 cases of activists and their family members being prevented from travelling domestically and abroad, being temporarily placed under house arrest or being detained for the duration of events. This included them being prevented from leaving their homes on national or religious holidays, during important political events and during official visits by foreign heads of state or UN delegations (including by plainclothes security forces, padlocks placed externally on their homes, or roadblocks). The organisation also reports that the authorities refuse to issue travel documents, impose travel bans and turn back the above-mentioned persons at airports and border crossings. HRW estimates that the actual number of people affected by these measures is much higher, partly due to the government's strict censorship.

## **Yemen**

### **Risk of aid programmes being closed**

The UN Special Envoy for Yemen, Martin Griffiths, reported on 15.02.22 that since the end of January 2022, almost two-thirds of the major UN aid programmes have been scaled back or closed altogether (cf. BN of 10.01.22). The World Food Programme, for example, has already cut food rations for around 8 million out of the total 13 million people it feeds every month (cf. BN of 03.01.22). By March 2022, he said further reductions or even cutting people from food assistance completely could follow. The reasons for this are persistent funding shortages. The UN has received only 58% of the requested funds from donors for its planned humanitarian aid measures.

### **Air strikes against ground station for satellites**

On 14.02.22, the anti-Houthi coalition led by Saudi Arabia carried out air strikes against a ground station for satellites in the capital Sanaa. The coalition accuses the Houthis of using the ground station to carry out drone attacks. The Houthis deny this.