



Briefing Notes

Group 62 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

17 July 2023

Afghanistan

Persecution situation

According to reports on 13.07.23, Voice of America (VOA) reporter Latif Yaqoubi was arrested by the Taliban in south-eastern Ghazni province on 10.07.23. Reports on 12.07.23 said that the Taliban publicly flogged four people, including a woman, for "moral crimes" in Kabul's Paghman district. In Maidan Wardak province, two men and a woman were publicly flogged, according to reports on 10.07.23. A media report on 11.07.23 said that Aleem Jan, a former Mujahideen commander, was shot dead by unknown gunmen in Afghanistan's Kapisa province. On 12.07.23 it was reported that the intensification of the conflict between the Taliban and the National Resistance Front (NRF) forcibly displaced dozens of families from four villages in the Shotul district of the northern province of Panjshir. The Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) informed on 12.07.23 that the Taliban destroyed a refugee camp in Kabul, evicting an estimated 280 families from their settlements and killing two children during the evacuation.

Governance

On 13.07.23, the Taliban Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued an instruction to its employees inside and outside Afghanistan urging them to observe religious practices. The Taliban also issued an order to close down teacher training centres, according to a news report of 14.07.23. These centres had been established to improve teachers' skills and provide two-year education programmes in almost all provinces. The Taliban Ministry of Education said that the approximately 6,000 teachers and staff at the centres would be assigned to schools to teach. Apparently, this decision has shocked many teachers, as their livelihoods depend solely on the salaries earned at the training centres, especially in the provinces where the job market is much tighter than in the capital Kabul.

Colombia

Ceasefire with the ELN and current security situation

As agreed in the peace negotiations, the state security forces and the guerrilla group Ejército de Liberación Nacional (ELN) officially ceased aggressions against each other on 06.07.23, a comprehensive, mutual ceasefire is to come into effect on 03.08.23. In the run-up to the ceasefire, state security forces were attacked several times, presumably by the ELN, resulting in three dead police officers in Norte de Santander and the kidnapping of a member of the military and her children who were on their way to Arauca. The ELN also explicitly announced that it would continue to respond to attacks or threats against its units. When also taking the media reports on the security situation in various parts of the country into consideration, it can be assumed that the existing conflicts between the ELN and other armed groups or between various armed groups or criminal gangs will continue.

Already at the beginning of July 2023, mayor Yáñez of Cúcuta, the capital of the department Norte de Santander, had demanded more government support for the border region. According to a report by El País, more than 160

homicides by armed groups have been recorded there since the beginning of the year, more than 75 % of them in Cúcuta alone. In addition, the region has seen repeated cases of violent disappearances.

In the port city of Buenaventura, an important hub for drug trafficking, urban gangs such as Los Shottas and Los Espartanos repeatedly clash. The Pares Foundation had reported that these actors had observed a ceasefire at the end of last year, which was extended in April 2023 after a short interruption, however, since then the violence has peaked again, while at the same time other criminal groups are operating in this area as well.

In recent months there have been various reports of ongoing violence against the indigenous Awá in the Pacific department of Nariño related to the conflicts between various armed groups, which have also led to violent displacements.

On 13.07.23, the National Ombudsman's Office warned that this year to date at least 23,000 people, mostly Afro-Colombians and indigenous people in the department of Chocó, had been affected by the armed conflict between ELN and the paramilitary group Clan del Golfo. The region experienced enforced disappearances and homicides as well as forced recruitment of children and forced displacements. At least 14,000 people were temporarily trapped due to the violence, the Office said. In addition, crimes of extortion are widespread.

According to official reports, two soldiers were killed during armed clashes between state security forces and a suspected FARC dissident group in Caquetá on 16.07.23.

The reports also said that at least twelve people had been threatened in the course of the investigations into extra-legal killings committed by the military during the armed conflict in Dabeiba, Antioquia (so-called falsos positivos) by the Special Prosecutor's Office for Peace (JEP).

Gabon

Incumbent favourite in presidential election

On 09.07.23, President Ali Bongo announced his candidacy for a third term. According to media reports, he is considered a strong favourite in the elections scheduled for 26.08.23. On the same election day not only presidential elections, but also parliamentary and local elections will be held. Bongo's father had ruled for decades as head of state until Bongo succeeded him in 2009. The last presidential elections held in 2016 were overshadowed by allegations of rigging and violent protests. Critics of Bongo point out that large parts of the population hardly benefit from the considerable oil business revenues. They concede that Bongo has achieved some success in the areas of education and port development during his term in office. Women's rights have also been strengthened and a commission for the regulation of natural resources has been created.

The Gambia

Compensation for unlawful imprisonment

According to a media report, the High Court in Kanifing awarded a plaintiff suspected of robbery a monetary compensation of GMD 400,000 (approx. EUR 6024, as of 14.07.23) for unlawful detention and ordered his release. The plaintiff had been detained for two years without trial in Mile II Central Prison. The plaintiff claimed to have been a minor at the time of his arrest and to have been remanded in custody in May 2021 without being charged or accused of any crime.

When pronouncing the judgment, the sitting judge also said that unlawful detention in regular prisons was common without trials being held within a reasonable time. Cases of prolonged pre-trial detention are a problem and persistently high pre-trial detention figures in prisons are well known (cf. BN of 26.06.23 and 11.10.22).

Georgia

LGBTIQ rally cancelled after riots

On 08.07.23, riots broke out in the run-up to the planned closing event of this year's Pride Week for the rights of LGBTIQ people in Tbilisi, whereupon the rally was cancelled. According to media reports, several hundred homophobic protesters stormed the event site and - largely unchallenged by police - burnt rainbow flags and vandalised a stage and several marquees. According to official reports, no one was injured. The event's organising

team and Georgian President Zurabishvili accused the police of lacking the will to provide protection and of insufficiently enforcing the right to freedom of assembly. They held the government of Prime Minister Garibashvili partly responsible for the escalation, as he regularly speaks out against public LGBTIQ events. The Georgian Interior Ministry defended the actions of the police and said that the participants' protection could only be ensured by evacuating the event site in view of the open terrain.

Riots and sometimes violent attacks on LGBTIQ people and media representatives regularly occur during the annual Pride week in Tbilisi (cf. BN 12.07.21).

Ghana

Inflation at 42.5%

On 12.07.23, the Ghanaian statistics office reported a renewed slight increase in the inflation rate to 42.5 % for June 2023. After the highest inflation rate in Ghana in the last two decades of 54.1% had been recorded in December 2022, the figures had fallen slightly. The country is currently living its worst economic crisis in years. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) approved a three billion USD aid package after the country asked for help when street protests against the rising cost of living broke out in July 2022.

India

Monsoon rains and floods

On 13.07.23 the authorities stated that at least 100 people have died from flooding caused by persistent monsoon rains in several Indian states. Large parts of the capital Delhi, including the Red Fort, are under water after the Yamuna River burst its banks. This place received the highest quantity of rainfall in a day since the 1980s. The water level is slowly falling, but still remains three metres above the danger mark.

Iran

Announcement of renewed deployment of police patrols to control compliance with the dress code

According to media reports, a spokesperson for the police forces announced on 16.07.23 that from now on police units would resume checks in public spaces to ensure compliance with the Islamic dress code. The announcement allegedly said that at first admonitions and, if necessary, warnings will be issued for any violations in the future. In case of non-compliance with police orders, legal action would be taken and the accused would be brought before the judicial system. According to Iranian criminal law, violations of the headscarf requirement can result in fines and even two-month prison sentences. A new bill now before parliament for a vote, initially provides for warnings and, in the case of repeated violations, fines, community service, occupational bans and even prison sentences. In the past months of 2023, more and more women ignored the mandatory wearing of a headscarf, also as a sign of silent protest.

Under President Ebrahim Raisi, the public presence of the so-called morality police (Pers.: *gasht-e ershad*) had been stepped up since July 2022 (cf. BN of 11.07.22). In the course of nationwide protests after September 2022, some government representatives announced the end of this police unit and its patrols in December 2022 (cf. BN of 06.12.22).

Reports of the death of two prisoners in the province of West Azerbaijan

According to reports by Kurdish human rights organisations, two inmates of a detention centre in Orumiyeh (West Azerbaijan province) died in quick succession on 09.07. and 10.07.23. As the reports refer to unnamed sources and information from the deceased's family members, they are difficult to verify. One of the men is believed to be a member of a Kurdish opposition group. In contrast, foreign media reported that according to official information from the Mahabad prosecutor, the man had been in custody on fraud charges and had died of a serious illness. The second prisoner had been detained for unknown reasons, the report said. According to family members, both prisoners were hospitalised with injuries before they died.

Freedom of the press: criminal proceedings against newspaper editor

According to media reports of 11.07.23, criminal proceedings have been initiated against the editor-in-chief of the well-known Tehran newspaper Shargh. The journalist is accused of publishing unverified and untrue articles, including reports of violence against women. Several staff members of the medium have been summoned in this context. The newspaper is considered reformist because it also takes up comparatively critical issues related to current developments in the country. Recently, the arrest and indictment of two female reporters of the newspaper caused a stir. In September 2022 they had been the first to report the death of a 22-year-old Kurdish woman in police custody, which triggered a nationwide wave of protests (cf. BN of 19.09.22 and 05.06.23). According to a report by the organisation Reporters Without Borders (RSF) of 12.07.23, 21 journalists are currently in custody in Iran.

Prison sentences

Prominent rapper Tomaj Salehi was sentenced to more than six years in prison, the media reported on 10.07.23. His lawyer reportedly stated that a two-year ban on leaving the country and a two-year ban on working had also been imposed. The dissident musician had been arrested in October 2022 (cf. BN of 31.10.22). He was accused of inciting violence with his songs and via social media during the nationwide wave of protests. He had previously been in solitary confinement in Dastgerd prison in Isfahan (province of the same name) and had been transferred to the general section of the prison after the conviction.

According to a human rights organisation, on 11.07.23 a detained teacher and civil activist was sentenced to another two years and six months in prison in addition to an existing sentence of several years. The organisation referred to information provided by his lawyer saying that he was accused of insulting the revolutionary leader and of propaganda against the system. Allegedly, he had published several letters and audio messages from prison.

According to media reports on 12.07.23, a well-known political scientist was sentenced to one year in prison. He is accused of spreading untrue allegations and content, the report said. The scientist had repeatedly criticised the Iranian leadership in his publications. On the other hand, he himself seems to have been criticised by activists abroad because of his connections to government circles.

Poverty line and minimum wage

After the minimum wage in Iran was last raised by 21 % to the equivalent of about USD 150 per month in March 2023, various institutions including the scientific service of the Iranian parliament have now published various studies on the poverty line and the prevalence of relative poverty within Iran. The consensus is that at least 30 % of the population currently live below the poverty line. Over the last decade, Iran's poverty rate has thus roughly doubled, with an additional eleven million people now classified as poor. In a detailed disaggregated study, local poverty lines were defined, according to which the poverty line in Tehran would be about USD 600 per month, in other cities of Iran about USD 480 per month. Depending on commodity group, inflation was between 60 % and 100 % higher than last year. The WFP also found a nationwide decline in food security and the consumption of meat and higher-quality food. According to the available figures, even households with two incomes in the range of the minimum wage and without children are currently unable to live above the poverty line in urban Iran. Additional economic pressure is created by the fiscal constraints of the state, which is trying to improve its revenues by increasing various taxes.

Iraq / Iran

Killing of KDPI member

On 12.07.23, a member of the Kurdistan Democratic Party-Iran (KDPI) was found dead north of Erbil. The man had a gunshot wound in the head. The incident occurred one day after Iran threatened further use of military means if Iraq failed to sufficiently secure the border with Iran and disarm the Iranian Kurdish opposition groups based in the Autonomous Region of Kurdistan (KR-I).

The KDPI is an Iranian-Kurdish opposition party accused by the Iranian leadership of being involved in the protests against the Iranian government. It is classified as a terrorist group by Tehran. The KDPI holds Tehran responsible for the man's death. Already on 07.07.23 two members of the KDPI were killed in Sulaymaniyah/KR-I, presumably by a member of the Iranian armed forces (cf. BN of 10.07.23).

Iraq

Türkyie-PKK conflict

On 11.07.23, suspected Turkish fighter jets bombed the area of the Metina and Gara Mountains (Dohuk Province/Autonomous Region of Kurdistan, KR-I), reportedly no civilians were injured. Because of the ongoing conflict this is a restricted military area which civilians are not allowed to enter.

A day earlier, the Turkish military announced the death of two soldiers in armed clashes with the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) in KR-I.

Christian community

On 16.07.23, Louis Raphael Sako, the Baghdad-based Patriarch of the Chaldean Community of Iraq, announced that he will retire from Baghdad after the Iraqi President on 03.07.23 revoked a 2013 presidential decree recognising Sako as head of the Chaldean Church in Iraq and entitling him to administer the Chaldean endowment affairs.

President Rashid justified his decision by saying that presidential decrees can only be issued in relation to government employees, not religious personnel. The decision to revoke the decree came after Rashid had met with the leader of the Babylon Movement, a nominally Christian party and militia. Sako had repeatedly criticised the militia leader including for his links to Shiite militias loyal to Iran. Already on 13.07.23, Christians in Ainkawa, a town north of Erbil with a majority Christian population, protested against Rashid's decision, accusing him of acting under pressure from militias loyal to Iran and thus further undermining Iraq's Christian community.

Israel

Ongoing mass protests after approval of first draft law on the so-called judicial reform

On 11.07.23, the Israeli Knesset approved a bill after a first reading. In conjunction with other laws the bill is intended to limit the control function of the Supreme Court in Israel. The approval is an important step in the government's efforts to overhaul the judicial system. Two further readings are to be held at the end of July 2023 before the bill can enter into force. Critics fear that the bill's abolishment of "reasonableness", which has allowed the Supreme Court to play a more active role in controlling the government, could pave the way for arbitrary decisions, improper appointments and dismissals and in the end for corruption.

This principle recently enabled the Supreme Court to remove an interior minister appointed by Netanyahu on a corruption conviction. The weekly protests against the reform project, which have been going on for 28 weeks, gained new momentum after the Knesset session. Thousands of people participated across the country. Major roads were blocked and international air traffic at Ben Gurion airport was disrupted.

Lebanon

Tensions with Israel

Incidents continue to occur at the Israeli-Lebanese demarcation line.

On 12.07.23, three Hezbollah members were injured by Israeli fire in an incident near the village of Al-Bustan. According to Israeli sources, they had approached the border fence and tried to sabotage it.

On 15.07.23, Israeli security forces fired smoke grenades at the Lebanese MP Kassem Hachem of the Baath Party near the village of Ghajar in the vicinity of the disputed Shebaa Farms. Ghajar is currently a focal point of conflict. The village was annexed by Israel along with the Golan Heights, but the population later spread north in what was then a disputed area, which has been in Lebanese territory since the agreement of the "Blue Line" between Lebanon and Israel. Due to several security incidents, Israel has started to build a wall around the northern part of the village, which Lebanon considers an attempt to annex Lebanese territory.

Libya

Southern oil fields briefly closed to secure release of former finance minister

On 12.07.23, Faraj Boumtari, former Minister of Finance of the Government of National Accord (GNA), which operated from 2015 to 2021, was reportedly arrested at Mitiga airport in Tripoli by members of the Internal Security Agency (ISA) and held at an unknown location until 15.07.23. According to UN information, the ISA, whose branches operate under the influence of the authorities in the east or west of Libya, depending on their location, is responsible for the intimidation, arbitrary arrest and, in some cases, torture of numerous human rights defenders and persons active in civil society.

In order to achieve the release of Boumtaris, who is a member of the Az-Zuwaya tribe, protesters belonging to the same tribe, closed down several oil fields in the south of Libya for two days from 13.07.23. In the past, the closure of oil production facilities and other infrastructure installations has been regularly used to assert specific interests.

Body to regulate the sharing of revenues from the oil and gas sector

According to media reports, competing political actors on 06.07.23 agreed to form a High Finance Committee to address fundamental issues of transparency in the use of public funds and the equitable distribution of resources in the country.

The committee is composed of representatives of the Presidential Council, the House of Representatives (HoR), the High Council of State, the Government of National Unity (GNU), the Libyan Arab Armed Forces (LAAF), the Central Bank of Libya and the National Oil Corporation (NOC). In the run-up to the formation of the body, General Khalifa Haftar had spoken out in favour of an equitable distribution of revenues from the oil and gas sector and warned that he would enforce this by the end of August 2023, if necessary, by force of arms.

Malawi

Religious leaders in Malawi protest against same-sex marriage

According to press reports, thousands of Malawian men and women joined church-organised protests against the legalisation of same-sex relationships in Blantyre and other parts of the country on 13.07.23. According to media reports, both, followers of Christianity and of Islam, participated in the protests.

The nationwide protests come at a time when the Constitutional Court is hearing a case in which a Dutch citizen and a Malawian transgender person argue that Malawi's laws against homosexuality violate their fundamental rights, human dignity and privacy. Homosexuality is a criminal offence in Malawi, punishable by a maximum sentence of 14 years in prison.

Mali

Jihadists released

According to media reports, the Malian transitional government released at least two jihadists belonging to the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) group in early July 2023 as part of a prisoner swap. They are said to be Oumeya Ould Albakaye and Dadi Ould Cheghoub. Albakaye was considered a regional leader who had commanded the areas of Gourma in Mali and Oudalan in Burkina Faso. He is blamed for numerous attacks on civilians. He had been captured by French special forces in June 2022 and handed over to the Malian authorities.

Niger

Violence in the country's south-west

According to information from the Nigerien army, a convoy was attacked on 14.07.23. A police officer and four civilians were killed and 19 people were injured. The convoy was travelling on a road near the border with Burkina Faso.

According to the UN, almost 11,000 people have fled their villages in the south-west of the country since the beginning of July 2023. They are fleeing violence by suspected jihadist groups that have been attacking targets in the Tillabéri region in the tri-border area between Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger for years.

Nigeria

Benue State and Plateau State: Deaths in attacks on several localities

Armed assailants of the regional militia Sankera attacked the villages of Adogo and Akpuuna in Benue State on 07.07. and 08.07.23, killing at least 24 people. This was reported by the media. In addition, people were injured and houses were burnt down. Military personnel had taken action against the aggressors, according to the reports. Attacks with numerous fatalities have not been uncommon in Benue State recently (cf. BN 12.06.23 and 22.05.23). According to media reports, the Nigerian authorities had struck a peace pact with the Sankera militia in 2020, which had been known locally for crimes such as murders, kidnappings, robbery and cattle theft. After the military killed the leader of the Sankera militia, it took up arms again.

On 08.07. and 09.07.23, violent groups in Plateau State attacked several villages in Mangu Local Government Area (LGA) and Jos South LGA, as reported by the media. A total of about 20 people, including an infant, were reportedly killed and many people displaced. In response, the responsible governor imposed a 24-hour curfew in Mangu LGA. Inter-communal violence is also widespread in Plateau State, especially in Mangu LGA (cf. BN of 22.05.23 and 26.06.23). According to the Chief of Staff of the Nigerian Army (COAS), the security problems in Plateau are largely due to unresolved conflicts between pastoralists and farming communities.

According to a recent report by Beacon Consulting, a Nigerian-based security consultancy organisation, around 460 attacks were recorded across Nigeria in June 2023, resulting in more than 800 deaths and around 240 abductions. The incidents took place in 234 different LGAs and in the capital Abuja.

Enugu State: Police kill suspected separatists

Police forces in the south-eastern state of Enugu reportedly killed four armed men on 07.07.23. They were trying to enforce a controversial one-week sit-at-home order by a faction of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) independence movement, which has been banned in Nigeria since 2017. According to media reports, the police also confiscated weapons and ammunition during the incident in Enugu South Local Government Area (LGA). The underlying sit-at-home order was called by Simon Ekpa (cf. BN of 06.03.23), an IPOB leader. Sit-at-home orders are a kind of voluntary curfew (lockdown) of the population in certain regions of south-eastern Nigeria. Already in the past, IPOB has tried to exert pressure on the Nigerian government with such measures. One of the specific aims of such orders is to secure the release of IPOB leader Nnamdi Kanu, who has been in prison since the summer of 2021 (cf. BN of 07.11.22). Those who disregard sit-at-home orders risk reprisals.

State of emergency due to food shortage

President Bola Tinubu declared a state of emergency for food security on 13.07.23 to address rising food prices and shortages, according to media reports. In order to address food supply shortages, the government has designed immediate, medium and long-term interventions, he said. These range from the provision of fertilisers and cereals to the transfer of responsibility for food and water to the National Security Council and other measures. Poorer households would also receive financial benefits. According to media reports, the International Monetary Fund has also warned of rising food prices in Nigeria. Among the many causes also the consequences of flooding and high fertiliser costs were cited.

Pakistan

Numerous dead in two attacks in Balochistan province

On 13.07.23 media reported that up to twelve Pakistani Army soldiers were killed in two separate attacks in the Zhob and Sui areas of Balochistan. Reportedly, seven suspected insurgents who attacked the security forces were also killed. Also civilians were reportedly killed or injured in the attacks. A new group calling itself Tehreek Jihad Pakistan (TJP) claimed responsibility for the attack on the garrison in Zhob.

IMF approves rescue package to stabilise the economy

According to a media report on 12.07.23, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) has agreed to a USD 3 billion bailout package long sought by the Pakistani government. Pakistan is living an economic crisis and is in urgent need of financial support. A difficult external economic situation, devastating floods and policy missteps have led to high budget and balance of payments deficits and rising inflation.

Palestinian Territories / Israel

West Bank: Several dead and wounded in military operations

During a security check by Israeli security forces on 10.07.23, a Palestinian motorist threw a grenade at them and opened fire on other military personnel, the Israeli army reported. The attacker was then shot dead by the security forces.

On 16.07.23, a Palestinian assailant wounded three Israelis, including two girls, who were driving their car on a West Bank road when he opened fire on them from his moving vehicle. Israeli security forces later detained a suspect in Bethlehem and confiscated his car and a gun. Two other suspects were also reportedly detained.

West Bank: Journalist arrested

On 13.07.23, a Palestinian journalist was detained by the PA police after he had previously contradicted statements made by the Palestinian leadership on social media. The same journalist had been arrested by the Palestinian security authorities already several years ago after reporting on protests against the autonomous authorities. During his detention, he was allegedly beaten and ill-treated.

Peru

Health emergency declared due to Guillain-Barré syndrome

Due to an increase in the occurrence of the so-called Guillain-Barré syndrome, the Ministry of Health announced a 90-day health emergency. Since January 2023, more than 180 cases of the rare disease that affects the nervous system have been recorded, four people have died and about 30 people are still in hospital. All regions of the country were affected, the Ministry said. Such cases had spiked already in 2019.

Russian Federation

Extensive restriction of the rights of trans persons

On 14.07.23 the State Duma passed a law banning medical and legal gender reassignment. According to this law, surgical procedures and drug treatments such as hormone therapy aimed at changing a person's sexual characteristics may no longer be provided in Russia. Children with "congenital physiological anomalies" are exempted. For the first time since 1997, it will no longer be possible to apply for a change of gender in official identity documents after a previous operation or therapy. In addition, existing marriages in which at least one person has undergone gender reassignment will become invalid when the amendment comes into force. As a result, cohabiting couples will be threatened with the loss of the right to joint property, health information and refusal to testify, among other things. The law also prohibits trans persons from adopting a child and from assuming guardianship or trusteeship. According to legal advisers familiar with the matter, it remains to be seen whether, despite official assurances to the contrary, children adopted by trans people will be removed from their families even if the adoption has already taken place.

As a result of the extensive restriction of the rights of trans persons, doctors and human rights activists fear an increase in suicides and the emergence of a black market for gender reassignment procedures with the related risks for those affected. Most recently, the exclusion of LGBTIQ people, including trans people, was intensified when the scope of the ban on the "promotion of non-traditional sexual relations and preferences" had been extended in December 2022 (cf. BN of 06.12.22).

Senegal

Leading YAW figures in custody after indictment; crackdown on political opposition

The leader of the parliamentary opposition coalition Yewwi Askan Wi (YAW) and secretary general of the opposition party Patriotes africains du Sénégal pour le travail, l'éthique et la fraternité (PASTEF), Birame Souleye Diop, was charged with "acts endangering public peace" as well as insulting the president and remanded in custody on 11.07.23. The lawyer of the MP and ruling mayor of Thiès Nord passed on this information to the news agency Agence France-Presse. Diop was arrested on 05.07.23 for his controversial statement about President Macky Sall, for which he publicly apologised, and held in extended police custody (cf. BN of 10.07.23). After Bassirou Diomaye Faye, Diop is the second leading member of the PASTEF party of the opposition leader Ousmane Sonko, who received a prison sentence on charges of making public statements and remanded in custody (cf. BN of 03.07.23). In a statement of 12.07.23, YAW criticised the judiciary as being selective and instrumentalised against the political opposition of President Sall. YAW also deplored the high number of political prisoners and prisoners of conscience in Senegal. In the National Assembly's current legislative period, 14 YAW deputies have been subject to arbitrary arrests and detentions – including for participating in peaceful demonstrations or for expressing their opinions freely. In the case of Diop, YAW alleged a violation of Article 61 of the Constitution and the Rules of Procedure of the National Assembly for violating his parliamentary immunity and his status rights as an MP. Yaw called on the National Assembly to request the suspension of prosecution and pre-trial detention against Diop.

Furthermore, the prefect of Dakar banned a rally planned and announced by PASTEF in a stadium in a Dakar suburb for 15.07.23. The reasons given were threats to public order and Sonko's recent warnings of chaos. PASTEF wanted to announce Sonko as the party's official and, in its own words, still eligible presidential candidate. The ban on meetings was criticised in opposition circles and triggered peaceful protests in Dakar and elsewhere in the form of "pot concerts" in response to Sonko's call for protest.

On 16.07.23, the PASTEF communications officer, El Malick Ndiaye, who was already under judicial and electronic surveillance, was arrested and taken into police custody. He is accused of inciting violence in an audio message. Ndiaye denied the allegations and the authorship. Two YAW MPs spoke of fake audio recordings.

PASTEF member in poor health dies in custody

According to media reports, a member of the PASTEF youth organisation (JF) held in pre-trial detention died in Mbour prison on 07.07.23. The deceased had been remanded in custody only ten days before. The Senegalese authorities stated that the cause of death was severe hypoxia and no outside influence. The deceased had been arrested on 26.06.23 for participating in protests in Nguékokh at the end of May 2023. At the protest he had been injured in the leg by state security forces. The young man, who suffers from epilepsy, required treatment and his poor state of health has been verified by doctors. However, despite his lawyer's claims that he was unfit to be detained, he was taken into custody. According to JF, their member died in custody under questionable circumstances. The deceased had been denied adequate access to necessary medical care, had been seriously ill and had suffered a gunshot wound during said protest, JF said. According to media reports, his death triggered a hunger strike among prisoners in Mbour. The prisoners accuse the authorities of failing to provide assistance.

Two journalists are placed under judicial supervision

According to unanimous media reports, Serigne Saliou Guèye, editor of the private daily newspaper Yoor-Yoor, and journalist Pape Ndiaye of the private channel Walf TV were temporarily released and placed under judicial supervision. The measures of judicial supervision include a ban on leaving the country and a ban on commenting on the subject of the criminal proceedings. Guèye, who has been in pre-trial detention for a month, is charged with insulting a judge and other offences in an article about the Senegalese judiciary published in May 2023. Ndiaye, who has been in pre-trial detention since March 2023, questioned the independence of the judiciary in the then pending rape trial against Sonko and is being prosecuted for spreading fake news and other offences (cf. BN of 13.03.23).

Sierra Leone

Deteriorating nutritional and socio-economic conditions

The country director of the NGO Action Contre la Faim in Sierra Leone, Antoine Esteban, recently described food insecurity in the country as a concern that has steadily worsened over two years. At the end of January 2023, the UN World Food Programme, citing an August 2022 food security analysis, reported that 81 % of Sierra Leonean households were food and nutrition insecure. Fifteen per cent were significantly food insecure and relied on emergency humanitarian food assistance, he said. According to Esteban, half of the population faces inadequate food intake. It is a common observation that the poorest sections of the population regularly resort to negative coping mechanisms - including deliberately skipping meals or eating food harvested unripe. The country's food insecurity is further exacerbated by a significant decline in food production due to the increase in prices of agricultural inputs, conflicts between pastoralists and agricultural workers, and extreme weather conditions. Sierra Leone is among the West African countries most affected by climate change.

Meanwhile, 60 % of the population are living below the poverty line. Inflation is high and, according to the Sierra Leone Statistical Office, was around 44 % year-on-year in May 2023. Food prices have risen by more than 50 % in one year, Esteban said. According to an academic source, the country is heavily dependent on imports, also for basic foodstuffs, and is thus suffering from the higher world market prices. In August 2022, dozens of people were killed during protests against the sharp rise in the cost of living (cf. BN of 03.07.23).

Somalia

Attacks in Buloburde and Mogadishu

Al-Shabaab detonated an improvised explosive device (IED) on a road near Buloburde (Hiraan region) killing eight civilians, all members of one family, on 09.07.23.

On 14.07.23, at least five people, including members of the armed forces and civilians, were killed in an al-Shabaab attack on a checkpoint near the district headquarters of Deyniile in Mogadishu, according to local reports. Others were injured. Al-Shabaab reportedly took control of the checkpoint after a firefight. The attack occurred just hours after al-Shabaab allegedly assassinated the Commissioner for Administration and Finance in Marka district in a restaurant in Mogadishu.

On 14.07.23, a suicide attack by al-Shabaab targeted the Ministry of Defence headquarters in the Wadag district of Mogadishu. Several people were killed in the attack, including a former government official.

Blockade of goods in Baidoa

According to reports, al-Shabaab has been blocking the supply of essential goods, including food and fuel, to the town of Baidoa (Bay region) since 10.07.23. The blockade has reportedly led to a shortage of the goods and caused prices to rise. Some residents are said to have left the town as a result. The blockade is said to be related to the detention by the police of south-west Somalia of people who are believed to have travelled to areas controlled by al-Shabaab. The regional authorities announced their intention to launch an operation to open the blocked roads.

Senior official flees after corruption allegations

Abdinasir Hussein, Director of Administration and Finance in the Somali Federal Government's Ministry of Information, reportedly fled the country while corruption investigations were ongoing. The allegations of corruption surfaced when reports revealed that money amounting to several million US dollars was missing from the ministry's accounts. Just recently, on 06.07.23, Attorney General Suleiman Mohamud had announced the state officials linked to corruption allegations (cf. BN of 10.07.23).

WHO: Attack on health facility in Las Anod (Somaliland)

According to WHO, dozens of people, including health workers and patients, were killed and injured in an attack on a health facility in Las Anod on 11.07.23. Two ambulances were destroyed as well. WHO condemned the attack and called on all parties to the conflict to respect the neutrality of health care. Las Anod experienced repeated attacks on health facilities during the violent clashes that have been ongoing since the beginning of 2023 (cf. BN of 06.03. and 24.04.23).

Sudan

General situation and ongoing fighting

In a statement on the situation in Darfur to the UN Security Council on 13.07.23, the International Criminal Court (ICC) announced the initiation of investigations into atrocities committed against the civilian population. The focus is on crimes against children as well as sexual and gender-based violence.

On 14.07.23, several media reported the discovery of a mass grave near the capital of West Darfur, El Geneina. According to the report, 87 people were buried there, many of them members of the Masalit ethnic group. Eyewitnesses held the RSF and its allied militias responsible for the deaths. Survivors were forced to bury the victims in the mass grave found - a dignified burial in a cemetery was deliberately denied. The victims are said to have been killed between 13.06 and 21.06.23 and buried one by one.

After the UN had already warned that the conflict might spread to the entire region of East Africa (cf. BN of 10.07.23), this view was also shared by an expert on this region from the London think tank Chatham House. Based on a corresponding interview, the media reported that the fiercest fighting continues to take place in the region in and around Khartoum as well as in Darfur. According to the report, the fighting in Darfur cannot be resolved quickly due to its ethnic dimension and the cyclical pattern of violence. An attempt by the Intergovernmental Authority on Development in East Africa (IGAD) to mediate on 10.07.23 also failed due to the resistance of the SAF and RSF. The RSF sent a representative to the IGAD meeting in Addis Ababa, while the SAF refrained from any form of participation. According to the Chatham House analyst, neither the SAF nor the RSF is interested in laying down their arms. Both are seeking a strategic military victory over the other.

Another attempt to find a solution to the ongoing conflict between the SAF and the RSF was made at a summit meeting in Cairo on 13.07.23 where Sudan's neighbouring states Libya, Eritrea, Chad, the Central African Republic, Ethiopia and South Sudan called on both parties to the conflict to end the fighting and to engage in comprehensive dialogue without external interference. In addition to emphasising Sudan's sovereignty and integrity and the view that the conflict is an exclusively internal affair, a ministerial mechanism is to be set up in the future to confer in Chad on possible solutions to the conflict. No time schedule has been communicated, though.

Meanwhile, fighting is as fierce as ever. On 14.07.23, the Shaabi market in Omdurman was shelled by SAF artillery, killing at least 30 people. On 16.07.23, a mosque was hit during an air strike in Bahri town, killing a family of nine. According to the UN, more than three million people, almost 50 % of Khartoum's population, have left the capital so far. Most of the people who are still in the capital are unable to flee the fighting for financial or health reasons.

Syria

North-West: Temporary halt to UN cross-border aid deliveries

With the expiry of the UN mandate for cross-border aid deliveries for north-western Syria via Türkiye on 10.07.23, aid deliveries via the affected Bab al-Hawa border crossing were initially suspended. An extension of the mandate had failed in the UN Security Council.

In view of the significantly increased demand after the earthquake, the Syrian government had allowed the temporary opening of two other border crossings to Türkiye in addition to Bab al-Hawa in February 2023. The UN can still use those crossings until 13.08.23. Nevertheless, 85% of the aid had been supplied via the Bab al-Hawa border crossing, because of its favourable geographical location.

Already in the past, the Russian government attempted to advocate aid deliveries from areas under government control in the UN Security Council, which would give the Syrian government significantly more control over access of aid to opposition areas. After no agreement could initially be achieved in the UN Security Council, the Syrian government held out the prospect of voluntary permission to extend cross-border aid for a period of six months. However, various conditions would have to be met and any aid delivery would have to be made in full "cooperation and coordination with the Syrian government", it said. The head of UN OCHA described the demands as unacceptable, but an official decision is still pending.

A total of about 4.5 million people are living in the affected areas of north-western Syria, including 2.9 million internally displaced people and two million people in refugee shelters. A large part of the people living there are dependent on aid supplies.

Türkiye / Syria

Forced deportations to Syria

On 15.07.23 it was reported that the Turkish authorities deported at least 160 Syrian refugees from their territory to the Syrian area of Tel Abyad in the outskirts of Raqqa, which are controlled by the Turkish military. According to media reports, the refugees were brought to the area via the Al-Terwaziyah line under the pretext of "voluntary return"; according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR), this raises concerns about a possible demographic change in the region. The deportations are said to have been carried out with the use of force. Some of the deportees are said to face immediate arrest by Turkish-backed groups upon arrival in northern Syria. The reasons for this are unknown, the reports said. In addition, SOHR reported that on 14.07.23 that Turkish authorities deported at least 45 Syrian refugees via the al-Hamam border crossing in the Jindires region to the area of the Turkish military offensive "Operation Olive Branch". Some of the deportees reportedly hold Turkish identity cards (Kimlik).

Tunisia

Political dissidents released five months after arrest

On 13.07.23, according to media reports, a court released Chaïma Issa and Lazhar Akremi, who had been arrested in February 2023 along with numerous other political opposition figures for allegedly conspiring against state security. The politician Chaïma Issa is a member of the opposition alliance National Salvation Front (Front de Salut National). The lawyer Lazhar Akremi served as a minister after the Tunisian revolution in 2011 and is considered a prominent critic of incumbent president Kaïs Saïed.

Uganda

Ongoing reports of hostility towards LGBTIQ persons

According to a report, at least nine people have been charged under the new "Anti-Homosexuality Act", no further information could be obtained so far. The report also says that threats of violence and extortion of LGBTIQ people had soared since the law entered into force; this was mostly in the form of psychological and online abuse, including threats to disclose the identity of LGBTIQ people. Those affected are mainly LGBTIQ people engaged in sex work and LGBTIQ-related organisations. In the current situation many of those affected try to hide their sexual identity and orientation or their workplace, according to the report.

Ukraine

Crimea: Drone attacks and explosion at bridge

According to Russian reports, a major Ukrainian drone attack on Sevastopol, the port of the Russian Black Sea Fleet in Crimea, was fully repelled on 16.07.23. Ukrainian drone attacks on the annexed peninsula are said to be recurrent. On the morning of 17.07.23, it was reported that traffic on the Crimean Bridge, which connects the Russian mainland to the annexed peninsula via the Kerch Strait, was suspended after an explosion at a pier. Two people died when their car was hit, reports said. Already on 08.10.22 a lorry had exploded on the Crimean bridge (cf. BN of 10.10.22). According to an agency report, Crimea continues to be the destination of numerous holidaymakers from the Russian Federation.

Other developments of the war effort

A Russian air strike that hit a humanitarian distribution centre set up in a school building in Orikhiv (Zaporizhzhya oblast) killed seven people on 10.07.23. According to Ukrainian sources, eleven people were injured. A guided missile was used in the attack.

According to media reports, Russian fire repeatedly targeted the Kharkiv region, the region and city of Kiev as well as Kherson recently. Residential areas were hit and several civilians died in the latter city. More than 20 people were injured by missile fire in the city of Zaporizhzhya and its surrounding area.

According to Ukrainian sources, direct clashes between the two sides are ongoing around Bakhmut, Avdiivka and Maryinka (all in Donetsk oblast). In the latter two towns, Ukraine is on the defensive, according to Deputy Defence Minister Hanna Malyar. Ukraine claimed minor territorial gains in the Zaporizhzhya region towards Berdyansk. President Volodymyr Zelensky warned against excessive expectations of the ongoing counter-offensive.

According to the US newspaper Washington Post, Commander-in-Chief Valerii Zaluzhnyi in the meantime confirmed that the army was attacking targets on Russian territory. In view of the conditional delivery of Western weapons systems, it is using its own weapons for this purpose. According to Russian sources, Ukraine recently shelled the town of Shebekino near the border.

Abbot of the Kiev cave monastery in custody; Christmas on 25 December

According to a media report of 14.07.23, the abbot of the Kiev cave monastery, Pavlo, which still belongs to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Ukrainian 'ka pravoslavna cerkva; UPC), was taken into custody. The detention will initially last until 14.09.23, according to the report. Since the beginning of the Russian invasion the authorities have repeatedly taken action against the UPC (cf. BN of 12.12.22, 20.03.23 and 15.05.23).

On 14.07.23, the parliament passed a law introduced by President Zelensky, which aims to "break away from Russian heritage", it is reported. In the future, Orthodox Christmas, which has been celebrated mostly on 7 January in Ukraine, will be celebrated on 25 December. Since 2017, 25 December has also been a public holiday. Until now, the UPC has celebrated its holidays according to the Julian calendar, which is 13 days later than the Gregorian calendar used today.

Venezuela

OVV Zulia, Lara and Sucre warn of increase in extortion crimes

According to the regional units of the Venezuelan Violence Observatory (Observatorio Venezolano de Violencia, OVV) in Zulia, Lara and Sucre, extortion crimes are on the rise in these states. In 2022, supermarkets and so-called bodegones were particularly affected by such offences in Zulia. Along with drug trafficking, extortion was one of the most important sources of income for armed groups, and the demands for money were often made in USD, OVV said. The groups mostly operated by means of written and telephone threats, sometimes cars were set on fire, houses and shops were shot at and there were kidnappings or individual homicides in case of non-payment. In Lara, the regional OVV also criticised the involvement of members of different units of the state security forces in such crimes. While the extortion of cattle farmers in Zulia continues, people in the fishing sector are often affected in Sucre, OVV said.

EU election observers not admitted to presidential election 2024

After the European Parliament adopted a resolution on 13.07.23 denouncing the exclusion of several opposition politicians by means of a ban on holding public office, the President of the Venezuelan Parliament, Jorge Rodríguez, announced that no EU election observers would be admitted for the 2024 presidential elections.

Yemen

Economic situation

The UN Special Envoy for Yemen, Hans Grundberg, addressed the UN Security Council on the deteriorating economic situation in Yemen on 10.07.23.

The currency in the areas under the control of the internationally recognised government has lost much of its value and roadblocks have more than doubled transport costs, he reported. A large part of the Yemeni population is dependent on humanitarian aid, which is drastically underfunded.

During the ceasefire from April to October 2022, food insecurity and malnutrition briefly declined, but the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) predicts that food insecurity will rise again in the second half of 2023 due to food and fuel price increases and underfunding of aid programmes.

