



# Briefing Notes

## Group 62 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

30 January 2023

### Afghanistan

#### Security situation

The National Resistance Front (NRF) claims it killed three Taliban fighters and injured two others in Kapisa province on 24.01.23 and that it captured 13 insurgents in Nuristan province.

#### Persecution events

According to reports, Musa Shahin, a singer from Panjshir province, was arrested for the second time by the Taliban on 25.01.23. The first time he was detained, he was allegedly tortured by the Taliban. Journalists of the Afghan press medium Hasht-e Subh living in exile, citing a reliable source in Taliban intelligence circles, report that prisoners are being tortured above all at district prisons in Panjshir.

#### Humanitarian situation and women's rights

Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock announced that Germany will be suspending its humanitarian aid to Afghanistan due to the ban on Afghan women working for international organisations and NGOs. She justified the decision by saying that without the participation of women the aid cannot reach its destination. Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations, Amina Mohammad, by contrast, has urged Germany and other EU Member States to continue providing aid, as large sections of the population depend on it, especially in winter. According to official Taliban figures, at least 166 people have died in recent weeks due to the freezing temperatures (cf. BN of 23.01.23).

### Angola

#### Freedom of assembly: police prevent protest march

On 28.01.23, the police in Luanda once again prevented a protest march demanding the release of activists Tanaece Neutro (pseudonym) and Luther Campos, who have been in prison for over a year. Both were arrested after the taxi strike held on 10.01.22 (cf. BN of 17.01.22). They were accused of rebellion and resistance against the state, among other things. According to media reports, 10 protesters were detained briefly on 28.01.23. Several of them were released shortly afterwards not in Luanda, but at a location around 60 km outside the capital. Before that, they had been prevented from speaking to the press.

Several similar protests and police interventions occurred in 2022, according to the annual report of Human Rights Watch (HRW), including the protest also demanding the release of the two activists that had been prevented on 19.11.22 (cf. BN of 21.11.22). In this case too, the police said the protest march had not been authorised by the Luanda provincial government. According to the organisers, this "march for justice and freedom" was also directed against recurrent violence perpetrated by the authorities against street vendor women (so-called zungueiras). The organisers they had sent a communiqué to the provincial government on 19.01.23, notifying them of the protest

The provincial government failed to respond within 72 hours. In its report on a protest that was dispersed on 09.04.22, HRW pointed out that the authorities repeatedly used violence to prevent and disperse peaceful protests despite the constitutional provision that it is not necessary to wait for a permit to organise a protest the authorities have been notified of.

The Washington-based NGO Friends of Angola, which aims to support Angolan civil society, named four political prisoners in a letter addressed to the U.S. government that was picked up by the media. In addition to Tanaece Neutro and Luther Campos, the NGO also lists José Mateus Zecamutchima, leader of the autonomy movement Movimento do Protectorado Português da Lunda Tchokwe (MPPLT) (Lunda Tchokwe Protectorate Movement) cf. BN of 22.02.21), and José Julino Kalupeteka, founder of the Igreja do Sétimo Dia a Luz do Mundo (Seventh Day Light of the World Church).

## **Bangladesh**

### **Six suspected HuJI members arrested in Dhaka**

On 29.01.23, the Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime (CTTC) unit of Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) arrested six suspected members of the banned extremist organisation Harkat-ul-Jihad al-Islami (HuJI) Bangladesh, including a trainer who had returned from Afghanistan. The latter has close ties with the Afghan Taliban and, according to the police, had been recruiting fighters in Rohingya refugee camps.

## **Burkina Faso**

### **Withdrawal of French troops**

The government of Burkina Faso has ordered the withdrawal of French troops. The French special unit "Sabre Force", which has almost 400 soldiers stationed in the country is to be withdrawn within four weeks. Relations between France and Burkina Faso have deteriorated further in recent months. After Mali last year, Burkina Faso is now the second country in the Sahel region from which France is withdrawing its troops.

## **Cameroon**

### **Missing journalist found dead**

According to various media reports, Cameroonian journalist Martinez Zogo was found dead in Soa, a suburb of the capital Yaoundé, on 22.01.23. Zogo had been considered missing since 17.01.23. Unknown assailants are said to have abducted him. According to a press release issued by the Cameroonian government, initial investigations indicate that Zogo had been tortured before his death.

Zogo was director of the radio station Radio Amplitude and known for reporting on critical issues. During his most recent research, Zogo had been talking on air about a case of alleged embezzlement involving a media outlet with government connections. Critical journalists like Zogo are particularly endangered in Cameroon. Zogo is said to have recently received death threats on a daily basis.

## **Central African Republic**

### **Humanitarian needs for 2023**

The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) expects half of the population, around three million people, to be food insecure in 2023. A total of 3.4 million people are reportedly in need of humanitarian aid in various sectors, 10% more than in 2022, including two million people whose needs are so complex and severe that their physical and mental health is at risk.

## Chad

### **Suspension of seven opposition parties lifted**

In the aftermath of the protests of 20.10.22 and the violent crackdown by the security authorities (cf. BN of 24.10.22), the transitional military government banned seven opposition parties from carrying out political activities for three months. The government had accused the parties of disturbing public order and security. On 21.01.23, a government spokesperson declared that the suspension of the seven parties had been lifted, saying they are now permitted to resume their work but had to strictly comply with the legislation in force.

## Colombia

### **Murders of social leaders reaches new high in 2022**

The Colombian Ombudsman's Office (Defensoría del Pueblo) reported on 23.01.23 that a total of 215 social leaders and human rights defenders, so-called Líderes Sociales, were murdered in 2022. According to the report, most of the attacks against this group of people occurred in the provinces of Nariño (35), Cauca (26), Putumayo (22) and Antioquia (22). This is the highest number recorded since state records began in 2016 and a 49% increase compared to 2021. According to the Ombudsman, Carlos Camargo, 145 and 182 Líderes Sociales were killed in 2021 and 2020 respectively (cf. BN of 12.12.22). While the Ombudsman's office claims that the total number of people killed between 2016 and 2022 was 1,113, the Indepaz Instituto de estudios para el desarrollo y la paz (Institute of Peace and Development Studies) registered 1,409 murders during the same period. In addition, the classification by type of activity shows that leaders of civic committees (Juntas de Acción Comunal (JAC), who are responsible for grassroots organisation in villages and neighbourhoods, remained the most vulnerable group with 63 murders. In 43 cases, indigenous leaders were the victims of homicides.

## Ecuador

### **Political violence against candidates in the run-up to local elections; candidates' links with organised crime**

In the run-up to the local elections to be held on 05.02.23, according to media reports, at least 12 attacks, some of them fatal, have been carried out against candidates, their relatives or employees using firearms, explosive devices or knives in various regions of the country since August 2022. In this context, the candidate for Mayor of Salinas was assassinated on 21.01.23. In general, the election campaign has been marked by considerable violence. Criminal organisations involved in drug trafficking are reportedly responsible for these attacks. In addition, on 25.01.23, the Minister of the Interior, Colonel Juan Zapata, announced that 28 candidates were being investigated for alleged links with organised crime and activities in the fields of drug trafficking and illegal mining.

## Egypt

### **Businessmen released after two years in detention**

On 21.01.23, the founder and former head of one of the largest juice and dairy companies in Egypt and his son were released from prison, according to reports in the media. Safwan and Seifeldin Thabet, who were imprisoned for allegedly belonging to and funding a terrorist organisation in December 2020 and February 2021 respectively, were never convicted. The family have denied the accusations made by the authorities. According to Amnesty International, the real reason for the arrest of the two entrepreneurs was their refusal to hand over assets to a state institution.

## The Gambia

### **Several communities in Eastern Gambia reject FGM and various forms of forced marriage**

According to media reports, 35 communities in the Sami and Niani districts of the eastern Central River Region (CRR) will henceforth voluntarily reject harmful traditional and cultural practices such as female genital mutilation

(FGM), child, early and forced marriages and other forms of gender-based discrimination. The communities had participated in a three-year community-based empowerment programme run by the NGO Tostan in cooperation with the Gambian government. Locally based traditional circumcisers have reportedly also agreed to abandon the practice. It was not until the end of 2022 that a media report revealed how the NGO Tostan had managed to bring about such a change in awareness among 25 communities in Fulladu District/CRR. In recent years, the NGO Tostan has managed to convince more than 200 communities in the Eastern Upper River Region to abandon harmful traditional and cultural practices by raising awareness and implementing educational campaigns. FGM and the various forms of forced marriages are still widespread, according to more recent information sources in spite of the gradual change in awareness and increasing rejection (cf. BN of 20.06.22).

Abdullah Fatty, former Imam at the State House mosque under former President Yahya Jammeh who allegedly continues to be a particularly influential Muslim scholar in the country, defended the FGM practice on 06.01.23, citing religious and hygienic reasons. Fatty has urged the population of the largely Muslim country to maintain the practice of circumcision.

### **Several criminal proceedings suspended in connection with allegedly foiled coup plots**

According to media reports, the trial judge discharged two civilians and three soldiers, some of whom were charged with treason, in connection with allegedly foiled coup plots (cf. BN of 02.01.23 and 09.01.23) on 25.01.23. Those previously remanded in custody are all to be released owing to a lack of new charges and without objection from the Attorney General's Office. Meanwhile, the Attorney General's Office had filed an amended bill of indictment at Banjul High Court against five accused soldiers, including the alleged mastermind and ringleader of the foiled coup plot, Sergeant Sanna Fadera, and a police officer.

## **Guinea-Bissau**

### **Guinea-Bissau slips down Governance Index**

In the latest Ibrahim Index of African Governance (IIAG, reporting year 2021), Guinea-Bissau has slipped down to 44th position out of a total of 54 countries covered - down from 43rd place the previous year and 39th back in 2015. The associated report examines the nearly ten-year period between 2012 and 2021. According to media coverage by the IIAG, Guinea-Bissau is one of eight countries that have reversed their initial positive trend into a negative one during the period under review. Guinea-Bissau performs particularly poorly in the areas of human development and foundations for economic opportunity (ranking 50th).

## **Haiti**

### **Killing of police officers, riots in Port-au-Prince**

According to local media reports, riots broke out in the capital Port-au-Prince when policemen demonstrated against several deadly attacks carried out against police officers. Policemen dressed in plain clothes allegedly set up roadblocks with burning tyres and attacked the residence of interim Prime Minister Ariel Henry while he was on his way back from the Summit of Latin American Countries (CELAC). Later, people, the majority of whom have also been identified as police officers, stormed the capital's international airport to meet the prime minister there, but he managed to escape to safety. The attacks are believed to be a response to several killings of police officers. The National Union of Haitian Police Officers say that 15 police officers have been killed by suspected gang members since the beginning of the year and that seven police officers were killed on 25.01.23 alone. A Haitian human rights group, the National Network of the Defence of Human Rights, said 78 police officers have been killed since Ariel Henry came to power in 2021. Haiti is considered to be the poorest country in the Americas and is characterised by an extremely poor security situation due to gang violence as well as an increasingly deteriorating healthcare and supply situation. In October 2022, the Henry government appealed to the international community for a multi-national security force to help restore order. On 15.10.22, the USA and Canada delivered armoured vehicles and other equipment to Haiti (cf. BN of 17.10.22).

## India

### **74th Republic Day; ban on broadcast of documentary about Prime Minister Narendra Modi**

On 26.01.23, India celebrated its 74th Republic Day with a military parade. This year's guest of honour was Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi.

To mark the Indian holiday, the UK's public service broadcaster BBC aired a two-part documentary on Prime Minister Narendra Modi's political career. The film shows that Modi's political rise cannot be separated historically from the religiously motivated violence against members of the Muslim faith in the state of Gujarat in 2002. The situation for Muslims in the country has worsened since the election victory of the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and since Modi took office in 2014. Not only were members of the Muslim faith declared stateless in the state of Assam, but violence against this religious minority in the country has been increasingly played down, while Modi has presented himself to the outside world primarily as a pragmatic promoter of the economy.

The government immediately used emergency powers to prevent the documentary from airing in India and banned its distribution on social media. Students gathered across the country to watch the documentary on laptops and mobile phones. Clashes broke out with student groups close to the BJP at Delhi University. Police stormed the university, confiscated laptops and imposed a ban on gatherings of more than four people. According to police, two dozen students were also arrested.

## Iran

### **Convictions in connection with protests**

Foreign media and human rights organisations have reported several convictions in connection with protests. Among other things, they say a provisional death sentence against a man has been lifted and commuted to a prison sentence of six months. The original verdict was for waging war on God (moharebeh, pursuant to Article 279 of the Iranian Criminal Code), after the man had offered shelter at his home to several persons wanted in connection with protests in Tehran. However, according to the press, the report could not be independently confirmed. A report issued on 27.01.23 claims that a woman was sentenced to one year in prison and banned from leaving the country for participating in protests in Ilam (province of the same name) on 30.09.22. She was convicted on charges of spreading propaganda against the regime, disturbing public order and engaging in actions against national security. After her arrest in September 2022, she was released on bail on 24.11.22. Reports of convictions of other people have also been issued, including a labour activist from Tehran, two civil activists from Dehghan (Kordestan province), and several students from Bukan (West Azerbaijan), Babol (Mazandaran) and Tehran, among others. They did not specify what the actual charges were. The prison sentences handed down ranged between one and six years. In addition, corporal punishment (lashes) and bans on leaving the country were imposed in some cases. The sentences can still be appealed.

### **Attack on the Azerbaijani embassy in Tehran**

On 27.01.22, a gunman gained access to the Azerbaijani embassy building in Tehran and opened fire. He killed the embassy's head of security and injured two other security guards before he was apprehended by security personnel and police. However, according to initial interrogations, he appears to have had a personal motive rather than a political one. Iran expressed its condolences to the family of the deceased and to Azerbaijan.

The attack came amid rising tensions between Azerbaijan and Iran. Azerbaijan was the first Shia country to send an ambassador to Tel Aviv just a few weeks ago. Iran hosts easily twice the population of the Republic of Azerbaijan. In addition, the embassy had repeatedly asked for stronger protection in Tehran. On 29.01.22 it was announced that Azerbaijan was evacuating the embassy until further notice.

### **Suspected missile attack on military facility**

Citing the state news agency Irna as a source, it has been reported that a military facility near Isfahan (in Isfahan province) was attacked by several armed aircraft on the night of 29.01.23. According to the Iranian Ministry of Defence, nobody was injured. It was a military attack in which nobody was harmed. Two aircraft, presumably drones, were reportedly shot down by air defence. Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian did not provide an official assessment of who was responsible for the attacks, saying that investigations will need to be carried out.

The U.S. Wall Street Journal, citing unnamed sources, reported that Israel had carried out the attacks. Israel has declined to comment.

## **Iraq**

### **Fight against ISIS**

On 26.01.23, security forces of the Kurdistan Regional Government of Iraq (KRG) arrested a total of seven suspected ISIS members in the province of Sulaymaniyah. Three of them are said to be high-ranking wanted persons.

### **Death sentences**

On 26.01.23, fourteen persons were sentenced to death for their alleged involvement in the Speicher massacre in which 1,700 Iraqi cadets were murdered by ISIS at Camp Speicher near Tikrit on 12.06.14. There are considerable doubts that the proceedings were conducted in accordance with the rule of law.

### **Economic situation**

On 25.01.23, several major payments by the Baghdad government to the KRG were declared unconstitutional. These payments were mainly used to finance salaries of civil servants, the payment of which is now once again in jeopardy. The political dispute over the ongoing issue of financial support for the KRG has been reignited.

Major rallies took place in Baghdad the same day, after the governor of the Central Bank resigned. The background is the devaluation of the Iraqi dinar in recent months. Since mid-November 2022, the currency has lost about 7% against the US dollar, which has had a noticeable impact on inflation. Iraq imports a significant portion of its consumer goods and is heavily dependent on its exchange rate and oil prices on international markets.

In parts of the KRG, the annual distribution of petroleum and fuel oil is inadequate. The allocations are part of Iraq's general revenue and for many households an essential part of their actual income. Large parts of Kurdistan are currently experiencing temperatures well below zero degrees Celsius at night.

### **Turkish military intervention**

During the months of December 2022 and January 2023, the Turkish army seems to have withdrawn from several dozen of its around 100 bases in Dohuk province. It is not clear at present whether it is merely regrouping or whether the threat posed by the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) is now being assessed differently by Ankara.

## **Kosovo**

### **Incident at checkpoint**

According to media reports issued on 23.01.23, a Kosovo Albanian police officer opened fire on a car travelling towards Serbia at a checkpoint between Leposavić/Leposaviq and Mitrovica. The Kosovo Serb driver had not only refused to stop, but according to the police, also rammed a police vehicle. After the incident, he managed to cross the border into Serbia. According to the government in Belgrade, one person received gunshot wounds. The Kosovar authorities have not confirmed this information. Tensions have been smouldering between Kosovo and Serbia for some time and have repeatedly led to riots and acts of violence (cf. BN of 09.01.23 and 12.12.22).

## **Lebanon**

### **Economic situation**

On 25.01.23, the U.S. government announced that it was once again rerouting USD 72 million in aid to the Lebanese army to ensure that wages can be paid.

On 26.01.23, the Ministry of Energy raised the heavily regulated petrol prices yet again. The Ministry says owing to the ever-increasing currency depreciation, it will be forced to issue new prices twice a day in the future. The announcement resulted in long queues forming in front of petrol stations and protests.

On 27.01.23 the Lebanese pound fell to a record new low of 1:61.0000 to the US dollar.

UNRWA is calling for USD 1.6 billion to fund all essential services for Palestinian refugees in the West Bank.

## Myanmar

### Security situation

As a result of the outbreak of fighting between Junta troops and the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) on 23.01.23, over 10,000 civilians fled Kyondoe town and 14 nearby villages in Kayin State. The junta troops also destroyed several homes during the shelling of the villages with heavy artillery.

In Sagaing Region, the military continued its scorched-earth campaign on 23.01.23, destroying residential homes in Yinmabin and Salingyi townships. Around 10,000 people from nine villages fled. According to recent counts by the Institute for Strategy and Policy - Myanmar (ISP), 43,216 buildings were destroyed in Sagaing between 01.02.21 and 14.01.23, including around 20,000 between November 2022 and January 2023 alone. Half of the buildings destroyed during this period were in Tabayin and Shwebo townships. The number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Sagaing was 794,000 (15% of the region's population) as of 14.12.22, according to the ISP, while OCHA estimates that the total number of IDPs was 624,000 as of 26.12.22. Countrywide, more than 1.5 million people had been displaced due to insecurity and violence by the end of December 2022, according to OCHA. Of these, 1.1 million people had been displaced as a result of the military coup of 01.02.21.

## Nicaragua

### Convictions of AUN members, members of the Catholic Church and an exiled politician

On 25.01.23, two leaders of the student union AUN, who have been in prison since November 2022, were sentenced at a closed-door trial in Managua. The public prosecutor's office has requested eight years' imprisonment for Mildred Rayo and Miguel Flores for conspiracy to undermine national integrity and propagation of false news.

On 26.01.23, four priests, two seminarians and a reporter (cf. BN of 22.08.23) were also sentenced on the same charges in a four-day trial. They had been arrested in August 2022 in Matagalpa together with the bishop Rolando Álvarez, who has been a sharp critic of the government. The ten-year sentence each demanded by the public prosecutor's office is not yet legally valid. The trial against Álvarez has not yet been scheduled; according to media reports, the Holy See is involved in an exchange with the Nicaraguan authorities in relation to this matter.

On 26.01.23, the sentencing of three relatives of the exiled politician Javier Álvarez Zamora (cf. BN of 19.09.22) to eight and ten years in prison respectively, also for the above-mentioned offences, became legally valid. Since the end of 2022, human rights defenders see the threat of attacks on and activities against relatives of political prisoners or wanted, untraceable persons as a new pattern of repression by Ortega's government to prevent civil society resistance and criticism. In particular, people who have applied for or received protection mechanisms from the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) have been affected by such measures. Cases have also been reported of people being given the choice to leave the country "voluntarily" instead of going to prison.

### Arrest of former Deputy Police Director Marengo Correa; support base eroding

According to consistent media reports, the former Deputy Director of the National Police Adolfo Marengo Correa was arrested on 13.01.23 and detained at the prison Directorate of Justice Assistance (DAJ) (also known as El Chipote) in Managua. He had been head of the police investigation and intelligence services for a long time and had belonged to the inner circle of the presidential couple in this function before he was retired in early November 2022 by means of a presidential decree. The reasons for his removal from office and his current imprisonment are unclear. Speculation is rife that he may have been planning to leave the country and was prevented from doing so, or that he refused to continue working for the presidential couple. The frequently quoted security expert Elvira Cuadra also considers it possible that Marengo, who has been indicted for alleged corruption and illicit private business dealings, is being used as a scapegoat for other persons within the police apparatus, whose loyalty the presidential couple want to continue to be sure of. There is great uncertainty within the system, for instance as to whom the presidential couple can trust. In the past year, even higher-ranking persons who are considered to be loyal to the party, such as the spokesperson of the Supreme Court (cf. BN of 24.10.22), have been repeatedly arrested. In this context, the expert says that the "internal support base is possibly eroding". Civil servants, including higher-ranking ones, have repeatedly tried to leave the country; other members of the elite such as the former ambassador to the Organisation of American States (cf. BN of 02.05.22) have criticised the government, sometimes publicly, while abroad. However, the expert says she is aware that other persons within the institutions do not have the possibility

of leaving the country due to their prominent position, as they are under strict surveillance or have had their passports confiscated.

## **Nigeria**

### **Dozens of Fulani killed in bomb blast**

At least 54 civilians belonging to the Fulani ethnic group were killed in a bomb blast in central Nigeria on 24.01.23. Security authorities only confirmed a lower death toll to begin with. According to media reports, the incident occurred in the border area between Benue and Nasarawa states, when Fulani were moving in excess of 1,000 cattle from Benue to Nasarawa. Details of the crime remain unclear. According to reports in the media, the bombardment could have been caused by a drone attack, or even a bomb or could possibly have been an accidental attack by the air force. The incident is particularly explosive against the backdrop of smouldering conflicts between sedentary and non-sedentary people over land, pasture and water rights in large parts of Nigeria, including and especially in the Central Region where the above-mentioned act of violence occurred. Ethnic and religious rivalries add to the complexity of the situation and make it difficult to find a solution. Acts of revenge have also been reported in the past (cf. BN of 03.01.22 and 24.10.22).

### **Troops free over 100 hostages in northern Nigeria**

Military personnel killed 84 terrorists and freed 122 kidnap victims in the north-east and north-west of the country within two weeks in January 2023. This was revealed in media reports issued on 27.01.23, citing information provided by the Nigerian Defence Headquarters (DHQ) on 26.01.2023. An army spokesperson stressed that during the two-week period of Operation Hadin Kai in the north-east, not only were 42 individuals belonging to the Islamist groups Boko Haram and Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) killed, but 14 others were also arrested. In addition, a total of 267 persons designated as terrorists or family members of terrorists by Nigerian government agencies reportedly surrendered in various locations in the north-east. In the north-west, 42 terrorists were killed, four terrorists were arrested, and 26 abducted civilians were rescued in Operation Hadarin Daji in several land and air operations carried out during the same period. The DHQ has circulated similar reports in the past (cf. BN of 28.03.22, 30.05.22 and 05.09.22).

### **North-east: troops foil attack on major city**

According to media reports, troops in Borno State have foiled an attack by Islamists on Monguno, a major city in the far north-east of Nigeria. According to a statement issued by an army spokesperson on 20.01.23, troops participating in Operation Hadin Kai and the Multi-National Joint Task Force (MNJTF) were involved in the successful operation. Two assailants were killed, and others sustained bullet wounds. Weapons, vehicles and other equipment belonging to the terrorists were recovered.

According to media reports issued at the end of January 2023, large numbers of people who fled Islamist violence in Nigeria to Cameroon began returning in the second half of January. On 20.01.2023 alone, for instance, a total of 455 Nigerian men, women and children were reportedly welcomed at the border by authorities in their home country. Media reports say UNHCR was involved in organising the return operation. Some of the returnees reportedly spent more than eight years in Cameroon.

### **South-east: another fatal shooting of police officers**

Unidentified gunmen shot dead at least three policemen and injured another at a road checkpoint on the Enugu/Abakaliki motorway in south-eastern Nigeria on 28.01.2023. According to media reports, the assailants opened fire when they arrived in two vehicles at the checkpoint located in the border area between Enugu and Ebonyi states. Recently, the number of deadly attacks carried out on security forces, police stations and other state facilities in the South-east by unknown individuals has been on the rise (cf. BN of 28.03.22, 30.05.22, 27.06.22, 10.10.22, 21.11.22 and 23.01.23). The authorities usually accuse the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), which has been banned since 2017, or members of its armed wing, the Eastern Security Network (ESN), of being responsible for the violent incidents occurring in south-eastern Nigeria. However, the IPOB and ESN organisations consistently deny any involvement.



## **Pakistan**

### **Nationwide power outage lasts an entire day**

On 23.01.23, a technical fault caused a nationwide power outage that lasted an entire day. According to the Ministry of Energy, voltage fluctuations between the towns of Jamshoro and Dadu in the southern province of Sindh were the cause.

### **Election dates set for dissolved provincial parliaments; high-ranking member of the PTI arrested**

On 25.01.23, the Election Commission of Pakistan announced that it proposes to hold elections for the two provinces of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Punjab in mid-April 2023. The two provincial parliaments have been dissolved (cf. BN of 23.01.23).

On 25.01.23, a senior member of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party was arrested on charges of sedition. The former Federal Minister for Information and Broadcasting, Fawad Chaudhry, allegedly incited violence against officials of the Election Commission of Pakistan.

## **Palestinian Autonomous Territories / Israel**

### **West Bank: several persons killed in military operations**

On 25.01.23, Israeli troops shot and killed two Palestinians during an altercation with several people throwing stones.

On 26.01.23, a military operation at a refugee camp triggered a gunfire exchange between Israeli troops and armed gunmen. Nine Palestinians were killed, seven of whom belonged to one of the militant groups Hamas or Islamic Jihad, according to information provided by the groups. The army announced it will be launching an inquiry into the killing of a 61-year-old woman. Medical rescue workers complained that they had been denied access to the wounded during the military operation. According to the organisation B'Tselem, this is the deadliest military raid to be carried out in two decades. A few hours later, another Palestinian was shot dead north of Jerusalem during protests against the previous raid. Since the beginning of 2023, a total of 34 Palestinians have been killed, among them numerous members of militant groups and civilians.

### **Gaza Strip: work permits revoked, missiles from the Gaza Strip and Israeli airstrikes**

On 25.01.23, the Israeli domestic intelligence service Shin Bet announced that Israel would be revoking approximately 230 Israeli work permits for family members of Hamas members living in the Gaza Strip. According to a statement issued by the intelligence service, they were suspected of recruiting Palestinians from the West Bank for the militant group during their work stays in Israel. The recruited persons were frequently unaware of what their work actually involved, such as transporting money, and did not know which group was in the background.

On 27.01.23, several missiles were fired from the Gaza Strip towards Israel in response to the military raid carried out in the West Bank that left seven dead (see above). Three of the missiles were intercepted, one had already hit the ground in the Gaza Strip, and another fell into open territory. The Israeli forces say they were responding by carrying out airstrikes on an underground missile production facility, which was also being used as a Hamas training site.

### **East Jerusalem: seven Jewish worshipers killed near synagogue**

On 27.01.23, a Palestinian gunman killed seven civilians and wounded three others near a synagogue in East Jerusalem before he was shot dead by the police. This is the deadliest attack to be carried out since 2008. The attack took place in the Neve Yaakov area, a Jewish settlement inside East Jerusalem. Israeli forces arrested 42 of family members and neighbours of the gunman who is from the East Jerusalem neighbourhood of at-Tur, and sealed off the home of the assailant's family.

On 28.01.23, a 13-year-old Palestinian boy attacked a group of Jewish civilians with a firearm in the Silwan neighbourhood, wounding two of them. He was overpowered by armed bystanders and was subsequently taken into custody by the police. On the same day, the Israeli Prime Minister announced further punitive measures to punish such attacks. In future, he said the families of assailants will no longer receive social benefits, it will be made

easier for Israelis to have weapons licensed, and the crackdown on illegal weapons possession will be stepped up. Concrete regulations are to follow.

### **UNRWA: ongoing financial crisis**

On 24.01.23, the head of the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees (UNRWA), Philippe Lazzarini, launched an appeal for USD 1.6 billion for 2023. UNRWA runs education, health and other support services for Palestinian refugees in Gaza, the West Bank, Jordan, Syria and Lebanon.

According to him, UNRWA is ending its fourth consecutive year with a deficit of about USD 70 million, while the majority of refugees needing services are now living below the poverty line (81.5% of the population in Gaza) and a growing number are dependent on UNRWA support. Accordingly, last year UNRWA only managed to USD 1.2 billion of the USD 1.6 billion it had appealed for.

Shortly before, around 3,700 aid workers in the West Bank joined a unionised strike in support of the demand for salary increases. The aim was to increase salaries by JOD 200 (approx. USD 281.81) per month. Various parts of UNRWA's services have been affected, including schools, healthcare facilities, rubbish collection systems and others.

## **Russian Federation**

### **Dissolution of the Moscow Helsinki Group ordered**

On 25.01.23, the Moscow City Court ordered the dissolution of the Moscow Helsinki Group, one of the last remaining independent human rights organisations in the country, which was founded in 1976 by Soviet dissidents and others. The court thus satisfied a petition filed by the Ministry of Justice, according to which the organisation had been carrying out its activities outside the Moscow city area in violation of the law. Thirteen months earlier, the same court had also ordered the dissolution of the Memorial Human Rights Centre at the request of the Ministry of Justice (cf. BN of 03.01.22).

## **Rwanda**

### **Doubts about official account of the cause of death of a journalist**

On the night of 18.01.23, journalist John Williams Ntwali died as a result of a traffic accident in Kigali, according to official reports. Ntwali is considered to be one of the last remaining investigative journalists in Rwanda, who was known for his research and contributions critical of the government. The official details of his death were only made public 24 hours after the alleged accident and raised many doubts about their veracity, among other things because, according to his family, Ntwali felt his life was in danger and had been persecuted in the weeks leading up to his death. Several NGOs, including the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), Human Rights Watch (HRW) and Reporters Without Borders (RSF), subsequently called for an independent and transparent inquiry into Ntwali's death.

## **Senegal**

### **Political opponent and presidential candidate loses parliamentary mandate**

According to media reports, on 24.01.23, the Office of the National Assembly voted to revoke the parliamentary mandate of Aminata Touré, former prime minister and once a close ally of President Macky Sall. The reason given was Touré's "de facto" resignation from the presidential party Alliance pour la République (APR) (Alliance for the Republic) and the ruling Benno Bokk Yakaar (BBY) coalition. Under Article 60 of the current Senegalese constitution, if members of parliament quit their party, this automatically affects their mandate. Touré criticised a politically motivated and illegal decision that she said violated Article 60 of the constitution. She said she had neither submitted an official letter of resignation to APR and/or BBY nor had her rights to information and consultation been respected in advance. The declared presidential candidate for 2024, who reportedly distanced herself from the presidential camp in September 2022 and has repeatedly spoken out against a third term for President Sall, accuses the latter of trying to exclude his main rivals from the presidential elections. Opposition

leader Ousmane Sonko, one of the most promising presidential candidates, is currently standing trial on rape charges, which he has rejected as politically motivated and views as an attempt to exclude him from elections in advance (cf. BN of 23.01.23). According to The Voice of America (VOA), many political observers fear that Sall's bid for a third term as president could unsettle the largely democratic and stable country.

### **Ongoing challenges related to combating sexualised violence**

In the context of press coverage of the dropped case of the alleged rape of the 2020 winner of the Senegalese beauty pageant, it is mentioned that combating sexual crimes remains a major legal and factual challenge in the country. Ladies Club Sénégal, a platform for women's rights, lamented the fact that the "culture of rape" was not about to fade and referred to the current rape case against opposition leader Ousmane Sonko. According to the communications officer of the Association des juristes sénégalaises (AJS) (Association of Senegalese Lawyers), awareness-raising measures did contribute to an increase in the willingness of victims of sexual assault to report the abuse. However, victims continue to face difficulties in accessing psychosocial support and legal counselling, as well as criminal justice and redress generally. Victims who are willing to report abuse also face social vilification and accusations of guilt. Actual recourse to legal proceedings is associated with high costs and a lengthy overall duration of the proceedings. While women's rights advocates have welcomed reforms in the area of sexual offences law, they have pointed to persistent difficulties, including lengthy investigation and criminal proceedings and few decisions on rape cases.

## **Sierra Leone**

### **Sierra Leone passes anti-discrimination law aimed at strengthening women's rights**

According to recent press reports, in an historic move, Sierra Leone has passed a law aimed at promoting and protecting women's rights, thereby paving the way for other countries in the Global South to enact laws that reinforce the equal role of women in modern society. The law, called the Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Act (GEWE), aims to grant women rights that they have traditionally been denied in a largely patriarchal society, including in the workplace and in relation to power of attorney and access to financial transactions. The legislation requires that at least 30% of the workforce in public and private organisations must be women, while the same proportion must be maintained in leadership and decision-making positions where women have been largely excluded.

## **Somalia**

### **Regional Minister assassinated**

On 28.01.23, the Galmudug State Government announced that the Regional Minister for Transport and Aviation, Farhiya Abdi Mohamed, had been shot dead in Mogadishu by armed al-Shabaab fighters who had been trailing her.

### **Freedom of the press**

On 25.01.23, Somaliland police arrested two SomNews journalists in Hargeysa, the capital of Somaliland. The police previously searched the news channel's offices. According to media representatives, television reporter Mohamed Mohamud Koronto and cameraman Mahdi Siyad remain in police custody without charge. Representatives of SomNews suspect that the arrests are about their coverage of the protests in Las Anod (cf. BN of 02.01.23).

### **High-ranking ISIS leader killed by U.S. military**

The U.S. government announced on 26.01.23 that during a military operation carried out the previous day in a mountainous cave complex in northern Somalia, U.S. special forces had killed 11 ISIS fighters, including the senior leader Bilal al-Sudani, who had been targeted in the mission. The objective had actually been to capture al-Sudani, but this had not been possible due to the resistance put up by ISIS fighters. No further details are known about the nature of the mission. Al-Sudani is reported to have played a key role in financing ISIS operations in Africa and also to have been active in Afghanistan. Before joining ISIS in the mid-2010s, al-Sudani was reportedly active with al-Shabaab.

## Syria

### **SDF: large-scale raid against ISIS in Raqqa**

According to their own sources, on 25.01.23, the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) succeeded in uncovering dozens of hideouts of suspected ISIS fighters in the governorate capital of Raqqa in a large-scale raid in which it arrested numerous suspects. The approximately 5,000 security forces involved in the operation reportedly received air support from the U.S.-led international coalition fighting ISIS.

On 26.01.23, the SDF reported having arrested a total of 68 fighters. These reportedly included Atallah al-Maythan, the leader of the ISIS cell responsible for operations in the Raqqa governorate.

According to the U.S. military, a total of 215 ISIS fighters were taken into custody last year and 466 were killed.

As recently as December 2022, the human rights organisation Human Rights Watch (HRW) published a report stating that more than 42,400 foreign and approximately 23,200 Syrian ISIS supporters and their family members remained in SDF custody. Most recently, on 24.01.23, France repatriated a total of 32 minors and 15 women aged between 19 and 56 with French nationality from north-eastern Syria.

## Türkiye

### **Deportation of refugees to Syria**

On 24.01.23, Turkish authorities deported around 40 Syrian refugees who were in possession of the "Kimlik" temporary residence permit, via the Bab Al-Salama border crossing, north of Aleppo, from Türkiye to areas under the control of Turkish forces in northern Syria. The deportees are to be settled in what the Turkish government calls the "safe zone".

On 18.01.23, more than 30 Syrian nationals, including women and children, who had recently entered Turkish territory, were taken to migration authority centres in the Kilis region to prepare for their deportation to Syria.

### **Ruling in HDP trial**

On 26.01.23, the Constitutional Court rejected the request filed by the pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) to postpone the court proceedings on the dissolution of the party until the crucial elections on 14.05.23. The proceedings to dissolve the party have been ongoing since March 2021.

## Uganda

### **New report on torture at detention centres**

The NGO Lawyers Without Borders reports that detainees in police cells and prisons are being tortured, mainly to extract more information from them. For its latest report, the NGO interviewed former inmates from 12 prisons and five police cells. According to the report, the violence is being perpetrated by police and intelligence officers, prison staff and fellow inmates. Although a reporting system for violent incidents in prisons exists, the reports are often not processed.

### **Dealing with LGBTIQ persons**

In recent weeks, church and political representatives have spoken negatively about the LGBTIQ community in the country. For example, a bishop and a local politician spoke about LGBTIQ persons "recruiting" children at schools and "pushing" them into homosexuality. The number of attacks on the rights of LGBTIQ persons recently increased from 1,527 (2020) to 1,826 (2021).

## Ukraine

### **Course of the war; high-ranking dismissals and resignations after corruption allegations**

After preceding night-time drone attacks, Russia carried out new missile attacks on Ukraine on 26.01.23. Air raid alerts were sounded throughout the country. Impacts were confirmed in Kiev, Odessa and Vinnytsia. Once again, Ukraine's energy infrastructure was affected. The Odessa Oblast was particularly affected, where emergency

shutdowns are expected until the end of January 2023, according to the energy company DTEK. Eleven people were killed, and 11 others were injured as a result of the attacks. Meanwhile, Russian forces in the Donbass continue their offensive in the directions of Liman, Bakhmut, Avdiivka, Novopavlivka, and especially in the direction of Vuhledar, where there were fierce attacks. However, the city is currently held by Ukrainian forces. In Kherson Oblast, three civilians were killed in Russian attacks carried out on 29.01.23, according to the regional military administration. In the Zaporizhzhya region, two people died as a result of a landmine explosion on 29.01.23, according to regional media, and a missile hit a residential building in the eastern Ukrainian city of Kharkiv, killing one civilian, according to reports in the media.

Over the past week, a number of high-ranking Ukrainian officials have been dismissed or have resigned following growing evidence of the existence of a corruption scheme involving food supplies to the Ukrainian armed forces. These include Deputy Defence Minister Vyacheslav Shapovalov, a deputy head of the presidential administration, three other deputy ministers, five heads of regional military administrations, five prosecutors and two heads of government agencies.

## Venezuela

### **Report by several UN agencies on food and nutrition security in Latin America**

According to a report (Regional Overview of Food and Nutrition Security in Latin America 2022) recently published by several UN agencies (WHO, FAO, UNICEF, IFAD and the WFP) on 18.01.23, the number of people suffering from hunger in Latin America and the Caribbean increased to 56.6 million people in 2021 (+30% compared to 2019), of whom 34.2 million alone lived in South America. The latter figure had almost doubled between 2015 and 2021. Venezuela has the highest malnutrition rate in South America at almost 23%, followed by Ecuador (15.4%) and Peru (almost 14%). Only in Haiti (over 47%) is the percentage even higher in the entire region. The percentage for Venezuela means that about 6.5 million people in the country suffered from hunger in 2021. This figure had reportedly increased by 18.4 percentage points between 2013-2015 and 2019-2021. In addition, Venezuela recorded the fifth highest prevalence of acute malnutrition among children under the age of five in the region, at 4.1%. Almost 40% of the total population in Latin America and the Caribbean was affected by food insecurity in 2021, with women often disproportionately more affected than men. According to the FAO, these developments in the world's most unequal region are due to, among other things, the significant impact of the pandemic, as well as strong inflation in the wake of the Ukraine war and the high cost of healthy food. It says the average daily cost in the region as a whole is USD 3.89, which is higher than in other regions of the world, meaning that 131 million people cannot afford a healthy diet.

### **First vote on new NGO control law**

On 24.01.23, the Vice-President of the ruling United Socialist Party (PSUV), Diosdado Cabello, introduced a draft law (Ley de fiscalización, regularización, actuación y financiamiento de las organizaciones no gubernamentales y afines) (Law of Supervision, Regularisation, Performance and Financing of Non-Governmental and Related Organisations) in parliament aimed at controlling the activities of NGOs, which was passed in a first vote. For final adoption, the law must be discussed article by article a second time before it can be finally adopted and enter into force through publication in the Official Gazette. Although the relevant document has not yet been officially published, a draft is circulating. This will reportedly introduce an accreditation obligation for NGOs as well as stronger regulation and disclosure of their funding. In addition, NGOs will reportedly no longer be allowed to carry out "political activities" or receive funding for them. However, this passage seems to be rather vaguely worded so that the interpretation of which activities fall within this scope will reportedly be up to the authorities. The law reportedly also prohibits CSOs from "promoting or allowing acts that threaten the national stability and national institution". NGOs that violate the new law could be sanctioned with fines of up to 200 Petro (about USD 12,000), among other penalties. Cabello stressed in the meeting that there was already a list of at least 62 politically active NGOs that were in the service of foreign governments, aiming to destabilise Venezuela. Some NGOs, in their criticism of the planned law, were already drawing comparisons with a corresponding Nicaraguan law, on the basis of which more than 3,000 NGOs have had their legal status revoked since its introduction and which is accompanied by similar rhetoric. A first similar Venezuelan bill (Ley de Cooperación Internacional) (Law governing International Cooperation) from 2022 has not yet been discussed and passed in plenary after considerable national and

international criticism. Numerous national and international NGOs criticise the current bill as a means of criminalising the work of NGOs and fear their criminal prosecution as well as the closure of corresponding organisations, which play an important role, particularly in alleviating the humanitarian crisis in the country.

## **Yemen**

### **UN: USD 4.3 billion for humanitarian aid**

On 18.01.23, the UN announced that it would need around USD 4.3 billion for humanitarian aid in Yemen in 2023. According to UN estimates, this amount could support 17.3 million people; the UN claims a total of 21.6 million people in Yemen (around two-thirds of the population) are dependent on humanitarian aid.

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