



Briefing Notes

Group 62 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

6 February 2023

Afghanistan

Security situation

Two civilians were injured in a bomb explosion in Kabul on 04.02.23. There was no immediate claim of responsibility for the attack. After a bomb attack was carried on a mosque on the premises of a police headquarters in the Pakistani city of Peshawar on 30.01.23 in which approx. 84 people (almost all of whom were police officers) were killed, the Pakistani government asked the Afghan Taliban to assist with the investigation. The attack was allegedly planned by the Pakistani Taliban from Afghan soil. Officially, however, no one has claimed responsibility for the attack.

Persecution events and government leadership

According to media reports, a well-known university lecturer was arrested by the Taliban on 03.02.23 for indulging in provocative actions. He had publicly spoken out against the ban on women's university education. On 02.02.23, another university lecturer was detained by the Taliban in Kabul without statement of reasons. On the same day, 16 convicts were publicly flogged by the Taliban in Helmand province. According to reports issued on 03.02.23, the Taliban have banned marriages between Shia and Sunni practitioners in the Nusay district of Badakhshan province. According to a report issued by journalists of the Afghan press medium Hasht-e Subh living in exile on 31.01.23, the Taliban vandalised a painted image of former Hazara leader Abdul Ali Mazari in western Kabul. Saudi Arabia evacuated its embassy in Afghanistan on 06.02.23, possibly because its female employees had been prohibited by the Taliban from working.

Benin

UN: human rights situation continues to improve

The United Nations Human Rights Council assessed the development of the human rights situation in Benin as positive at a meeting held on 26.01.23. According to media reports, it commended in particular the progress made in the areas of economic, social and cultural rights since the last review in 2017. Outstanding examples of this progress were the promotion of women's access to elected office and the abolition of the death penalty, which has been enshrined in the constitution since 2019. The last 14 death sentences have reportedly been commuted to life imprisonment. Another positive development can be seen in the Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) 2022 published by Transparency International on 31.01.23. According to this index, Benin improved its ranking by one point to 43 out of a maximum of 100 possible points compared to the CPI published the previous year. In the 2021 CPI ranking, Benin had ranked 78th together with Bahrain, Bulgaria and Burkina Faso. In the 2022 ranking, Benin ranked 72nd out of 180 countries, together with Bulgaria, Ghana, Senegal and South Africa.

Colombia

Protests by the Wayúu

The Wayúu indigenous community has been protesting in the north of the country since 23.01.23 in order to draw the attention of the public and President Gustavo Petro in particular to their difficult situation. According to media reports, hundreds of protesters blocked the border crossing with Venezuela and several main roads in the administrative region of La Guajira on 24.01.23. Hundreds of thousands of Wayúu (also known as Wayú, Wayu, Guajiro, Wahiro) live in this region in the far north-east. The protests were triggered by deficits in the areas of food and drinking water supply, housing, education and energy, among others. According to media reports, the situation has deteriorated further in recent times.

Côte d'Ivoire

Case involving the arrest of army personnel in Mali: activist released from pre-trial detention

The opposition activist and president of the NGO Alternative citoyenne ivoirienne (ACI), Pulchérie Gbalet, was released from pre-trial detention on 03.02.23, having been held since 22.08.22. She was arrested on 29.08.22 for criticising the government's actions in the case involving the arrest of 49 Ivorian soldiers in Mali (cf. BN of 29.08.22). In the meantime, the latter have been sentenced in Mali, but have been allowed to return to Côte d'Ivoire (cf. BN of 02.01.23 and 09.01.23). According to recent media reports, Gbalet's legal representatives had to file a petition for her provisional release eight times before it was granted. The conditions of the release are to be determined by an investigating judge in the next few days. Gbalet had spent eight months in pre-trial detention between August 2020 and April 2021. She had protested against the ultimately successful candidacy of President Alassane Ouattara for a third term in office in the election held on 31.10.20 and had called for peaceful protests.

Ethiopia

Attack on a church in Oromia

According to reports, at least two people were killed, and several others were wounded in attacks carried out on an Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo church in Shashamene on 04.02.23. The violence erupted against a backdrop of tensions in the ancient Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church after bishops had created their own synod in Oromia to discuss discrimination within the church, among other things. The religious leader of the Tewahedo Church, Abune Mathias, declared the breakaway synod illegal and excommunicated the bishops involved. Representatives of the church assume that government security forces were involved in the attacks.

Eswatini

Unrest following the murder of human rights activist

On 21.01.23, the human rights activist Thulani Maseko was killed by unknown gunmen at his home in Luyengo, Mbabane. Maseko had been campaigning for years for the reform of the monarchy. Eswatini has seen decades of unrest and protests due to the leadership of King Mswati III, who has ruled the country as an absolute monarch since 1986. Amnesty International has expressed concern about the safety of human rights activists and government critics. Representatives of the democracy movement assume that Maseko was deliberately killed. However, the government has denied these accusations. As far back as 2021, numerous people were killed in anti-government protests, which were violently suppressed by security forces.

The Gambia

Eastern Gambia: investigation into genital mutilation

According to a press release, the NGO Gambia Committee against Traditional Practices (GAMCOTRAP) uncovered several cases of genital mutilation that were either about to happen or had already been carried out, on a total of

eight children between four months and 12 months of age in the village of Bakadagi-Mandika in the Niani district of the eastern Central River Region (CRR). No information was provided on the gender or ethnicity of the children. GAMCOTRAP learned about the incidents undertaken at a traditional circumciser's property when it received a tip-off from a local community member who reported the genital mutilations, which are illegal in The Gambia, to the police authority in Kuntaur. The police investigation is said to be closely coordinated with the state child protection unit as well as GAMCOTRAP. Three circumcised children were taken to hospital for medical treatment and crime detection. The suspect, who is the defendant in the proceedings, had also carried out the genital mutilations in violation of an oath she had taken in 2013 in spite of the fact that she had been given a bakery as an alternative means of a livelihood and source of income in exchange for ceasing work as a circumciser. Before these cases came to light, several dozen communities in CRR, inter alia in Niani district, including traditional circumcisers based there, had announced that they would voluntarily abandon the practice of circumcision (cf. BN of 30.01.23). While criminal investigations and prosecutions for FGM have attracted public attention in the past, there have been no reports of criminal convictions for FGM to date, according to a largely unanimous body of information.

Guinea

Another FNDC leader detained

Amnesty International (ai) and the Fédération internationale pour les droits humains (FIDH) (International Federation for Human Rights) announced the arrest of Mamadou Billo Bah on 21.01.13. According to FIDH, Bah, who had just left a meeting with citizens in the Tombolia neighbourhood of the capital Conakry, was arbitrarily arrested by heavily armed, masked security force personnel. He was then detained for two days without any contact with his family or lawyers, and was denied hospital treatment for injuries he sustained during the arrest. On 24.01.23, an investigating judge issued an arrest warrant for Bah who is the mobilisation coordinator of the Front National pour la Défense de la Constitution (FNDC) (National Front for the Defence of the Constitution), a civil society and political alliance banned by the ruling junta (cf. BN of 15.08.22). According to ai and FIDH, he is accused of criminal participation in a prohibited assembly, aiding and abetting the destruction of private and public property, intentional assault, arson and looting.

Similar accusations have also been made against the FNDC leaders Oumar Sylla ("Foniké Menguè") and Ibrahima Diallo, who have been in detention since the end of July/beginning of August 2022 (cf. BN of 08.08.22). Together with Foniké Menguè and another FNDC member, Bah was detained for three days back in July 2022 (cf. BN of 11.07.22). Like Foniké Menguè and Diallo, Bah also holds an important position in the Guinean offshoot of the Tournons La Page (TLP) movement, according to FIDH. TLP says it unites civil society actors from ten francophone countries in sub-Saharan Africa who are committed to the principle of democratic alteration.

India

Forced displacement of Muslim families

In the northern Indian town of Haldwani, some 4,000 families have been facing homelessness since December 2022, after the Uttarakhand State High Court ordered the eviction of land claimed by the Indian Railways. The Supreme Court temporarily halted the eviction on the grounds that the authorities must first submit a resettlement and rehabilitation plan.

In the state of Assam, thousands of Muslim families have been facing forced expulsion since 2021. The Miya Muslim community, whose ancestors settled in Assam, then part of British India and now part of Bangladesh, from East Bengal many generations ago, has been hardest hit by forced displacement. Extremist Hindu groups refer to members of this community as illegal immigrants.

Indian Muslims have a higher poverty rate as well as a lower literacy rate than the national average and have even fewer social advancement opportunities than members of the Hindu castes and tribes that have traditionally been discriminated against.

Iran

Sunni clerics arrested

According to foreign media reports, a total of four Sunni clerics have been arrested in the provinces of Kordestan, Sistan and Baluchistan. During Friday prayers, local clerics had publicly criticised the violent crackdown the government has unleashed on protesters since the end of September 2022, among other things. According to reports by human rights organisations, the violent crackdown on protesters in several cities in both provinces has resulted in a disproportionately high number of deaths.

Online activities: convictions based on dance video

According to media reports, a couple who are well known as social media influencers have each been sentenced to five years in prison for posting a video of themselves dancing next to Tehran's Azadi Square (Freedom Square). They have also been barred from social media and have been prohibited from leaving the country for two years after they complete their prison sentences. A bill has recently been tabled by parliament that intends to criminalise "unprofessional comments" made by influential personalities on social media. The bill specifically targets prominent online activists with a high reach. The proposed law will allegedly protect national security and make provision for prison sentences of up to fifteen years as well as fines.

Announcement of pardons and alternative sentences for arrested protestors

Referring to a state news agency, it was reported on 05.02.23 that several thousand prisoners are to be pardoned on the occasion of the anniversary of the 1979 revolution. According to the report, the pardons will include reductions in prison sentences and amnesties at the suggestion of the head of the judiciary, Gholam-Hossein Mohseni-Eje'i. This will also apply to demonstrators imprisoned during the recent wave of protests. State media offered a list of caveats over the order as well, meaning that those with ties abroad or facing internationally criticised espionage charges will not be eligible. Prisoners convicted of murder, damage to or arson of government or military installations will not be eligible for a pardon either.

Meanwhile, according to a state news agency, some 50 people arrested during the recent protests in the northern province of Semnan have been given alternative sentences instead of jail time. These included sentences requiring the posting of "appropriate content" on social media, participation in media literacy training and the wearing of electronic ankle tags. In addition, some sentences have reportedly been suspended. The alternative sentences were given to people who had expressed remorse, had not damaged property and whose actions were considered minor compared to others who had been arrested during the protests.

Iraq

Fire at IDP camp

A major fire broke out at the Chamshko IDP camp in Dohuk on 05.02.23 in which two children died. The camp houses around 23,000 mainly Yazidi refugees. The conditions there are conducive to large fires. Most of the regions of origin the refugees at the camp have not yet been determined or restored to a degree that allows them access to basic services. In addition, the security situation in many areas housing mainly Yazidi remains very fragile.

Murder of YouTuber

The YouTuber Tiba al-Ali was strangled most probably by her father in Diwaniyya province on 31.01.23, sparking outrage in the media. Al-Ali had been living away from her family in Türkiye for six years. She had asked the police for help several times beforehand, but they had merely tried to mediate between her and her family. Al-Ali had recorded telephone conversations with her father, which she said were to be made public in the event of her death. These show that she was repeatedly sexually abused by her older brother and that the family was trying to keep this a secret. The police seem to have been aware of this. She had therefore fled to Türkiye as a teenager and had established herself there with a notable social media presence, among other things.

Her murder sparked widespread condemnation from various authorities and many politicians. After the phone recordings were published, several dozen people, mostly women, took to the streets in front of the parliament

demanding the abolition of Article 409 of the Criminal Code, which provides for significantly reduced sentences in cases of "honour killings".

Drone strike on suspected AQAP members

Three suspected members of Yemen's al-Qaeda (AQAP) were killed in a drone strike carried out in Marib governorate on 30.01.23. According to Yemeni officials, the drones involved were U.S. drones. The U.S. has been carrying out drone strikes against al-Qaeda in Yemen since 2002, although the frequency of drone strikes has declined sharply in recent years.

Kenya

Formal recognition of Pemba as an ethnic group

According to local press reports, Kenyan President William Ruto, in a proclamation dated 30.01.23, directed all government institutions and agencies in the country to formally recognise the Pemba community as an ethnic group. Articles 11 and 44 of the Kenyan Constitution enshrine the government's duty to promote and protect Kenya's diverse heritage. The members of the Pemba were previously considered to be stateless. Through government recognition, they will be issued with Kenyan identification documents in future. The Pemba ethnic group lives in parts of Kwale, Mombasa and Kilifi counties.

Kuwait

Protection for Filipino workers

The government of the Philippines has tightened the rules for the deployment of workers to Kuwait after a Filipina domestic worker was murdered in January 2023. This will mainly affect recruitment agencies operating in the Philippines that offer jobs in Kuwait. The domestic worker who was pregnant was allegedly killed by her employer's son. According to reports, more than 100 Filipino domestic workers have left Kuwait since the murder was reported; more than 400 have sought shelter at an emergency facility at the Philippine Embassy in recent weeks. Violence against foreign domestic workers is a regular occurrence in Kuwait, where several domestic workers have been murdered.

Lebanon

Economic situation

For the first time since 1997, the official exchange rate of the Lebanese lira was adjusted on 02.02.23 and is now 1:15,000 (previously: 1:1,507). However, this rate is only being maintained by the Central Bank for a very limited group of people and some goods transactions. In addition to the widespread Sayrafa rate of 1:42,000 used to pay for various essential goods such as many medicines, the black market rate of 1:64,000 is mainly used in everyday life. Since most Lebanese remain unable to access their savings in foreign currency, the daily impact is likely to be minimal.

Liberia

Further deterioration in the Corruption Perceptions Index

Liberia is one of the countries that still needs to make considerable progress in the fight against corruption. According to the Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) 2022 published by the NGO Transparency International on 31.01.23, Liberia has dropped from 136th position to 142nd out of 180 countries compared to the CPI of the previous year. According to media reports, the country is one of the countries portraying a particularly worrying development in terms of corruption. Liberia ranked 75th back in 2012.

Mali

High-ranking UN employee expelled

The Malian military government announced on 05.02.23 that the Director of the Human Rights Department of the United Nations mission MINUSMA, Guillaume Ngefa-Atondoko Andali, has been declared a persona non grata and has been asked to leave the country within 48 hours. The government is accusing him of engaging in "destabilising and subversive actions". According to a UN official, the decision by the Malian military government is regretted, but the mandate of the UN mission MINUSMA is to be continued.

Morocco

Protests against the resumption of diplomatic relations with Israel

On 01.02.23, protests took place in front of the parliament building in Rabat with protestors showing their support for Palestine and protesting against the normalisation of diplomatic relations between Morocco and Israel. They fear they might lose their national sovereignty and have called Israel a colonialist state.

On 10.12.20, Morocco resumed diplomatic relations with Israel after a 20-year hiatus. Protest rallies also took place in Berkane, Oujda, Meknes, Casablanca, Khouribga, El Jadida, Beni Mellal, Tangier, Errachidia, Agadir, Taza, Safi and Mohammedia.

Nigeria

South-east: another attack against the Electoral Commission office

Unknown assailants destroyed at least 700 ballot boxes and over 200 polling booths in an attack carried out on an Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) office in Ojoto, south-eastern Anambra State on 01.02.23. This was reported in the media citing police and electoral authority sources. According to police sources, a police station and a residential building were also attacked during the incident. One person was shot dead and another suffered gunshot wounds. The incident occurred less than a month before the upcoming general elections (cf. BN of 23.01.23), in which, among other things, the country's next President will be elected. According to a media report, over 50 attacks on INEC facilities have been reported in 15 states since 2019.

Northern Nigeria: armed gang kills over 40 members of a vigilante group

At least 41 people were killed in a clash that erupted between a local vigilante group and members of an unidentified armed group in a forest in the northern state of Katsina on 01.02.23. According to authorities, the vigilante group is one of the local volunteer groups known as Yankasai who fight against criminal groups in the region. In the above-mentioned incident, the vigilantes were searching for stolen cattle. According to media reports, the members, who were drawn from eleven different localities, were ambushed on this occasion.

North-east: military strike against Boko Haram

Troops involved in Operation Hadin Kai, carried out in collaboration with the Civilian Joint Task Force (believed to belong to Boko Haram, including key leader Abu Illiya, in Borno State, according to media reports issued on 29.01.23. Vehicles belonging to the Islamists were also destroyed in the military operation carried out in Konduga Local Government Area (LGA). Success stories of this kind are not uncommon (cf. BN of 30.01.23).

North Macedonia

Increasing tensions between the two countries following attack on ethnic Bulgarian

According to media reports, the tensions between Northern Macedonia and Bulgaria (cf. BN of 31.10.22 and 28.11.22), which have been simmering since autumn 2022, have increased further since the ethnic Bulgarian Hristian Pendikov was violently attacked in the Northern Macedonian town of Ohrid on 19.01.23. Pendikov, an employee of a Bulgarian cultural association in Ohrid, which is rejected by parts of the Macedonian population because of its provocative name (cf. BN of 31.10.22 and 28.11.22), was beaten up by a group of Macedonian nationals. The

Bulgarian government promptly recalled its ambassador to Skopje and vehemently criticised an alleged "anti-Bulgarian campaign" in the neighbouring country. According to a press release issued by the North Macedonian Foreign Minister Bujar Osmani on 26.01.23, the entire state leadership has condemned the incident and the alleged perpetrator is already in custody. On 30.01.23, the Interior Ministers of both countries met in Skopje to reduce tensions and discuss preventive measures to prevent further violence. On 02.02.23, the Bulgarian parliament adopted a declaration warning that the increasing escalation could possibly derail Northern Macedonia's EU accession process.

Pakistan

Suicide bombing in Peshawar

Around 100 persons were killed and at least 200 were wounded in a suicide attack carried out at a mosque in Peshawar (Khyber Pakhtunkhwa) on 30.01.23. According to police sources, most of the victims were security personnel. The suicide bomber blew himself up during afternoon prayers in close proximity to the policemen standing in a line of worshipers. The explosion brought down the roof of the mosque. The 37-year-old perpetrator was from Mohmand Agency, north of Peshawar. Initially, it was said that the suicide bomber had been standing among the police before the explosion and may have already entered the mosque in a police vehicle. At a press conference held on 02.02.23, a police spokesperson stated that the suicide bomber had entered the area around the mosque, which was guarded by security forces, on a motorbike. However, the police officers deployed at the entrance to the compound did not check the assassin because he was wearing a police uniform, a mask and a helmet. The headquarters of various police units are located near the site of the attack. The Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) initially claimed responsibility for the attack which was said to have been carried out in retaliation for Khalid Khorasani, one of the founding members of the TTP, who was killed in August 2022. Later, however, a spokesperson for the TTP denied any involvement, saying that mosques are generally not targeted by the TTP. Police suspect that the radical Islamic Jamaat-ul-Ahrar (JuA), a splinter group of the TTP, is behind the attack.

Organisational and operational revival of the TTP

In recent years, the TTP has for the most part limited itself to self-defence. Since the Taliban seized power in Afghanistan in August 2021, the TTP has felt increasingly emboldened to carry out attacks on Pakistani security forces itself. Since the unilateral termination of the ceasefire with the Pakistani government in November 2022, these type of attacks have once again become more frequent. The months-long ceasefire had been brokered by the Afghan Taliban. The TTP has repeatedly warned the police against engaging in operations against its fighters in the Afghan border areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The more than seven million inhabitants of the former tribal areas incorporated into Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province in 2018 have been neglected by the federal government for years. Moreover, a law dating back to the colonial era (Frontier Crimes Regulations) in the former tribal areas allowed the entire tribe to be punished for crimes committed by its members. The population living there have borne the brunt of the fight against terrorism in the recent past. Under the leadership of Noor Wali Mehsud, the TTP has mainly exploited socio-economic deprivation, particularly highlighting basic needs such as water, gas and electricity supply. Since 2020, at least 17 militant groups, including splinter groups of the TTP, al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS) and Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ) have pledged allegiance to Noor Wali Mehsud. According to estimates, there are approximately 5,000 to 6,000 TTP fighters in Afghanistan.

Looming economic crisis, conditions of the IMF

On 03.02.23, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif announced significant economic challenges linked to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) bailout programme. He said the government, for instance, needs to allow a market-based exchange rate for the national currency, reduce fuel subsidies and control floating debt in the energy sector. The government has largely complied with the first two demands amidst the prevailing political chaos and tense security situation. Inflation has risen to record levels. A large section of the population can hardly afford basic food anymore. Bank guarantees are no longer being given except for basic foodstuffs and medicines. Thousands of shipping containers packed with goods are being held up at the port of Karachi that the country can no longer afford. A key issue in the talks with the IMF continues to be the increase in electricity prices and a credible plan to reduce the

country's circular debt. Pakistan has deferred the requested increases for several months, citing the 2022 floods and the challenges they pose.

Wikipedia blocked for alleged sacrilegious content

On 04.02.23, the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority blocked access to the online encyclopaedia Wikipedia because of alleged blasphemous content. The Wikimedia Foundation, which operates the website, had previously been given a deadline to delete the corresponding content. Freedom of expression in Pakistan is being severely curtailed by increasing censorship, which is affecting electronic and print media alike.

Palestinian Autonomous Territories / Israel

West Bank: several killed in military operations

Between 30.01.23 and 06.02.23, seven Palestinians were shot dead by Israeli troops and at least six people were wounded in various incidents. On two occasions, according to military sources, Palestinians attempted to attack military personnel at checkpoints.

According to military sources, at least five persons were killed and six were wounded in several raids carried out at the Aqabat Jabr refugee camp near Jericho. Israeli troops had been searching for suspects who had unsuccessfully tried to shoot people dining at a restaurant in a settlement near Jericho on 28.01.23. At least two of those killed were said to be members of Hamas.

Gaza Strip / Israel: mutual fire

On 02.02.23, Israeli Air Force warplanes carried out airstrikes destroying a rocket production facility in the Gaza Strip in response to a rocket attack that had been launched against Israel from the Gaza Strip. The latter was intercepted by the Israeli air defence system.

Senegal

2022 IIAG: negative developments in the area of human rights

The 2022 Mo Ibrahim Index of African Governance (IIAG) shows, among other things, that although Senegal has steadily improved over the past decade in terms of governance as a whole and above all in the areas of the rule of law and justice, there has been considerable regression in the area of certain fundamental and human rights in some respects. According to the Index, during the period under review, considerable regression is evident, particularly in the area of the right to freedom of association and assembly. It says there have also been more restrictions in the areas of freedom of expression, press, religion and belief. The Index reports that, overall, civic space has shrunk. There has reportedly also been a general regression in the effective and equal participation of all population groups, including women, in civic, political and economic life. The individual indicator "Absence of Violence against Civilians", which measures both state and non-state violence against the civilian population as well as the extent of political violence in Senegal, reportedly also showed a negative trend during the observation period. Nonetheless, Senegal has reportedly made commendable progress in a number of areas, including granting protection against discrimination, respect for political pluralism, freedom of action and movement, and privacy. In the 2022 IIAG overall score, Senegal ranked ninth out of 54 African countries surveyed, the country ranked third best among West African countries.

Further criminal proceedings pending against opposition leader Ousmane Sonko

Ousmane Sonko, mayor of Ziguinchor, president of the opposition party Pastef-Les Patriotes and a promising candidate in Senegal's 2024 presidential elections, is facing charges in further criminal proceedings before the courts. Sonko is reportedly accused of defamation, public insults and forgery. Citing an allegedly existing report by the State Inspectorate General, Sonko is said to have publicly accused Mame Mbaye Niang, current Minister of Tourism and Leisure, of embezzlement in connection with the "Programme des domaines agricoles communautaires" (programme of community agricultural domains) (Prodac). Niang has reportedly denied the allegations against him as defamatory and has instituted legal proceedings against Sonko. The competent criminal court in Dakar has scheduled the main hearing for 16.02.23 after Sonko failed to appear at the main hearing on

02.02.23, claiming he had not received a proper summons. There are already criminal court proceedings pending against Sonko for rape and another offence (cf. BN of 23.01.23). Sonko has again spoken of a "plot by his political opponents" and an "instrumentalisation of the judiciary" aimed at excluding him from the 2024 presidential elections.

Somalia

Execution of four officials for killing colleagues

On 02.02.23, the military court in Mogadishu executed four officials, including members of the military, police and National Intelligence and Security Agency (NISA), by firing squad, according to official sources. The court found them guilty of killing fellow soldiers.

Wife of an ISS leader convicted

On 30.01.23, the military court in Mogadishu sentenced Fartun Abdirashid Hassan, wife of Abdiqadir Mumin, a senior local member of the Islamic State in Somalia (ISS), to eight years in prison. She is alleged to be a member of the ISS and to have passed on information and organised financial transactions. She had been under custody in Mogadishu since her arrest in March 2022.

Regional security summit; mortar shell attack

On 01.02.23, the Heads of State and Government of Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya and Somalia met in Mogadishu for a regional security summit focused on the fight against al-Shabaab. The three neighbouring countries are contributing troops to the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS). After the summit concluded, it was stated that planning for a joint operational strategy against al-Shabaab had been agreed.

Prior to the meeting, at least four mortar shells landed near the presidential palace in Mogadishu. Al-Shabaab claimed responsibility for the attack, in which no casualties were reported.

Elders arrested for links to al-Shabaab

Somali authorities claim they arrested six traditional elders on 31.01.23 who are accused of signing an agreement with al-Shabaab and thus violating the new guidelines (cf. BN of 10.10.22). According to military sources, the elders have reportedly reached an agreement with al-Shabaab to withdraw their clan militias from the ongoing military offensive against al-Shabaab (cf. BN of 10.10.22 and 23.01.23).

Transparency International: highest level of corruption in the world

According to the Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) 2022 released on 31.01.23, Somalia is the most corrupt country in the world. Last year, it ranked penultimate in terms of the perception of corruption in the public sector.

Sri Lanka

Criticism of military parade on Independence Day

On 04.02.23, Sri Lanka celebrated its independence, which it gained in 1948, by staging a grand military parade in the capital Colombo. This year's celebrations were overshadowed by hefty criticism. Buddhist and Christian clergy called for a boycott of the event which they see as a waste of money at a time of economic crisis. Buddhist monk Omalpe Sobitha said there is no reason to celebrate and that the ceremony is just an exhibition of weapons made in other countries. Catholic priest Cyril Gamini referred to the celebrations as a crime and a waste. According to a video posted on social media, police reportedly used water cannons to break up a silent protest in Colombo on 03.02.23.

Syria

Several hundred die in earthquake

In the early morning of 06.02.23, Türkiye was struck by an earthquake of magnitude 7.8 with its epicentre in south-eastern Türkiye. Hundreds of thousands of Syrian refugees live in the Turkish provinces of Gaziantep and Kahramanmaraş, some of them in container cities built especially for them.

In addition to the areas in Türkiye, northern and north-western Syria have been particularly affected. The Syrian Ministry of Health reported just a few hours after the earthquake that at least 237 people had been killed and 639 others injured in the government-controlled parts of the governorates of Aleppo, Hama, Latakia and Tartus. For the rebel areas, the rescue workers known as the "White Helmets" initially reported several dozen dead, but fear the figure could reach several hundred, who have yet to be recovered.

President Bashar al-Assad declared a state of emergency across the affected areas under government control and announced, among other things, the construction of short-term shelters. According to Syrian media reports, this is the most severe earthquake to hit Syria since 1995. The region is currently also affected by a winter storm and is still being hit by aftershocks.

Attack on military transport

As confirmed by the Syrian Ministry of Interior, a bus transporting Syrian police on the M5 highway between Dar'a and Damascus was hit by a roadside bomb on 30.01.23. Fifteen officers were injured, seven of them seriously. The incident occurred near the village of Khirbet Ghazaleh.

Türkiye

Arrests on suspicion of terrorism

On 31.01.23, it was reported that according to the Ministry of Interior, a total of 1,042 operations were carried out against the ISIS terrorist organisation in 2022 and 1,981 people were arrested. In January 2023, 60 operations were conducted against ISIS and 95 people were arrested.

A total of 134,713 operations were conducted against the PKK (Kurdistan Workers' Party) and YPG (People's Protection Unit) in 2022, and 8,410 people were arrested. In January 2023, nine thousand and forty operations were conducted against the PKK and YPG, and a total of 378 people were arrested.

Femicide and gender-based violence

On 03.02.23, it was reported that according to the NGO We Will Stop Femicide (Kadın Cinayetlerini Durduracağız Platformu), a total of 31 women were the victims of femicide in January 2023, whereas 28 women died under suspicious circumstances. Six of the victims had obtained restraining orders against the perpetrators. Fifteen women were murdered by their partners or ex-partners. Most of the women were killed by a close male relative such as a husband, father or brother. During the same period, another 72 women reported being victims of gender-based violence, while 13 women reported being forced into prostitution.

Gülen movement

On 30.01.23, the Istanbul Public Prosecutor's Office issued arrest warrants for 11 persons suspected of having links to the Gülen movement. The police arrested 10 of the suspects. Eight people were arrested on the same day during police operations in Kastamonu as part of the investigation carried out by the provincial prosecutor's office.

On 31.01.23, arrest warrants were issued for 35 male and female academics who used to work at Gülen universities as part of an investigation launched by the Ankara General Prosecutor's Office. During police operations carried out in 32 provinces, 27 people were arrested.

Tunisia

State of emergency extended

Various media reported on 01.02.23 that the state of emergency, which has been in force since 2015, has been extended until the end of the year. It was supposed to end on 30.01.23. Under the state of emergency, measures

can be enacted to stop assemblies and demonstrations, impose curfews and crack down on media organisations. According to human rights groups, the restrictions constitute violations of human rights because they are often abused.

Ukraine

War events: fighting intensifies in the Donbas region

According to Ukrainian sources, fighting in the embattled Donbas region is intensifying amid signs of a possible imminent major offensive by Russian forces in eastern Ukraine. According to reports from the Ukrainian General Staff on 03.02.23, Russian attacks had been reported in the direction of the towns of Bakhmut, Lyman, Avdiivka and Novopalivka. In particular, Russian troops are gradually closing in on the heavily contested town of Bakhmut, according to media reports. On 04.02.23, a large-scale air alert was declared in Ukraine due to reported attacks in nine regions in the north, south and east. On 04.02.23 and 05.02.23, several civilians were killed or injured in attacks carried out in the Donetsk region and in the cities of Kherson and Kharkiv, among others. On 04.02.23, the city of Odessa reported a widespread power blackout caused by an attack on a transformer station. According to media reports, the power supply in the Kiev and Dnipropetrovsk regions was also deteriorating. President Volodymyr Zelenskyy submitted bills to parliament on 06.02.23 to extend martial law, which is currently in force until 19.02.23, as well as general mobilisation.

HRW criticises use of landmines by Ukraine and Russia

In a press release issued on 31.01.23, Human Rights Watch (HRW) criticised the alleged use of landmines by Ukrainian forces in and around the eastern Ukrainian town of Isyum and called on Ukraine to investigate the incidents. HRW had documented numerous cases of landmines being used in the course of on-site research following Ukraine's recapture of the area in autumn 2022. According to HRW, the documented use of landmines by Russian forces since the beginning of the war does not justify the use of this weapon by Ukraine, which has ratified the 1997 Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention (Ottawa Convention). The Russian Federation, which is not a State Party to the Convention, was similarly urged to investigate the use of landmines in Ukraine and to cease further use. According to the Ukrainian Red Cross, it could take decades to clear war-related mines and booby traps in Ukraine.

Venezuela

Visit from UN High Commissioner for Human Rights

The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Volker Türk, visited Venezuela from 26.02.23 to 28.02.23 at the invitation of the government and held talks with government and opposition representatives as well as numerous NGO workers, human rights defenders and victims of human rights violations. At the final press conference, as well as in direct talks held with government representatives, he said he had called for the implementation of reforms in the justice system and the release of arbitrarily detained persons, and had addressed issues such as prison conditions. He also said at the press conference that extrajudicial killings continue to occur in the country and that people had reported torture in detention to him. In this context, he called for a comprehensive review and prosecution of such crimes.

He also asked the government to review the planned law on the regulation of non-governmental organisations (BN 30.01.23) and to ensure that it does not restrict civil society's freedom of action. He also reported that numerous NGOs had discussed socio-economic problems and the difficult humanitarian situation in the country at meetings he attended. According to UN figures, about 7 million people in the country are currently in need of humanitarian assistance. In this context, Türk also stressed that despite pre-existing economic problems, it was clear that "the sectorial sanctions imposed since August 2017 have exacerbated the economic crisis and hindered human rights". He also called for continued dialogue between government and opposition representatives, for which he assured continued UN support.

Yemen

France seizes arms

According to an announcement made on 02.02.23, the French Navy seized thousands of assault rifles, machine guns and anti-tank missiles in the Gulf of Oman on 15.01.23. French sources claim this was a shipment containing weapons coming from Iran and heading to Yemen; the weapons are similar to those seized by U.S. forces in recent months (cf. BN of 16.01.23, 06.12.22 and 15.11.22). Iran continues to deny any involvement.

Group 62 - Information Centre for Asylum and Migration
Briefing Notes
BN-Redaktion@bamf.bund.de