



Briefing Notes

Group 62 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

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Afghanistan

Security situation

On 12.12.22 Islamic State in Khorasan Province (ISKP) carried out a suicide attack on a hotel in Kabul which is frequented in particular by Chinese travellers. 18 people were injured and three were killed.

Fighting continues between the National Resistance Front (NRF) and the Taliban. It was reported from Baghlan province on 12.12.22 that an NRF fighter had been killed and 14 (eleven, according to another source) had been taken prisoner by the Taliban. Seven employees of UNICEF were held for several hours in Panjshir province on 14.12.22. The Taliban arrested ten people on 16.12.22 following an explosion in the Rokha district of Panjshir province.

Persecution

The Taliban released the prominent women's rights activist Zarifa Yaqubi from custody in Kabul on 12.12.22. She was arrested together with four colleagues on 04.11.22 (cf. BN of 07.11.22). There is no information as to the whereabouts of her colleagues.

The dead bodies of a former soldier and a taxi driver were found in Laghman province on 13.12.22. They had been arrested by the Taliban two months previously. There are reports of a number of killings and arrests of former members of the security forces by the Taliban. A player belonging to the Helmand football team was shot dead by the Taliban on 17.12.22. The background to this incident remains unclear.

A total of 48 men and seven women are reported to have received between 30 and 50 lashes each in public floggings in Zabul, Helmand, Jowzjan and Kapisa provinces between 14.12. and 18.12.22. They were allegedly accused of having had extra-marital relationships, committed thefts or sold drugs. There are reports of the Taliban mistreating drug addicts in Faryab province.

Governance

The Afghan exile medium Etilaatroz accuses the Taliban-led transport directorate of large-scale corruption.

Some 300 Taliban fighters are reported to have collectively deserted in Helmand province on 15.12.22 after complaining about their treatment by a commander.

Angola

Amnesty law adopted

The Lusa news agency reports that parliament passed a comprehensive amnesty law on 15.12.22. The amnesty applies to commonplace offences which are punishable with up to eight years in prison. Offences resulting death, serious drug trafficking, human trafficking and illegal dealing in arms and ammunition are excluded from the amnesty. Offences such as incitement to insurrection are also excluded. The largest opposition party, the National

Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) criticises the law as being selective, because sentences for civil servants and white-collar criminals are to be reduced by one quarter, although they do not qualify for the amnesty. The party's parliamentary group abstained from the vote on the new law. Smaller opposition parties joined the governing People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) in voting in favour of the law. According to earlier estimates by the public prosecutor's office, around 2,000 prisoners could benefit from the amnesty – out of a total prison population of slightly over 20,000.

Bangladesh

Leader of Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami arrested

Shafiqur Rahman, leader of the largest Muslim party, Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami (Bangladesh Islamic Assembly), was arrested on 13.12.22 after announcing that his party would join the protests led by the opposition and demand the resignation of prime minister Sheikh Hasina of the Awami League. Jamaat, which has been barred from running in elections since 2012, was for many years the third-largest political party in the country and a key ally of the largest opposition party, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), with which Jamaat formed a governing coalition from 2001 to 2006. The arrest took place against the backdrop of ongoing repression measures by the government against the BNP. To date, more than 2,000 BNP members and supporters have been arrested in raids carried out by the government (cf. BN of 12.12.22).

Burkina Faso

Jihadists killed in military operation

According to information from the Burkina army, at least 39 suspected jihadists and one soldier have been killed and a number of soldiers injured in a ten-day military operation in the north-west of the country, close to the border with Mali. The military operation was carried out at the beginning of December of 2022 with the aim of restoring security in Banwa province.

DR Congo

Kivu provinces: Human rights and security situation

Citing a human rights activist, UN radio station Okapi reported on a worsening of the human rights situation in the eastern province of South Kivu on 12.11.22, stating that the basic right to freedom of assembly and freedom to demonstrate is being violated. The ongoing activities of non-state armed domestic and foreign groups in most areas of South Kivu are seen as an alarming destabilising factor as violence continues against the civilian population. The capture of extensive territory by the Mouvement 23-Mars rebel group (M-23) in the neighbouring northern province of North Kivu is said to be further exacerbating the socio-economic situation for the population in South Kivu.

There are reports in the press that fighting between the Congolese forces and M23 and also between allied armed groups and M23 is continuing in Rutshuru Territory and North Kivu. According to information which is not independently verifiable, the local population in the territories controlled by M23 continues to face reprisals and punitive measures (cf. BN of 06.12.22) and other human rights violations, including arrest, torture, rape and enforced labour. A provincial MP has reported that M23 arrested more than 42 people for boycotting an M23 solidarity march in the border town of Bunagana on 13.12.22. Two people allegedly died as a result of physical abuse. This information cannot be independently verified.

Ituri and Irumu provinces: ADF responsible for more than 100 civilian deaths

According to the NGO Convention pour le Respect des Droits Humain, the radical armed Islamist group Forces démocratiques alliées (ADF)/Madina at Tawhid Wai Muwahedeen (MTM) has killed more than 100 civilians in 2022 to date in three chiefdoms of Irumu territory in the eastern province of Ituri alone. The NGO believes the actual number of civilians killed to be substantially higher, as many civilians are victims of kidnapping and abduction by the ADF.

Eastern provinces of Tanganyika and Maniema: Security situation in the border region

Okapi reports that several hundred internally displaced people have protested in the town of Kongolo, Tanganyika at the lack of equal access to humanitarian aid from the Congolese government and humanitarian organisations. According to Okapi, in recent weeks and months the displaced people have fled violence in Nyunzu Territory, Tanganyika emanating from Malaika Kabala, a Mai-Mai splinter group which is active both in Maniema and Tanganyika. A further source of displacement is the conflict between Twa and Bantu in Kabambare Territory, Maniema. It has also been reported in the media that Mai- Mai- Malaika Kabala coming from Kabambare looted the village of Muhemba in Nyembo chiefdom on the night of 15.12.22.

President of Lubumbashi commercial court steps down due to alleged political interference

According to various consistent reports in the media, the president of the commercial court of Lubumbashi (Haut-Katanga province), Laurent Batubenga Ilunga, has resigned. The lawyer Peter Kazadi, a close aid of Congolese president Félix Tshisekedi, had apparently exerted political pressure on the judiciary in a case involving Moïse Katumbi, and Illunga stepped down out of fear for his own and his family's safety. In response to inquiries by Okapi, Kazadi denied the accusations. Katumbi, who fled into exile on political grounds under former president Joseph Kabila, is a former governor of Katanga province and currently leads the party Ensemble pour la République. He recently announced that his party was leaving the governing coalition Union Sacrée de la Nation and that he intended to run in the presidential election in 2023.

Egypt

21 journalists in prison

A report by the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) finds Egypt to be one of the most repressive countries towards media representatives. According to the report, as per 01.12.22 21 journalists were in prison in Egypt (2021: 25) and CPJ notes that a small number of these have been held for more than nine years. In the course of 2022 the authorities released journalists from prison in isolated instances (cf. BN of 02.05.22 and 19.09.22) while on the other taking numerous media representatives into custody (cf. BN of 02.05.22, 12.09.22 and 07.11.22).

Eritrea

Number of media representatives in prison remains high

According to the latest report from the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), an organisation which supports the rights of those working in the media, Eritrea is among the countries with the highest numbers of journalists in prison. CPJ states that 363 media representatives are in prison worldwide, including 16 in Eritrea.

Ethiopia

Arrests in Addis Abeba

According to local reports, 97 people were arrested on 08.12. and 72 on 12.12.22 for inciting violence in and around educational establishments. Recent days have witnessed a number of disturbances at schools, with pupils refusing to hoist the Oromian flag or sing the Oromian national anthem, for example. Violent clashes and the destruction of school property have been reported. The disturbances are said to have been sparked by the current unrest in the Oromia region. Pupils and teaching staff are also among those arrested.

Hostilities in Oromia

The Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED) has reported violent clashes between Amharic militias (the Fano militias are suspected of being involved) and Oromian special units. At least 34 people are said to have been killed in Gutin (East Wollega Zone). Hostilities are also reported to be still ongoing in Kiremu (East Wollega Zone) (cf. BN of 12.12.22). The Oromo Liberation Front (OLA-Shane) are alleged to be targeting Amharic civilians in attacks. OLA-Shane representatives have rejected these accusations.

The Gambia

Survey on child marriage: Highest prevalence among Serahule, Fula and Mandinka

A representative survey of 200 women and 200 men conducted by the NGO Wassu Gambia Kafo reveals that child marriage is particularly prevalent in the multi-ethnic country The Gambia among the Serahule and Fule ethnic groups and the Mandinka, which is the largest ethnic group in the country. 75.8 % of respondents from the Serahule ethnic group stated that they came from families or households in which child marriage is practised, while the corresponding levels among the Fula and Mandinka ethnic groups were 65 % and 62.5 % respectively. 72 % of those taking part in the survey recognise child marriage as a harmful traditional practice and a similarly high share of respondents expressed opposition to this tradition. Child marriages are widespread and take place in a climate of impunity (cf. BN of 20.06.22 and 13.09.21).

Court of appeal affirms death sentence passed on ex-minister by court of first instance

According to reports in the media, on 13.12.22 the court of appeal of The Gambia affirmed the death sentence passed by the court of first instance on the former minister for local government and lands under former president Yahya Jammeh, Yankuba Touray, on the charge of murder (cf. BN of 19.07.21). Touray is reportedly free to lodge an appeal. Since the change of government at the end of 2016 / beginning of 2017, only Touray and five members of the national intelligence service, who have also received death sentences (cf. BN of 18.07.22), have so far been brought to justice in connection with crimes committed under the previous government of president Jammeh.

Maximum sentence handed down for rape

It was reported in the media on 13.12.22 that the high court in Banjul had found a former police officer guilty of rape and sentenced him to life imprisonment. Sexualised and gender-based violence is commonly kept secret and goes unpunished (cf. BN of 19.04.21).

ECOWAS troop mandate extended by a further year

At the 62nd ordinary session of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) on 04.12.22, the heads of state and government resolved to extend the military mandate for ECOWAS troops (ECOMIG) for a further twelve months, beginning on 01.01.23. The ECOMIG mission is a contentious issue in some areas of civil society and opposition circles. Multinational ECOWAS troops have been stationed in the country since Barrow assumed power.

Guinea-Bissau

Early parliamentary election not to be held until June 2023

Only days before the originally scheduled date for the early parliamentary election on 18.12.22 (cf. BN of 23.05.22), president Umaro Sissoco Embaló set 04.06.23 as a new date by decree. It was already known that the originally planned date would have to be postponed. Following early consultations, 23.04.23 had been proposed (cf. BN of 24.10.22). According to reports in the media, it is indicated in the presidential decree that the latter has been issued after consulting the government, the political parties and the national electoral commission (CNE). The members of the CNE are not recognised by all parties, however. The African Party for the Independence of Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde (PAIGC), for example, is of the view that the CNE's mandate has expired following the retirement from office of the CNE executive committee's chairman to take up the post of president of the supreme court. The new registration of voters began under the existing CNE in the previous week. The leader of the Union for Change party (UM), Agnelo Regala, described this measure as "illegal and unconstitutional". Criticism has been voiced from other quarters that the new date of 04.06.22 will coincide with the beginning of the monsoon season.

India

Kashmir: Protest in Rajouri

Hundreds of people demonstrated outside the military base in Rajouri, 150 kilometres to the south of Srinagar, capital of India-administered Kashmir, on 16.12.22. The demonstrators blocked a main road, set tyres on fire and

threw stones. The demonstration followed directly in the wake of the shooting of two men who were employed at the military site. Eye witnesses have reported that the men were shot by military guards at the entrance to the military base. The Indian military claims that armed rebels killed the two men outside the military hospital which forms part of the base.

Arunachal Pradesh: Clashes along the Line of Actual Control

Clashes occurred on 09.12.22 between the Indian military and the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) in the Tawang district of the north-eastern state of Arunachal Pradesh, along the Line of Actual Control (LAC), the de facto border between China and India. The Indian defence ministry accused PLA soldiers of having advanced into Indian territory. Soldiers were injured on both sides in the ensuing skirmish. India and China fought a war over the border in 1962. On 16.11.22 India commemorated the 60th anniversary of the "Battle of Walong", in which 800 Indian soldiers held their ground against 4,000 advancing PLA fighters for 27 days. The last fatal clash between the two national armies occurred in Ladakh in the Galwan Valley in June 2020.

Iran

Demonstrators receive prison sentences in Tehran

Citing information from the judicial authority in Tehran, foreign media report that around 400 people arrested during the latest protests have been sentenced to prison terms. Custodial sentences of between five and ten years have apparently been handed down to 160 people in Tehran province alone. 80 people have reportedly received prison terms of between two and five years and 160 have been sent to prison for up to two years. 70 people have been fined. No details have emerged to date regarding the pronounced verdicts, such as individual charges involved or lodged appeals. According to human rights organisations, several thousand protesters have been arrested since the current protests began in September 2022.

Prison conditions: Violent disturbances at prison in Karaj (Alborz province)

There are reports in the media of an outbreak of violence at the central prison in Karaj on 17.12.22. One inmate apparently died in the course of a clash between prisoners and prison staff. Several people were reportedly injured. The precise course of events remains unclear. Human rights organisations report that prisoners had revolted against fellow inmates being placed in solitary confinement. According to official sources, the clash occurred between prisoners after blankets had been set on fire. Members of prisoners' families reportedly gathered outside the prison on 18.12.22. Reports in the media claim that an uncertain number of people arrested during the latest protests are also being held at the prison.

Strikes and protests by oil industry employees

It was reported in the press on 17.12.22 that oil industry workers had gathered for demonstrations and rallies in various towns and cities throughout the country, including Ahvaz and Mahshahr (both Khuzestan), Asaluyeh (Bushehr) and Dogonbadan (Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad). The strikes are taking place in part in solidarity with the current protests in the country. The strikers are also protesting against increasingly unsafe working conditions and pay cuts against the backdrop of the ongoing critical economic situation.

Religious minorities: Prison sentences for two leading members of the Bahá'í community

According to reports in the media, two women who are well-known leading figures in the Bahá'í community have each been sentenced to ten years in prison. The two women, aged 60 and 69, have reportedly already served prison terms of several years in the past. The women were apparently detained in a further wave of arrests of Bahá'í believers in July 2022 (cf. BN of 25.07.22).

Iraq

The struggle against IS

Three members of the Iraqi army died when an IED exploded to the north of Baghdad on 15.12.22. It is assumed that the device was planted by IS.

Three children died in the village of Baashiqa in Ninawa province on 17.12.22 while playing with a mortar which they had found. The mortar had presumably been left behind during the withdrawal of IS. It exploded as the children were playing with it. Explosive ordnance disposal in the territories recaptured from IS is expected to take decades or centuries.

On 18.12.22 an Iraqi police convoy was the target of a bomb attack near to the village of Safra, around 30 kilometres north of Kirkuk. Nine Iraqi policemen were killed. The explosion formed part of an ambush. The subsequent attack with light weapons was repelled.

Sadrist committee takes stock of progress to date

A Sadrist committee has been working since 2022 on returning property to members of minorities, in particular Christians and Mandaeans, which has been stolen or occupied by militias since 2003. According to an interim appraisal, 200 apartments, houses and other properties have been returned to their rightful owners. In some cases the latter had been attempting to recover their property through the courts, but were thwarted by inefficiency and also discrimination on the part of the authorities as well as the power of the militias. Sadr himself has no official position on the matter at present. For the most part, it may be assumed that the returned property had been occupied by militias belonging to the Sadrist movement.

Death in custody

A 45 year-old man was arrested in the course of a house search in Kirkuk on 15.12.22. He died in custody some hours later. The exact circumstances have yet to be clarified.

Jordan

Authorities shut down social media app following death of a policeman

A police officer was killed in the city of Ma'an on 15.12.22 in violent disturbances linked to demonstrations against sharp increases in fuel prices. Professional truck drivers had already staged strikes and protests a number of days earlier, which spread across numerous towns and cities. Numerous violent clashes ensued between protesters and security forces. Many videos were shared via the TikTok social media platform and spread throughout the entire kingdom. One day after the policeman's death, the Jordanian authorities announced the temporary shutdown of the app on account of "abuse of the app and its failure to take action against publications calling for violence and unrest". Internet connections to Ma'an and Al-Karak were also suspended. It remains to be seen how long the app will be blocked.

Lebanon

Death of an Irish UN soldier

An Irish UN soldier died when a UNIFIL convoy came under fire in southern Lebanon on 14.12.22. He is the first UN soldier to die since January 2015. Two suspects have been identified and placed on the wanted list. The incident was condemned by most parties in Lebanon. The UN convoy was allegedly slightly outside of the territory covered by UNIFIL's mandate, which antagonised the local population and prompted them to block the road. Hezbollah itself has yet to comment on the incident (which took place in its sphere of influence), but its security chief has publicly expressed his condolences.

Nicaragua

Concise report by the High Commissioner for Human Rights

According to a verbal report from the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Volker Türk, Nicaragua has witnessed a further increase in the suppression of critical voices and dissidents. Türk reports that there are at least 225 victims of arbitrary arrest in prison in the country – 30 more than in September 2022. He also cites arresting relatives as a measure which is being used to growing extent, presumably to encourage opposition figures and critics of the government to give themselves up to the authorities. He notes that conditions at El Chipote prison for

political prisoners remain inhumane. The scope of action and freedom of expression available to civil society remain limited. Support services are lacking following the closure of more than 3,000 NGOs and free media coverage of news and events is highly restricted. Türk also referred to the high numbers of people migrating to the north, with more than 70,000 asylum applications filed by Nicaraguan nationals in neighbouring Costa Rica between January and October 2022, and mentioned the country's growing international isolation.

Nigeria

Kano State: Death sentence for Muslim cleric

On 15.12.22 a Sharia court in Kano State, northern Nigeria, sentenced the controversial Sufi Muslim cleric Abduljabbar Nasiru Kabara to death by hanging. According to reports in the media, the charges against him include blasphemous comments relating to the prophet Mohammed. Kabara, who has been in custody since July 2021, reportedly denies the accusations. He is free to appeal against the verdict. Kano State is one of the states in the predominantly Muslim north of the country in which Sharia law can be applied to Muslims. Death sentences are rarely executed in Nigeria. Instead, persons sentenced to death are generally imprisoned for an indefinite period (cf. BN of 04.07.22 and 08.08.22).

Imo State: Attack on electoral commission office claims lives

It has been reported in the media that unknown persons attacked an office of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) in Owerri, capital of Imo State in south-eastern Nigeria, with firearms and improvised explosive devices on 12.12.22. One police officer and three of the attackers were killed. There have been reports of similar incidents over recent weeks (cf. BN of 12.12.22). Voter ID cards were to be issued to newly registered voters on the day of the attack in Owerri. The attack took place barely two and a half months ahead of the general elections scheduled for 25.02.23, which will include the election of Nigeria's next president.

North-east: Military denies serious accusations

According to the findings of research work published by the Reuters news agency on 07.12.22, the Nigerian military has carried out an abortion programme over a period of approx. ten years in the north-east of the country. The aim of the secret programme is allegedly to abort pregnancies of former prisoners of Boko Haram. Reuters claims that at least 10,000 enforced abortions have been carried out since around 2013, many in and around Maiduguri, the largest city in the north-east of the country. Lucky Irabor, chief of the defence staff, vehemently denies the assertions, describing the findings as fictitious, malicious and insulting. The research conducted by Reuters comprises dozens of interviews with victims, members of the armed forces and health workers, and also refers to patient registers and numerous other documents.

Pakistan

Exchanges of fire at Chaman-Spin Boldak border crossing point

More than a dozen Pakistani civilians were injured once again (cf. BN of 12.12.22) in exchanges of fire at the Chaman-Spin Boldak border crossing point on 16.12.22. As in the case of the incident on 10.12.22, the Pakistani military has blamed the escalation on indiscriminate shooting at civilians by the Afghan Taliban, while Afghanistan has accused members of the Pakistani security forces of having opened fire first.

Palestinian territories / Israel

West Bank: Palestinian minor killed by the military

The Israeli military stated on 12.12.22 that an unarmed Palestinian female minor who died as a result of being shot in the head from close range during a clash with armed persons in Jenin was shot dead by members of the Israeli military (cf. BN of 12.12.22). The killing allegedly resulted from a mistake during the violent clash with armed Palestinians.

East Jerusalem: Franco-Palestinian lawyer deported to France

A Palestinian resident of East Jerusalem was deported to France on 18.12.22. As a Palestinian from East Jerusalem, the lawyer and human rights activist Salah Hammouri held a permanent residence title from the Israeli authorities as well as French citizenship.

Since Israel's annexation of East Jerusalem in 1980 – which is a matter of international controversy and is not recognised by Germany or the EU – Palestinians from East Jerusalem have received a permanent residence title and have been able to acquire Israeli citizenship, although figures from 2022 show that only 34 % of applications for naturalisation are successful. The permanent residence title may be withdrawn by the Israeli authorities, however, should it be proven that the holder's main place of residence has been outside of East Jerusalem for an extensive period or in individual so-called security-related cases.

Hammouri had been in administrative custody since March 2022. The practice of holding people in administrative custody is much criticised, as it allows the Israeli authorities to detain people over long periods without bringing charges.

The official reason for his imprisonment is “betrayal of the state of Israel”. More specifically, he is accused of belonging to the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), which is classified as a terrorist organisation by numerous states, including Israel. His legal representatives were not allowed to examine the alleged evidence against him for reasons of secrecy. Hammouri has worked in the past for the human rights organisation Addameer, one of six organisations which Israel declared to be a terrorist organisation last year due to alleged links to the PFLP (cf. BN of 25.10.22). Numerous international actors have criticised this classification and the appurtenant ban, as they themselves have been unable to find any evidence of structural links to the PFLP. They have thus called on the Israeli authorities to produce pertinent evidence.

Hammouri has already spent seven years in an Israeli prison, accused of having planned an attack on a well-known rabbi. He was never charged or convicted, however. He was released in 2011 as part of an exchange of prisoners between Israel and Hamas.

Only a few days before his deportation, a court hearing had been scheduled in Jerusalem for 01.01.23.

Peru

Continuing socio-political crisis: Rising death toll, state of emergency, Castillo remanded in custody for 18 months

The increasingly violent protests which are particularly prevalent in the south and south-east of the country continue (cf. BN 12.12.22). In connection with the protests, demonstrators have attacked the airport in Arequipa, administrative and court buildings and media houses, for example. President Boluarte declared a national state of emergency for 30 days on 14.12.22, plus night-time curfews for five days in 15 provinces, including Arequipa, Apurímac, Cusco and Ica. The state of emergency grants special rights to bodies such as the police, while individual civil rights, such as the freedom to demonstrate, are suspended. The military is also being deployed in the country at present to protect critical infrastructure and to guarantee public safety. Numerous roads and five airports have been closed and the majority of bus and rail services have been suspended. On 15.12.22 the supreme court ordered that former president Castillo be remanded in custody for 18 months due to a risk of his absconding and for the duration of investigations into accusations of rebellion. His immunity was withdrawn by parliament on 12.12.22. According to official information from the health ministry, as per 18.11.22 the death toll in connection with the protests stood at 25 (Ayacucho (nine), Apurímac (six), La Libertad (three), Cusco (three), Junín (three) and Arequipa (one person)). While violent clashes were the direct cause of at least 17 deaths, the other fatalities are indirectly linked to the demonstrations. Almost 70 people are in hospital and several hundred people from civil society and the security forces have been injured. Human rights defenders have criticised violent action on the part of the security forces in some instances. A number of videos in social media have shown firearms being used against unarmed demonstrators. On 16.12.22 the national ombudsman's office filed a criminal complaint with the public prosecutor's office in Huamanga, which is specialised in human rights issues. The complaint relates to violent clashes in Ayacucho in which eight people were killed and the ombudsman's office is seeking to initiate criminal investigations into what happened in the incident. It has also called on the national security forces to act in accordance with the constitutional order. On 16.12.22 parliament rejected bringing forward fresh elections to 2023, and two members of the cabinet resigned.

National ombudsman's office: Summary of the human rights situation in 2022

The national ombudsman's office released a statement on 10.12.22, providing a summary of the human rights situation in 2022 and calling on the government to guarantee these rights and to press ahead with improvements in the pertinent areas. The statement highlights problems with regard to guaranteeing rights relating to health, education and the environment as well as the inadequate protection available to indigenous people and human rights defenders. The statement also notes that the prisons are heavily overcrowded and prison conditions inhumane. Further points of criticism raised include an inadequate budget for prosecuting violence against women by way of an existing special judiciary and the lack of a register for acts of violence and discrimination against LGBTIQ people. The institution furthermore rejects proposed modifications to the law on migration to the detriment of migrants and refugees.

Republic of the Congo

Opposition party leader released

According to a report in the media, Destin Gavet, leader of the only recently accredited opposition party Mouvement républicain (MR), was released on 08.12.22. Following his recent arrest, he had allegedly been held in incommunicado detention (cf. BN of 12.12.22). The reasons for his arrest are unclear and are described by Gavet as arbitrary. No charges have been preferred as yet. Gavet has stated that the MR party will be continuing its public campaign for political prisoners in the Republic of the Congo unabatedly until 18.12.22.

Senegal

Provisional release of a journalist, 2022 Press Freedom Index

The investigative journalist Pape Alé Niang, who was arrested and taken into custody in Dakar on 06.11.22, was provisionally released on bail and placed under judicial supervision on 14.12.22, according to reports in the media. The anti-government journalist and director of online news service Dakar Matin was reportedly indicted on 09.11.22, on charges including endangering national security, spreading false information and disclosing confidential official information in connection with the pending trial of opposition politician Ousmane Sonko on sex offence charges. According to an international NGO, the information concerned could exonerate the defendant. Reports in the media in recent weeks indicate that Niang's arrest sparked protests and that he went on hunger strike on 02.12.22 in protest at his arrest, which is described as arbitrary. Various national and international NGOs and the opposition had reportedly called for his release. Senegal, which ranked 49 among 180 surveyed countries in the 2021 Press Freedom Index of NGO Reporters Without Borders (RSF), has since dropped 24 places to 73rd in the index for 2022. RSF has called for Niang's prosecution to be stopped.

Somalia

Humanitarian situation

According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), a famine (phase 5 of 5 in the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification, IPC, based on the country as a whole) has been averted for the time being as a result of an increase in humanitarian aid (cf. BN of 12.09.22). OCHA states that the food insecurity situation is nevertheless still to be classified as a "crisis" (phase 3). It is forecast that the situation will worsen up to June 2023 and the number of people acutely affected by malnutrition will increase threefold, from 214,000 to 727,000 (phase 5). Those pursuing agropastoral farming and internally displaced people in the Bay and Baidoa regions and in Mogadishu are particularly severely affected. The "Emergency Watchlist" published by the International Rescue Committee (IRC) on 14.12.22 forecasts that Somalia will be the country most severely affected by a worsening of humanitarian crises worldwide in 2023. UNICEF reports children and juveniles dying of hunger-related illnesses. It is not possible to ascertain the exact number of deaths. The number of people affected by the drought has more than doubled from 3.2 million in January 2022 to 7.8 million in October 2022, accompanied by a proportional worsening of the emergency situation. The number of people displaced as a result of the drought has risen more than fivefold over the same period, to almost 1.3 million.

Al-Shabaab accused of forcing civilians to flee their villages

The Somali National Army (SNA) claims that Al-Shabaab fighters are deliberately attacking civilians in villages under their control and forcing them to flee their homes. According to the SNA, this is intended to prevent villagers from collaborating with the government. Al-Shabaab is further accused of kidnapping relatives of the local Maawisley militia, which is fighting Al-Shabaab on the side of the government troops. According to official information, more than 70 villages have been liberated since the beginning of the offensive in August 2022.

South Africa

Ramaphosa avoids impeachment proceedings

On 13.12.22 a parliamentary majority voted against the initiation of impeachment proceedings against president Cyril Ramaphosa. The ruling African National Congress (ANC), which holds a majority in parliament, largely sided with Ramaphosa to prevent the two-thirds majority which is required to carry a motion. A report by a parliamentary commission of inquiry accuses Ramaphosa of possessing undeclared foreign currency, among other charges (cf. BN of 06.12.22).

South Sudan

UN calls for an end to the violence in Upper Nile

The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Volker Türk, called for an end to the violence in Upper Nile State on 13.12.22 (cf. BN of 29.08.22, 21.11.22 and 12.12.22). He also called on the authorities to take action. According to the UN, at least 166 civilians have been killed and 237 injured in the fighting since August 2022. Over 20,000 people have become displaced to date. The ongoing conflict stems from rivalries between various ethnic groups.

Sudan

Intercommunal clashes in South and West Kordofan

At least 24 people were killed and dozens injured in clashes between armed members of the Hamar and Misserya peoples in the Abu Koa region of West Kordofan State on 10.12. and 11.12.22. The dispute related to cattle rustling. Violent clashes in the region around Abu Kershola, South Kordofan State, claimed five lives on 14.12.22. Relatives of a person who had been killed attacked the suspected killers, leading to the lethal fighting. The Sudanese army intervened with a large troop presence and temporarily cordoned off the access road to Abu Kershola.

Protests continue

The protests against the framework agreement of 05.12.22 for the handover of power to a civilian-led interim government (cf. BN of 12.12.22) continue. Hundreds of people demonstrated in Khartoum on 13.12.22. Security forces used tear gas against the demonstrators.

Syria

Report by UN Secretary-General summarises current situation

In a report to the UN Security Council which an international news agency claims to have received in advance on 12.12.22, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres warns of a worsening humanitarian situation in Syria.

The report comes in the context of a impending Security Council vote on an extension of the cross-border UN relief supplies from Türkiye into the rebel-controlled territories in Idlib (north-western Syria). The supply of UN aid deliveries via the Bab al-Hawa border crossing point between Syria and Türkiye was last extended by six months in July 2022. A vote on a renewed extension must be held on the UN Security Council by 10.01.23.

Guterres states that relief supplies to the rebel territories via Damascus, which Russia has pushed for on the UN Security Council, have increased this year. He adds that these supplies are still not on an adequate scale to replace the relief supplied via the Turkish-Syrian border, however. Out of a total population of 4.6 million in north-western

Syria, around 4.1 million, 80 % of whom are women and children, are believed to be dependent on humanitarian aid.

Throughout the country as a whole, Guterres estimates that 15.3 million people will be in need of relief in 2023. This represents a rise over the corresponding figure of 14.6 million people in 2022. According to Guterres, around 22.1 million people are still living in Syria today. 7.5 million of these are believed to be living in territories outside of Syrian government control and a further 6.8 million are reliant on humanitarian aid.

The report notes that acute malnutrition among children aged between six months and five years increased by 48 % between 2021 and 2022.

Türkiye

Freedom of the press: Journalist arrested

Citing Turkish media, it was reported on 14.12.22 that a journalist had been arrested in Bitlis province in connection with his report on a child abuse case. The editor-in-chief of a local news portal apparently reported on the suspected sexual abuse of a 14 year-old girl in social networks. His home was subsequently searched and he was arrested. The accused has reportedly been sentenced to fines and prison terms in the past in connection with his reporting on repeated occasions.

A contentious law which entered into force in October 2022 makes spreading “false or misleading information” an offence which is punishable with between one and three years in prison. With 40 journalists held in prison, in 2022 Türkiye ranks 149th among 180 countries in the World Press Freedom Index, which is published annually by Reporters Without Borders (RSF).

Provisional prison term and ban on political activity for opposition politician

It was reported in the media on 14.12.22 that Ekrem İmamoğlu, Istanbul’s current mayor and an opposition politician belonging to the centre-left CHP party, has been sentenced to two years and seven months in prison for insulting a public official. He has reportedly also been banned from engaging in political activities. His conviction apparently stems from a derogatory remark made by the politician towards the electoral authority against the backdrop of the local government elections in 2019. He is considered to be a promising rival candidate to incumbent president Erdogan in the parliamentary and presidential elections in June 2023. The accused politician can remain in office until the verdict becomes final. Protest rallies against the conviction which were attended by several thousand people took place outside the municipal administration building in Istanbul on 15.12.22. Human rights organisations are criticising the verdict as politically motivated. The government refutes this portrayal of the case, pointing out that it has yet to be reviewed by courts of appeal.

Nine injured in suspected bomb attack

It has been reported in the media that an explosion occurred on a highway in Diyarbakir province in the south-east of the country on 16.12.22. An explosive device in a parked vehicle reportedly detonated as a minibus carrying a number of police officers passed by. Nine people are said to have been injured. It remains unclear whether the incident involved a terrorism-motivated attack.

Tunisia

Majority of Tunisian population abstains from voting in parliamentary election

Barely 9 % of eligible voters turned out in the parliamentary election on 17.12.22, according to the Independent High Authority for Elections (ISIE). While initial results are to be announced on 19.12.22, the final result is not expected before January 2023. The National Salvation Front (a coalition of five opposition parties) has called for president Kais Saied to resign in view of the low turnout; the opposition parties announced back in September 2022 that they would be boycotting the election.

According to reports in the media, the journalists’ union had accused the ISIE of intimidating the media in order to silence voices critical of the parliamentary elections.

Ukraine

Humanitarian and military situation

On 16.12.22 the Ukrainian military reported 76 Russian rocket attacks on various targets, including in the Ukrainian regions of Kiev, Kherson, Dnipropetrovsk, Zhytomyr, Zaporizhzhia, Kharkiv and Odessa. Cities including Kiev, Kharkiv and Odessa reported partial or complete temporary failures of power, heating and water supplies. The affected population was referred to emergency accommodation and public heat rooms. According to information from the local authorities, the heat supply in the capital, Kiev, was fully restored on 18.12.22, while power blackouts continued. According to media sources, drone attacks and damage to civilian infrastructure were reported in Kiev in the early hours of 19.12.22. At least two people were injured. Ukrainian energy utility Ukrenergo has reported that the Ukrainian power grid was set to emergency mode on 16.12.22, adding that there are power cuts throughout Ukraine due to the ongoing destruction of the energy infrastructure. The commander-in-chief of the Ukrainian armed forces, Valerii Zaluzhnyi, and the Ukrainian foreign minister, Dmytro Kuleba, have stated that a major new Russian offensive is expected in the winter or spring of 2023, adding that a renewed attack on the capital, Kiev, is also possible. A situation report released by the US think tank Institute for the Study of War on 15.12.22 concludes that, while such a scenario cannot be ruled out, the prospects of success are unlikely. Both parties to the conflict reject a ceasefire between New Year's Day and the orthodox Christmas period at the beginning of January. Reports in the media identify the cities of Kreminna in the Luhansk region and Bakhmut and Avdiivka in the Donetsk region as key focuses of the military confrontation on the front line. According to information from the regional Ukrainian military administration, the Ukraine-controlled part of the Kherson region is subject to sustained heavy shelling by Russian artillery and the situation regarding food and basic supplies and services in the city of Kherson remains precarious in the wake of the city's recapture by Ukrainian forces in the middle of November (cf. BN of 15.11.22 and 12.12.22). According to information from the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Volker Türk, the number of people in Ukraine who are currently dependent on humanitarian support is estimated at over 18 million and the number of internally displaced people at around 6.5 million. Türk points out that the continual attacks on Ukraine's energy infrastructure are exposing millions of civilians, and vulnerable people in particular, to extreme hardship in the prevailing winter conditions, in addition to which the humanitarian situation could deteriorate still further and internal migration could increase as a result of strikes, for example.

Venezuela

30-year prison terms handed down

According to information from relatives of the three defendants, Maria Delgado Tabosky, major (retired) Juan Carlos Marrufo and colonel (retired) Juan Francisco Rodriguez, who are accused of participating in an alleged attempted attack involving the detonation of drones at a rally by president Maduro in 2018, have each received the maximum sentence of 30 years in prison for terrorism, treason and forming a criminal organisation. The UN Human Rights Council working group for arbitrary arrests criticised the arrests of the first two individuals as arbitrary back in 2019, and NGOs stated that they had only been arrested because they are related to the person alleged to have financed the attack, who lives abroad and cannot be apprehended. 17 other people charged in connection with the same case were sentenced to prison terms of between five and 30 years in August (cf. BN of 08.08.22).

Yemen

Mine explosions

A number of people have been killed and injured in mine explosions in Yemen. On 16.12.22 a mine exploded in Al Hudaydah province, killing three people aged twelve, 15 and 35 and injuring one person. On the same day, a mine explosion in Abyan killed one person and injured five. The victims were fighters of the Southern Transitional Council. It is estimated that more than two million land mines have been planted in Yemen.

