



Briefing Notes

Group 62 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

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Afghanistan

Persecution situation

A new report published by Amnesty International on 21.03.22 highlights arbitrary violence and arrests by the Taliban. In January and February 2022, at least 60 people, including children, were arbitrarily arrested. Women protesters, former politicians and government employees as well as journalists have been particularly affected. It said that the number of people who had faced arbitrary arrests is probably much higher, as media coverage is severely restricted. On 24.03.22, the Taliban's regional Ministries for the Propagation of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice in Bamiyan and Balkh provinces issued official decrees banning women who do not wear full-face veils (burqas) from entering government buildings. In Bamiyan, male civil servants are reportedly not allowed to shave their beards and have to wear a turban to work. Previously, these rules had only been applicable unofficially. They say anyone who violates the rules will face severe consequences.

Education continues to be blocked for girls

Despite the Taliban's announcements that girls would be allowed to return to school beyond the sixth grade when the new school year begins on 22.03.22, most secondary schools for girls have remained closed. According to the state news agency Bakhtar, plans for teaching in accordance with Islamic law and Afghan culture have yet to be worked out by the Taliban. Some schools opened in many provinces but girls were often sent home again after a few hours without further explanation. The UN Security Council met on 25.03.22 to discuss the continued ban on girls' education. Ten countries subsequently read out a joint statement calling for the ban to be lifted. On 26.03.22 protests by women and girls took place in Kabul against the ongoing ban on education.

Azerbaijan

Karabakh conflict

On 26.03.22, the Russian Ministry of Defence announced that Azerbaijani forces had entered the area of control of the Russian-deployed peacekeepers in Karabakh and, in particular, had carried out four drone strikes near the village of Furuch. The internationally unrecognised "Republic of Artsakh", which controls parts of Karabakh, imposed martial law. On 27.03.22, the Russian Defence Ministry noted the withdrawal of Azerbaijani forces from Furuch. Russia is monitoring the ceasefire in Karabakh through peacekeepers. These were provided for under a trilateral agreement concluded between Armenia, Azerbaijan and Russia. The Azerbaijani side has denied violating the ceasefire agreement and accuses Armenia of violating it, claiming the Armenian side has failed to ensure the complete withdrawal of its forces from the conflict zone. Neither party has reported any further escalation at this time.

Burkina Faso

Transitional parliament established

The transitional parliament was established on 22.03.22, electing Professor Aboubacar Touguényi as its president. The parliament has 71 seats: 21 seats for persons appointed by transitional president Paul-Henri Sandaogo Damiba, 16 seats for security forces, 13 for civil society organisations, eight for political parties and movements and one for each of the country's 13 regions.

Fatalities during military operation

The military announced on 22.03.22 that at least 36 extremists had been killed or wounded in an operation carried out in the Est Region on 20.03.22. Thirteen security forces were killed at Natiaboani (cf. BN of 21.03.22) and 11 security forces were killed at Napade.

Central African Republic

"Republican dialogue" without concrete results

From 21.03.22 to 27.03.22, the "**republican dialogue**" with the aim of national reconciliation (cf. BN of 11.10.21 and 14.02.22), which had long been announced by President Faustin-Archange Touadéra but was finally arranged at very short notice, took place in the parliament building. Representatives of the government, opposition and civil society were invited. However, the important opposition coalition COD2020 announced their boycott of the dialogue one day before it was due to start. They justified this with the fact that no invitations were issued to rebel groups, with the vague agenda and objectives as well as the fact that the post-election crisis after the elections of 27.12.20, including the disputed re-election of Touadéra, would not be covered in the talks. However, sections of the opposition broke away from the boycott, leading to divisions within their ranks.

The submission of a proposal to revise the constitution was also met with displeasure by representatives of civil society. Any such revision would presumably allow Touadéra to run for president again. The proposal was eventually withdrawn. According to media reports, the "republican dialogue" ended without any concrete results. One of the aims had been to adopt a roadmap ("feuille de route") for better integration of the opposition and civil society into government activities. According to experts, the dialogue was held primarily in response to corresponding demands from the international community, which also financed it.

Colombia

2021 ICRC Annual Report: increase in violence, six non-international armed conflicts

According to the annual report of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) published on 23.03.22, violence against civilians increased significantly in 2021 and the number of people affected by violence has reached a new high since the FARC peace agreement was concluded in 2016. Figures document an increase in mass displacement by almost 150% compared to 2020, with the departments of Nariño, Chocó, Cauca and Valle del Cauca particularly hit. More than 480 people have been victims of anti-personnel mines and almost 170 cases of disappearances have been documented. In this context, the ICRC speaks of six active internal conflicts in 2021, three of them between government actors and various armed non-state groups (ELN, AGC, FARC successor groups). The report says conflict dynamics are high, areas of influence vary and forced recruitment is taking place.

Child killed and eleven wounded in explosion in Bogotá

At least eleven people were injured in an explosive attack carried out on a police station in Bogotá on 26.03.22, one child died of its injuries, a five-year-old girl's life is still in danger.

Democratic Republic of the Congo

North Kivu, Ituri: HRW – increase in repressive measures since martial law was imposed

The report "Martial Law Brings Crackdown in East" (L'état de siège dans l'est du pays est accompagné de repression) issued by Human Rights Watch (HRW) on 22.02.22 shows, among other things, that both repression and the suppression of the rights to freedom of expression, press and assembly by military and police forces equipped with executive (special) powers of intervention have increased in the eastern provinces of North Kivu and Ituri, since martial law was imposed in May 2021. Journalists, activists and political opposition members are being arbitrarily detained and prosecuted. Police and armed forces are using excessive force in dispersing peaceful demonstrations. Military courts, to which civilian criminal jurisdiction has been transferred, are overstretched and are unable to cope with the number of cases. According to a lawyer in Ituri whom HRW has quoted, the military justice system is an instrument of oppression and the military prosecutor faces interference from the military authorities. According to the 2021 annual report issued by the United Nations Joint Human Rights Office in the DRC (UNJHRO) cited by HRW, prison overcrowding and pre-trial detention numbers have increased since martial law was imposed.

UN: worsening humanitarian crisis and security situation in the eastern conflict-ridden provinces

Referring to Major General Benoit Chavanat, Vice-Commander of the troops of the United Nations Organisation Stabilisation Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), Radio France International reported on 24.03.22 that the security situation had deteriorated in the provinces of North Kivu and Ituri, which have been under siege since May 2021. There has also been an increase in the use of child soldiers by armed groups. According to Edouard Beigbeder, UNICEF representative in the DRC, 17,500 child soldiers have been freed since 2017, but this is only the "tip of the iceberg". According to Bruno Lemarquis, Deputy Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General and Resident Coordinator in the DRC, the humanitarian situation in the eastern crisis-torn provinces (which he did not name) remains worrying.

El Salvador

Over 60 homicides in one day, state of emergency declared

A total of 62 people were killed on 26.03.22. This means that the number of homicides in March 2022, with 148 officially registered deaths (as of 26.03.22), is already significantly higher than in the two previous months. In connection with this increase in violence, experts are talking about a possible end to the "deal" struck between the country's large gangs (maras) and the government, which has always been rejected by the government. On 27.03.22, a state of emergency was imposed for 30 days at the request of President Nayib Bukele. This measure suspends numerous constitutionally guaranteed rights, including the prohibition of interception of phone calls without a judicial order and allowing security forces to hold suspects in preliminary detention for longer 72 hours until they are brought before a judge after they have been arrested.

Ethiopia

Ethiopian government declares humanitarian truce

Almost one and a half years after the beginning of the armed conflict in the regional state of Tigray (cf. BN of 09.11.20), the Ethiopian government announced an immediate "humanitarian ceasefire" on 24.03.22, which should hasten delivery of emergency aid to the local population. According to the World Food Programme (WFP), around nine million people in Tigray and the neighbouring regional states of Amhara and Afar, which have also been affected by fighting, are dependent on food assistance. Since the Ethiopian army withdrew from Tigray at the end of June 2021, aid has reached Tigray only very sporadically. According to UN estimates, about 90% of the population in the regional state are in need of external assistance (cf. BN of 31.01.22). Some aid convoys were attacked and looted; others were not given the necessary permission to proceed. Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed has been accused of establishing a de facto blockade of Tigray.

The regional government in Tigray, the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), agreed to the ceasefire and announced that fighting would cease immediately. It remains to be seen whether the armed units of the TPLF will follow the Ethiopian government's call to withdraw from the areas they still occupy, especially in Afar. It is also unclear whether the announced ceasefire can provide the basis for a permanent end to the armed conflict. Back in June 2021, the government announced a unilateral ceasefire following fierce fighting with the TDF and their withdrawal from Tigray. However, the ceasefire only lasted a few weeks (cf. BN of 19.07.21).

HRW: Ethiopia must investigate air strike on refugee camps

According to a statement issued by Human Rights Watch (HRW) on 24.03.22, the air strike carried out by the Ethiopian army on a refugee camp in Tigray on 07.01.22 is likely a war crime. At least 57 civilians, including 15 children, were killed in the attack on a school compound where thousands of displaced people had sought refuge (cf. BN of 10.01.22). HRW found no evidence to back the Ethiopian government's claim that the drone attack was aimed at military targets and has urged the government to investigate the incident and prosecute those responsible.

Gambia

Another death sentence pronounced

The accused, Pateh Jallow, was found guilty of murder and sentenced to death by the High Court in Basse on 23.02.22. Courts repeatedly pronounce death sentences, citing the law. A de facto moratorium on executions has been in place in The Gambia since February 2018, with no sign of it being lifted. The last execution of a death sentence took place in 2012.

Iran

Journalist sentenced

According to foreign media reports, a journalist and civil rights activist from Bushehr province has been sentenced to 20 years in prison and fined IRR 15 million (approx. EUR 520, as of 28.03.22). The man has been sentenced to a total of 20 years' imprisonment and the above-mentioned fine on several charges, including spreading propaganda against the regime, insulting sacred Islamic values and the revolutionary leader, as well as spreading lies and causing public nuisance. The journalist had already been briefly detained in 2019 but was temporarily released on bail. Iran ranks 174 in the current Reporters Without Borders (RSF) ranking of the situation of freedom of the press and information in 180 countries (as of 2021).

Arrests and assaults in Kurdish areas

According to Iranian foreign media and Kurdish human rights organisations, security forces continue to carry out summonses and arrests in the regions in the west of the country on the occasion of the New Year festival of Nowruz. Numerous towns and settlements in the provinces of Western Azerbaijan and Kurdistan are affected. An unknown number of people have been arrested, including activists and artists as well as children and youths. A total of 22 people were arrested in a park in Sanandaj on 21.03.22. Tensions had already risen in the region prior to the arrests. In Oshnavieh (western Azerbaijan), special police units reportedly used tear gas and shotgun ammunition to prevent many people from participating in local New Year celebrations. It is also reported that security forces obtained written pledges from people summoned to refrain from wearing Kurdish costumes, using Kurdish symbols and playing happy music.

In Iran, Nowruz (this year on 20.03.22) is traditionally celebrated extravagantly. However, the New Year customs of the Kurds differ from those of the people in central Iran. Besides torchlight processions, colourful folk dances are held, which are seen by the authorities as an aspiration for Kurdish cultural autonomy.

Acid attack on young woman

Iranian foreign media report that an acid attack was carried out on a 17-year-old woman. The incident allegedly took place in a village near the city of Jahrom (Fars province). The woman's husband doused her with corrosive acid. The man was subsequently arrested. The local police cited family problems as the motive for the crime. Further details of the crime have not been released.

Iraq

Presidential election failed again

On 26.03.22, a new president was to be elected by parliament. In Iraq, the new president is the head of state, but not the head of government, even though he exercises several important functions, such as ratifying the death sentence. According to the Iraqi constitution, the position is reserved to a member of Iraq's Kurdish population. The parliamentary session failed to meet the necessary quorum, with several parties abstaining, so a new ballot is planned for 30.03.22. After the failed election, an emergency food assistance package was passed to mitigate the effects of the war in Ukraine on the Iraqi population.

Israel

Six killed in two attacks in Israel

A Palestinian Israeli killed four people and injured two others in a knife attack carried out in the town of Beersheba, southern Israel, on 22.03.22. According to police, he was shot by residents and thus stopped. The attacker had already spent several years in prison since 2015 after claiming that he intended to join the so-called ISIS.

On 27.03.22, two Palestinian Israeli gunmen killed two policemen and wounded four others in the central Israeli city of Hadera. They were stopped and shot dead by the police. The following day, the so-called ISIS claimed responsibility for the attack. Hamas in the Gaza Strip hailed the acts as a "heroic" sign of resistance.

Lebanon

Economic situation

After the relative stabilisation of the Lebanese pound to the US dollar at around LBP 20 to US\$1 in January 2022, both the war in Ukraine and complex legal disputes between the judiciary and some key players in the Lebanese financial sector have caused the exchange rate to drop significantly again to around LBP 25 to US\$1. The U.S. announced an increase of around US\$ 64 million emergency assistance for Lebanon, which will largely consist of food deliveries to the UN Food Programme and vouchers for purchasing food staples at local markets. This means the Lebanese government does not have direct access to the aid. On 22.03.22, it was also announced that Saudi Arabia had already provided US\$ 36 million for a similar aid fund organised together with France.

Mali

French radio and television stations banned

On 17.03.22, the Malian military government imposed a broadcasting ban on the French media outlets Radio France International (RFI) and France 24. The stations' digital platforms are also affected. According to the Malian government, this decision was triggered by a report broadcast by RFI on 14.03.22 and 15.03.22 in which alleged victims of attacks perpetrated by the Malian army and the Russian Wagner group of mercenaries, among others, had spoken out. The government is accusing the station of spreading false information about alleged human rights abuses by the Malian army. The two broadcasters had referred to reports by Human Rights Watch (HRW) and the UN published days earlier (see post below).

The media group to which the two channels belong condemns the ban and is considering possible legal remedies against this decision. The French government expressed its concern and sees it as a serious violation of the freedom of the press.

HRW and UN report of civilians being killed

According to a report published by HRW on 15.03.22, at least 107 civilians are believed to have been killed in central and southwestern Mali since December 2021. HRW was able to link 71 of the deaths to Malian security forces and 36 to suspected jihadists. The victims include merchants, village leaders, religious leaders and children. Most victims were reportedly executed.

The UN also says there has been an increase in civilian casualties in 2021. Six hundred civilians are reported to have been killed in Mali by jihadists, armed militias and armed forces. In the second half of 2021, the number of civilians killed is said to have increased by 16%.

Myanmar

UN sees evidence of war crimes

According to a UN Human Rights report published on 15.03.22, there has been clear evidence of war crimes and crimes against humanity since the military coup took place on 01.02.21. The military has reportedly bombed residential areas with air strikes and heavy weapons and has targeted civilians. People have been shot, burned, tortured, arbitrarily arrested or used as human shields by the military. At least 1,600 people have reportedly been killed by security forces and allied groups since the coup. More than 12,500 people have been arrested. At least 543 others have been killed for supporting the military.

At least 40 civilians and 16 members of the People's Defence Forces (PDF) reportedly died in recent clashes and as a result of violence by the military (Tatmadaw) that occurred between 09.03.22 and 24.03.22 in Magway, Mandalay, Sagaing, Yangon and Tanintharyi regions and Chin, Kayah, Kayin and Shan states. Dozens were injured, some seriously, and many people had to flee their homes because of fighting and attacks by the Tatmadaw. Several people were arrested in Yangon and Sagaing. Several hundred buildings (homes and temples) were burnt to the ground by the Tatmadaw, according to media reports. Around 24 junta soldiers were killed.

Nicaragua

Indigenous activist killed

On 15.03.22, the mutilated body of indigenous Mayangna leader Salomón López Smith was found in the remote Pansunwás area of Matumbak. According to the NGO Centre for Justice and Human Rights of the Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua (Centro por la Justicia y Derechos Humanos de la Costa Atlántica de Nicaragua (Cejudhcan)), at least 63 indigenous people were killed between 2015 and 2022, 28 of them in 2020 and 2021, according to data from the NGO Fundación del Río. All of the acts went unpunished, as did, generally, the unlawful land grabbing by illegal settlers, whom several NGOs attest to being close to the Sandinista ruling party.

Nigeria

Northeast: Islamists recruit children and lose defectors

According to findings of the Institute for Security Studies (ISS), it is not just the Boko Haram faction Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'Awati Wal-Jihad (JAS) that recruits minors, the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) is recruiting children too. Videos released in January and February 2022 purport to show ISWAP training camps for youths. While JAS has always recruited children, this is a new development with regard to ISWAP. It is noteworthy that criticism of the handling of children and their use in acts of violence is considered to be a contributing factor to the ISWAP split in 2016. Meanwhile, 7,000 members of the two Islamist groups surrendered to the Nigerian military at various locations in the northeast within a week in March 2022. This was indicated in media reports, which refer to official data from the Nigerian Defence Headquarters (DHQ). Since September 2021, a total of 47,975 persons belonging to Islamist groups who are designated as terrorists by government agencies or are family members of this group of persons are said to have surrendered. The government also considers this development to be a success of the Hadin Kai military operation. JAS and ISWAP are responsible for a large number of terrorist acts of violence, especially in north-eastern Nigeria. These include, among other things, attacks, suicide bombings and kidnappings.

Niger State: security forces kill scores of bandits

According to media reports, on 16.03.22, a team of security forces repelled an attack carried out by a criminal gang on a police station in Bangi town, headquarters of Mariga Local Government Area (LGA), Niger State, killing scores of assailants. In addition, 50 motorbikes were confiscated. The team, known as the Joint Security Operatives, was made up of security personnel from the Nigerian Army, the police and members of the regional vigilante group, the

Niger State Vigilante Corps. A day earlier, an attack carried out on a police station in Magama LGA in the same state was also repelled (cf. BN of 21.03.22).

Attacks on police stations in the southeast

Unknown gunmen attacked two police stations in Imo State on 20.03.22, killing two persons, according to media reports. As a result of the attack, detainees also managed to escape. The police say the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) independence movement is responsible for the attack. IPOB supporters and members of its armed wing Eastern Security Network (ESN) have been linked to similar attacks in the past (cf. BN of 09.08.21). However, they deny any connection.

100 killed in raids on villages in northern Nigeria

Armed gangs killed a total of around 100 people in several attacks carried out on villages in Zamfara and Kaduna states on 20.03.22 and 25.03.22, according to media reports. Attacks committed by unknown individuals on 20.03.22 in the north-western state of Zamfara targeted two remote villages and claimed the lives of at least 16 people. Two local traditional leaders are said to be among the dead. On the same day, heavily armed men killed at least 34 people, including two soldiers, in attacks against several local government areas in Kaduna State. The assailants also burned down over 200 buildings. The state government responded by imposing a 24-hour curfew. On 25.03.22, further attacks were reportedly carried out on villages in the same state. Also referring to the representative of a local vigilante group, media reported that around 50 people had been killed and that looting and arson attacks had been carried out in this context. In north-western and north-central states of Nigeria, local criminal gangs have recently been committing frequent acts of violence such as kidnappings for ransom, lootings and murders. Gang violence in Nigeria has its historical origins in land conflicts between farmers and herdsmen, mainly in the northwest. Since 05.01.22, the Nigerian government has been classifying these activities as acts of terrorism (cf. BN of 10.01.22). Since the perpetrators usually use motorbikes to reach and flee the targets of their attacks, the states of Kebbi, Katsina, Sokoto and Zamfara have issued motorbike bans, according to media reports.

Senegal

Casamance: eight bases destroyed and several rebels killed

In the ongoing conflict in Casamance, the Senegalese Armed Forces completely destroyed or occupied the rebel bases of Bakingaye, Djilanfalé, Guikess, Katama, Katinoro, Karounor, Tampindo/Kanfounda and Younor on 22.03.22, it says in a statement issued by the Director of Information and Public Relations of the Senegalese Armed Forces, DIRPA (Directeur de l'information et des relations publiques des Armées sénégalaises, (DIRPA)). Several rebels were reportedly killed in the operation. Senegalese forces say they lost one soldier and eight soldiers were wounded.

Somalia

Al-Shabaab carries out a series of attacks

MP Amina Mohamed Abdi was killed in a targeted bomb attack carried out in Beledweyne (Hiraan region) on 23.03.22. As the wounded were being evacuated, another suicide attack was carried out at the same location. Officials say at least 48 people died, including former MP Hassan Ali Abdi Dhuhul, other political figures, civilians and security forces, and at least 110 others were injured. Prime Minister Mohamed Hussein Roble has called on the security authorities to thoroughly investigate the attack. A few hours before the attack was carried out in Beledweyne, two gunmen attacked Mogadishu International Airport and engaged in skirmishes with security forces. At least eight people were killed, including a soldier from the African Union Mission to Somalia (AMISOM), a peace keeping mission operated by the AU in Somalia with approval by the UN. The AMISOM headquarters and the headquarters of some foreign diplomats are located in the airport building. Al-Shabaab has claimed responsibility for both attacks.

State of emergency due to drought, UN warns of famine

According to the UN, Somalia is facing the worst drought it has experienced in more than three decades. It is estimated that about 7.7 million people, more than half of the population, are at risk of severe hunger or famine this year. In the Gedo region bordering Kenya, 25 people have reportedly died due to a lack of food and water. More than 700,000 people have been displaced internally since October 2021. The number of internally displaced persons is expected to rise. The government has already declared a state of emergency.

Adoption of a transition plan for the post-AMISOM phase

The Somalia Transitional Plan (STP) was adopted on 21 March 2022. It provides for the replacement of AMISOM by a new mission, the Transitional African Union Mission in Somalia (ATMIS) and is intended to pave the way for a transfer of security responsibility to the national security forces by the end of 2024. The STP is a key milestone for Somalia before the United Nations Security Council approves the new mandate for the ATMIS. The mandate for AMISOM is due to expire on 31.03.22.

Sri Lanka

Controversial terrorism law amended

On 22.03.22, the Sri Lankan Parliament passed the amendments to the controversial Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) previously introduced by the government. Human rights organisations, the UN and the EU have long criticised the law (cf. BN of 28.06.21). Despite the amendments, the abusive framework of the PTA remains intact, according to human rights organisations (cf. BN of 14.02.22).

South Sudan

Security situation

Last week, fighting reportedly broke out between government units under the command of President Salva Kiir and SPLM/A-IO forces led by First Vice President Riek Machar. Both sides blame each other for the outbreak of fighting. In the wake of these latest clashes, the SPLM/A-IO suspended its participation in meetings of several security mechanisms and bodies that form an important part of the 2018 peace agreement. Due to the ongoing deterioration of the situation, on 23.03.22, the so-called Troika – consisting of the U.S., the U.K. and Norway – expressed concern about the continuation of the unity government and called for full commitment from all parties involved to implement the outstanding projects in a timely manner. In less than a year, the transition period will end and with it the responsibilities of the current interim government.

Sudan

Demonstrations continue

On 21.03.22, the US Department of the Treasury imposed sanctions on the Sudanese Central Reserve Police (CRP) and froze all CRP assets in the U.S. The Department of the Treasury justified this step by claiming that the CRP had used excessive, including lethal, force against activists and demonstrators.

On 22.03.22 and 23.03.22, demonstrators blocked major roads in the three largest cities of Khartoum State by erecting barricades of burning tires and stones. The organisers previously called for a "revolutionary escalation" and the "Day of Barricades". As a result, major regional travel traffic ground almost to a halt in the affected cities on both days.

On 24.03.22, demonstrations against the military takeover took place across the country and one demonstrator was killed by security forces who used live ammunition. Several people were also injured. This brings to 90 the number of people killed by security forces during demonstrations since the takeover in October 2021.

Syria

Meeting of the Constitutional Committee ends

On 25.03.22, another meeting of the UN-initiated Constitutional Committee, consisting of representatives of the government, the opposition and civil society, ended in Geneva. According to media reports, it was not possible to achieve any significant progress after five days of negotiations.

The meeting ended without any statements from the participating parties, and a UN press conference was cancelled. The UN Special Envoy for Syria, Geir Pedersen, addressed the UN Security Council and called on all parties to be serious and willing to compromise in order to move the process forward.

Challenging developments in food prices and availability

According to media reports, price increases in the food sector, brought about, among other things, by the Ukraine war and related supply shortages, are causing rising food insecurity among the Syrian population. 90% of Syrians had already been living below the poverty line before the outbreak of the war. Over 12 million people, more than half of the population, are estimated to have been previously food insecure. As early as February 2022, the UN Security Council estimated that more than 14.6 million people in Syria would be dependent on aid programmes in 2022.

Tunisia

Demonstration for press freedom

On 25.03.22, dozens of Tunisian journalists protested outside the National Union of Tunisian Journalists (SNJT) to demand press freedom and the release of a reporter who had been arrested after refusing to reveal his sources to the authorities. The reporter was released that same evening.

Demonstrators have accused the authorities of clamping down on the media since parliament was suspended and President Saïed took over the reins of government on 25.07.21 (see BN of 26.07.21). The SNJT announced strikes by the state media.

Turkey

Police violence against alleged members of the Furkan movement

On 21.03.22, it was reported that video footage of excessive use of force by police against suspected members of the Furkan movement, which is known to be critical of the government, sparked outrage on social media. The incident occurred on 20.03.22, when suspected members of the Istanbul-based Furkan movement held a demonstration against the arrest of members of the group in the southern province of Adana. Footage released by the Furkan movement shows police intervening with disproportionate force and using batons, rubber bullets and pepper spray against the demonstrators, who included children.

Ruling of the Constitutional Court in the case of MP Semra Güzel

On 22.03.22, the Constitutional Court rejected the application submitted by People's Democratic Party (HDP) MP Semra Güzel seeking to reverse the lifting of her parliamentary immunity on terror charges. The Turkish parliament had voted to lift the MP's immunity on 01.03.22. Güzel was charged with two counts of membership of a terrorist organisation after a series of photos appeared in the media in early January 2022, showing the MP posing with a member of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) allegedly at one of the group's camps (cf. BN of 07.03.22).

Draft election law adopted by parliamentary commission

On 24.03.22, the AKP-MHP Alliance's draft amendment to the electoral law was adopted by the parliamentary commission. The draft, consisting of 15 articles, was submitted to parliament with the joint signature of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) and Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) leaderships. The electoral law reform provides, among other things, for a reduction of the parliamentary threshold to 7%. The current 10% threshold was introduced by the 1982 constitution, which was adopted in a referendum after the 1980 military coup. The draft also provides for the abolition of the requirement that political parties must form parliamentary groups in order to

stand in elections and instead requires parties to have organised themselves in 41 provinces six months before the election. In addition, the proposal seeks to restrict the changing of residence prior to elections in order to be able to vote for relatives who are standing in local elections. This measure is intended to prevent "electoral migration". The voter's address in the past year will be deemed to their residence.

Ukraine / Russian Federation

Russian military invasion

Now in its fifth week, the war in Ukraine caused by the Russian military invasion continues. According to UNHCR, over 3.8 million people have fled Ukraine as of 26.03.22; UN figures as of 27.03.22 indicate that at least 1,119 civilians have been killed and 1,790 injured so far. According to the WHO, the medical care situation is deteriorating, especially in eastern Ukraine; since the beginning of the war, 72 attacks on medical facilities with at least 71 fatalities have been verified by the WHO. On the evening of 27.03.22, according to various media reports, there were heavy explosions caused by Russian air strikes in, among other places, the cities of Kyiv, Kharkiv, Mariupol and Luzk as well as near Kryvyi Rih and in the embattled region of Luhansk.

In the city of Mariupol, which has been surrounded by Russian armed forces for weeks, the situation remains critical, according to the local mayor, with around 80% of homes destroyed. He says half of the civilian population has now left the city; there are also reports that civilians have been abducted by Russian forces and deported to the Russian Federation. The number of casualties and injured in Mariupol is unclear.

The city of Chernihiv, also surrounded by military forces, has been cut off from electricity, water and heating, according to media reports. The city council in Kyiv said that the heating season in the capital would end early on 28.03.22, but that the infrastructure was functioning despite the war. It was reported from the city of Zaporizhzhia on 27.03.22 that more than 46,500 civilians who had fled had arrived in the past twelve days and were being provided with necessary assistance.

Further attempts by Russian forces to militarily encircle the major cities of Kyiv and Kharkiv have so far been unsuccessful, according to media reports, and the Ukrainian army says it has been able to conduct limited counter-offensives in both areas. Civilian protests and cases of abductions of officials continue to be reported in Kherson, an area occupied by Russian forces. The self-proclaimed Luhansk People's Republic in eastern Ukraine announced on 27.03.22 that it plans to hold a referendum on joining the Russian Federation in the near future.

Further negotiations between the parties to the conflict are scheduled for this week in Turkey, mediated by Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, according to news agencies. In an interview on 27.03.22, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy reiterated his willingness to examine a possible neutrality status as one of Russia's core demands, but a final decision could only be made following a referendum to be held in Ukraine.

Venezuela

Power cuts intensify in western states

As part of a power rationing plan (plan de administración de carga), electricity is being cut off in the western states for certain periods of time every day. However, according to media reports, the actual outages have been exceeding the officially announced ones for several days now, in some cases significantly. On social media, people in Táchira, Mérida, Trujillo, Zulia and Lara report being without electricity for up to twelve hours a day

CASLA Institute Report: Crimes against Humanity in 2021

On 11.03.22, the CASLA Institute in Prague, an NGO focusing on the study of Latin America, presented its report "Licence to kill", based on testimonies provided to the International Criminal Court (ICC) by victims as well as by active and exiled intelligence officers. The report speaks of at least 55 victims, including 32 civilians and 23 military personnel, who in 2021 were "victims of arbitrary detention, short-term enforced disappearances, physical or psychological torture, cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment, and acts of systematic repression for political reasons by the Venezuelan state". This was done with the knowledge and approval of the top military and civilian leadership. The report also describes the use of various new torture methods as well as the "training" provided by

Cuban military personnel to implement methods of repression, interrogation and torture, up to and including their direct involvement. CASLA also assumes that there is a high number of unreported cases.

Four indigenous Yanomami killed in Amazonas state

According to reports by the NGO Provea, at least four indigenous people were killed and three others injured in clashes between indigenous Yanomami and members of the military in the Alto Orinoco region of the state of Amazonas on 20.03.22. The Attorney General's Office has announced an investigation.

Vietnam

Journalist receives multi-year prison sentence

On 23.03.22, the freelance journalist Le Van Dung (also known as Le Dung Vova) was sentenced to five years' imprisonment and a further five years' probation for spreading "propaganda against the state" (Article 88, 1999 Criminal Code). In the past, he had campaigned for environmental, land rights and human rights issues, among others, was active as a blogger and took part in numerous demonstrations against China's actions in the South China Sea, among other things. He stood as an independent candidate in the National Assembly elections in May 2021 but was not admitted as a candidate by the authorities. He was arrested on 30.06.21 (cf. BN. of 05.07.21).

Yemen

Air strikes on Sanaa and Hodeida

In the early hours of 26.03.22, the Saudi Arabia-led anti-Houthi coalition carried out several air strikes on targets in Sanaa and Hodeida. According to reports, an oil facility in Hodeida and a building for security guards of the state social security in Sanaa were hit. At least seven civilians were reportedly killed, including women and children. A coalition spokesperson said the air strikes had been carried out in response to the Houthis' drone attacks on the Saudi oil company ARAMCO in Jeddah on 25.03.22.

Bomb attack on high-ranking military

The motor convoy of a Major General of the Yemeni army was hit by a car bomb on 23.03.22 when a bomb attached to a parked car exploded in the immediate vicinity of the convoy. The Major General, his son, who was an officer, and at least two other people were killed. So far, no one has claimed responsibility for the attack. In recent years, however, it was mainly al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula AQAP and so-called ISIS who have been responsible for such attacks.

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