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Briefing Notes

Group 62 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

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Afghanistan

UN reports increase in conflict-related security incidents

A UN Security Council report on Afghanistan released on 28.02.24 shows that between 01.11.23 and 10.01.24 the UN recorded 1,508 security incidents, a 38 percent increase from the 1,090 incidents recorded during the same period in 2022 and 2023. Many of the cases involve arrests made in the context of drug trafficking. The armed opposition remains active but does not pose a threat to the Taliban. The report also highlights the increase in the arrests of women accused of violating the dress code. This mainly affects urban non-ethnic Pashtun women. Although the Taliban continue to deny any persecution of former security forces, at least five former security forces were killed and seven others arrested in the reporting period between November 2023 and February 2024. People accused of belonging to the armed opposition also continue to be arrested or executed without a trial. The Taliban regularly use corporal punishment; journalists and human rights activists continue to be arrested. The economic situation is relatively stable, but at a low level. Sixty-nine percent of the population lack access to basic items. The effects of the earthquakes in Herat province in October 2023 continue to be felt, as agriculture in particular has been severely affected. The shrinking labour market faces further challenges due to the high number of Afghan nationals deported from neighbouring countries. The need for humanitarian aid remains high, especially in the healthcare sector.¹

Security situation

The National Resistance Front (NRF) and the Afghanistan Freedom Front reported attacks carried out against the Taliban in the provinces of Herat, Parwan, Takhar and Kabul on 07.03.24 and 09.03.24. A total of 10 Taliban insurgents and two members of the NRF are said to have been killed.²

Persecution

In the provinces of Maidan Wardak and Parwan, a total of 10 men and two women were whipped on 06.03.24 and 10.03.24. Several former security forces, people from Panjshir province and people accused by the Taliban of collaborating with the armed opposition have reportedly been arrested or killed.³

Humanitarian situation

Recent snowfall and extreme cold weather have resulted in the deaths of around 40 people in several provinces. At the same time, deportations from Pakistan continue. Between 25.02.24 and 02.03.24, more than 5,000 people are said to have been deported. The people affected are particularly vulnerable to the current extreme weather conditions.⁴

Burkina Faso

Opposition figures released

Kidnappings and arrests of prominent opposition figures have been on the rise in Burkina Faso recently. On 24.01.24, unidentified individuals kidnapped and arrested the coordinator of the political movement *Servir et non se servir* (SENS) and lawyer, Guy-Hervé Kam, at the airport in Ouagadougou (cf. BN of 29.01.24). At the hearing held before the Administrative Court in Ouagadougou on 05.03.24, the Burkinabe Minister of Justice officially admitted that Guy-Hervé Kam had been accused and detained on suspicion of "endangering state security". According to media reports, the unknown actors who abducted Guy-Hervé Kam were state security forces. Following the filing of a complaint for the arbitrary arrest and detention of Guy-Hervé Kam, the court ordered Kam's release on 07.03.24. According to his lawyers, no due process was followed during his arrest. Ablassé Ouédraogo, the former Foreign Minister and leader of the *Le Faso Autrement* party, was also released on 07.03.24. Unidentified individuals had abducted him on 24.12.23 and forcibly conscripted him into the Burkinabe army. Ouédraogo had sharply criticised the Burkinabe military regime under the leadership of Captain Ibrahim Traoré and criticised the restrictions on individual and collective freedom, freedom of the press and the backsliding of democracy in Burkina Faso in a published letter (cf. BN of 08.01.24).⁵

Centre-Est Region: fatal attacks

Armed gunmen raided the village of Tissaoghin in the province of Koulpélogo in the Centre-Est region, near the borders with Togo and Ghana, on 08.03.24, killing 27 people. According to media reports, the attack took place while residents were gathering to celebrate International Women's Day. A few days later, on 10.03.24, violent attackers stormed the village of Bané in the province of Boulgou in the Centre-Est region, killing around 20 people. According to a media report, members of the paramilitary group *Volunteers for the Defence of the Homeland* (*Volontaires pour la défense de la patrie* (VDP)) were among those killed.⁶

Cuba

Serious economic crisis

Cuba is still in the throes of a deepening economic crisis, with some media reporting that it is the worst economic crisis since the 1990s. Numerous foodstuffs, medicines and fuel have been in short supply for a long time. Back in February 2024, the Cuban government announced that it could not guarantee that subsidised bread would be available on the state-issued ration books (*libreta*) as part of the basic food basket until the end of March 2024 due to a shortage of wheat flour. Most recently, the Cuban government also had to ask the WFP to supply powdered milk for infants and children. Cuba has to import most of its food, yet foreign currency is in short supply.

At the end of December 2023, the government announced a package of measures including price increases for petrol and public services in order to reduce its budget deficit and generate higher revenues for imports. As part of this, the price of fuel at petrol stations increased five-fold on 01.03.24. At other petrol stations, petrol and diesel will only be available in exchange for foreign currency. On 05.03.24, the government also announced that it would be turning off a large proportion of public lighting at peak consumption times. Blackouts in large parts of the country have become more frequent again in recent months.

Many people lack the necessary financial resources to be able to afford food beyond the basic food rations in the state-issued ration books, provided the food is available in the first place, as the average monthly wage is around EUR 15 and the rate of inflation is high.

In addition to the ongoing US embargo and further sanctions, the current economic crisis has recently been fuelled in particular by the decline in income generated from tourism during the pandemic, the lack of recovery in the aftermath of the pandemic and reduced support from Venezuela.⁷

Democratic Republic of the Congo

North Kivu: sharp rise in the number of civilians wounded in the armed conflict

The Director General of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has reported on the areas in eastern Congo that are affected by the armed conflict between the M23 rebel group and the Congolese army together with their allies. In the province of North Kivu, he said the already overwhelmed healthcare facilities have recorded a sharp increase in the number of civilians wounded by heavy weapons, adding that around 40 percent of seriously wounded persons, many of whom are women and children, are the victims of shelling or other heavy weapons. He said the use of these weapons in urban, densely populated areas is adding a new dynamic to the conflict and is threatening to further exacerbate one of the largest and most complex humanitarian crises.

According to media reports, an attack carried out on the town of Nyanzale in the territory of Rutshuru (North Kivu province) claimed the lives of at least 15 civilians as recently as 04.03.24. The town has since been under the control of the M23 rebel group. The town of Nyanzale is home to thousands of internally displaced persons who have fled the fighting in the surrounding areas. Nyanzale is located around 130 kilometres north of the provincial capital Goma.⁸

South Kivu: two women accused of witchcraft killed

A group of youths in a village dragged two women aged 60 and 65 from their homes, stoned them and then burned them alive in the Uvira region (South Kivu province) on the evening of 03.03.24. RFI reports that the women were accused of witchcraft and held responsible for the deaths of several people who had recently gone missing from the village. Representatives of civil society and socio-political leaders have condemned the incident. According to a local organisation, at least 33 primarily elderly women accused of witchcraft were murdered in 2023. Other women accused of witchcraft have reportedly been forced into hiding due to the witchcraft accusations made against them.⁹

Egypt

Death sentence for members of the Muslim Brotherhood and the Freedom and Justice Party

According to media reports, the Supreme State Security Court sentenced eight high-ranking members of the Muslim Brotherhood and the Freedom and Justice Party to death on 04.03.24. Some of these individuals had already been sentenced to death in previous trials. In the current trial, 37 defendants were sentenced to life imprisonment, six defendants to 15 years of imprisonment, and seven defendants to 10 years of imprisonment. A further 21 defendants were acquitted. The defendants were accused, among other things, of leadership in a terrorist group, attempting to change the regime by force and preventing state institutions and public authorities from performing their duties.

The trial is related to the events of 27.07.23, when supporters of the recently deposed President Mohammed Morsi demonstrated near the Manassa memorial in Cairo. Security forces intervened violently and at least 95 protesters were killed. Although, according to human rights organisations, this represented a disproportionate use of force by the security forces, no member of the security forces is known to have been prosecuted for the killings.¹⁰

The Gambia

Parliament discusses bill to decriminalise FGM

On 04.03.24, the Gambian parliament debated a bill seeking to repeal the Women's Amendment Act. The bill was introduced by independent MP Almammeh Gibba and specifically provides for the decriminalisation of female genital mutilation (FGM), which has been banned in The Gambia since 2015. Gibba justified the bill on the grounds of upholding religious purity and safeguarding cultural norms and values. The second reading has been scheduled for 18.03.24. According to the spokesperson for the majority faction, the presidential party, the National People's Party (NPP), has yet to decide whether it will support the bill. In the event that the bill is rejected at the second reading, Gibba has already said she will reintroduce it to parliament.

In the run-up to the plenary session, Muslim scholar Abdullah Fatty and his followers rallied in support of the bill's adoption. Fatty was a former imam in the State House mosque under former President Yahya Jammeh and is still considered to be particularly influential. He and other religious actors have repeatedly defended the practice of FGM on religious grounds. The first FGM convictions in September 2023 and the fact that Fatty and other Islamic religious leaders paid the fines imposed triggered an intense debate between those in favour of FGM and those against it (cf. BN of 11.09.23 and 18.11.23). Following the verdicts, Islamic religious leaders, several members of parliament and the influential Supreme Islamic Council, which used to be described as quasi-governmental, have called for the widespread traditional practice to be decriminalised (cf. BN of 11.09.23).¹¹

Ghana

President postpones decision on anti-LGBTIQ law

President Nana Akufo-Addo announced in a statement issued on 05.03.24 that he will not approve the anti-LGBTIQ law on his desk until its constitutionality has been confirmed. He wants to wait until the country's Supreme Court has made a decision on the matter. According to media reports, a citizen has challenged the constitutionality of the bill. After some national and many international representatives raised concerns over the bill, Mr Akufo-Addo said Ghana would not backslide on its human rights record. The Ghanaian Finance Minister also warned that billions in funding and subsidies could be lost if the law entered into force. The Ghanaian parliament passed the "Promotion of Proper Human Sexual Rights and Ghanaian Family Values Bill" on 28.02.24 (cf. BN of 04.03.24).¹²

Iran

Two women arrested for dancing in public

According to Iranian media, two young women have been arrested in Tehran following the circulation of a video in which they can be seen dancing in public to celebrate the arrival of the Iranian New Year. The video clip of the two women, which was recorded near Tajrish Square in northern Tehran, went viral on social media. The two women are seen dancing in the square disguised as Hajji Firouz, a fictional character in Iranian folklore dressed in red who every year crosses the streets of Iranian cities, singing and dancing to announce the arrival of the Iranian New Year Nowruz which begins on 20 March. The Tehran public prosecutor ordered the arrest of the two women on the grounds that they had violated social norms.

Iranian law prohibits women from dancing in mixed-gender public places. Numerous videos of women dancing in public places or in the subway have gone viral in recent months after a mass protest movement shook the country at the end of 2022 following the death of Jina Mahsa Amini in police custody (cf. BN of 19.09.22).¹³

Iraq

Conflict between Türkiye and the PKK

Two civilians were killed and a third was injured in a suspected Turkish airstrike carried out in the Shiladze district (Dohuk province) on 08.03.24. Türkiye has not yet commented on the incident.

Türkiye regularly carries out airstrikes against PKK (Kurdistan Workers' Party) positions in northern Iraq, and reports indicate that civilians, residential areas and agricultural land have also been repeatedly hit in the past.¹⁴

Lebanon

Security situation along the border between Lebanon and Israel

Hezbollah and the Israeli armed forces continue to trade fire on a regular basis. On 09.03.24, a family of four was killed in an airstrike.

In the meantime, on the Lebanese side, 303 people have been reported killed, including 50 civilians; 10 soldiers and seven civilians have been reported killed on the Israeli side.¹⁵

Malawi / Zimbabwe / Zambia

Lack of protection of women's rights and human rights

According to recent media reports, the governments of neighbouring Malawi, Zimbabwe and Zambia are accused of failing to protect the human rights of women in informal and cross-border trade. Reference is made to a recently published report by an international NGO. It reports that women working in informal cross-border trade (ICBT) are forced to work without social security and are not protected from gender-based violence in the workplace or from economic exploitation.¹⁶

Malaysia

HRW report on detention of refugees and asylum seekers

In a report published on 05.03.24, HRW describes the precarious conditions under which irregular migrants, refugees and asylum seekers are being detained in Malaysia's Immigration Detention Centres (IDCs). The report is based on interviews conducted with 23 former detainees and 20 family members, NGO workers, lawyers and former immigration officers. Some migrants spend months to years in detention in precarious and unhygienic conditions in IDCs. The supply of food and water is said to be inadequate, the rooms are overcrowded and medical care is not guaranteed. Former detainees say they suffered physical and psychological abuse, violence and torture at the hand of security forces. In recent years, there have been hundreds of deaths in immigration detention facilities; seven children died in IDCs in 2022. There are also reports of women giving birth in IDCs without the support of medical professionals and being subsequently detained for months with their new-born babies. According to official figures, more than 11,690 people - mainly from Myanmar, the Philippines and Indonesia - including around 1,460 children, were being held in custody in September 2023. HRW assumes the actual numbers are higher. Since August 2019, the UNHCR has no longer been allowed to enter the detention centres, making it impossible to examine asylum applications.¹⁷

Mozambique

Tense situation in Cabo Delgado

Ongoing attacks by Islamist insurgents on the civilian population and the local infrastructure have led to the displacement of thousands of people in the north of the country. In January and February 2024 alone, more than 67,000 people fled the province, many to the neighbouring province of Nampula. Chiure District and Mucojo have been hit by the most recent attacks. At present, there is also a risk that children who were separated from their guardians during the clashes have been abducted by the insurgents.

The group known locally as Mashababos or al-Shabaab, which is linked to ISIS, has been carrying out raids in Cabo Delgado since 2017. At least 5,000 people have died since the outbreak of the conflict, including more than 2,000 civilians. 540,000 people have been displaced so far, more than half of whom are children.¹⁸

Nigeria

North: several mass abductions

Armed actors abducted dozens of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the remote Gamboru locality in Ngala Local Government Area (LGA), near the borders with Cameroon and Chad, in the northeastern state of Borno on 29.02.24. According to media reports, the abductees are mostly women and children living in refugee camps who had fled to Gamboru because of previous acts of violence. At the time of the abductions, they were reportedly searching for firewood outside the camp. The UN puts the number of abductees at over 200. According to individual media reports, the kidnappers are suspected members of an Islamist group. The Islamist groups Boko Haram and Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) have been carrying out attacks and other acts of violence against the military and the civilian population for years, particularly in northeast Nigeria (cf. BN of 30.05.22 and 27.03.23).

A few days later, on 07.03.24, unidentified gunmen raided a school in the northwestern town of Kuriga in Chikun LGA in Kaduna State and abducted around 250 schoolchildren. According to a media report, the abducted pupils

are aged between eight and 15. Security forces reportedly arrived in the city several hours later. It was said to be the largest mass abduction from a school since 2021.

On 09.03.24, gunmen invaded the dormitory of a school in Gidan Bakuso village in Gada LGA in the northwestern state of Sokoto and abducted around 15 pupils.

Abductions of pupils from schools in northern Nigeria have occurred before. The Islamist group Boko Haram abducted over 270 girls in the Chibok LGA in the northeastern state of Borno in 2014. The incident sparked international outrage and a campaign called #BringBackOurGirls. Almost 100 of them remain in captivity. Several were forcibly married off to members of the Islamist group.¹⁹

Southeast: military kills suspected ESN member

Army troops killed a suspected member of the Eastern Security Network (ESN), the militant wing of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) group advocating the secession of southeast Nigeria, in Orsu LGA in Imo State on 02.03.24. This is according to media reports based on official military information released on 03.03.24. The incident reportedly took place in connection with a military operation to clear a suspected separatist camp. An intense firefight took place, among other things, and a homemade weapon, improvised explosive devices and various items of equipment were seized. It was reported that further military operations against IPOB/ESN hideouts were to be expected in the region.

Government agencies regularly hold members of the IPOB and ESN organisations responsible for acts of violence in the southeast of the country. However, these organisations just as regularly deny any such accusations. In recent times, there have been a number of reports of separatist camps being cleared and destroyed by security forces in the southeastern states of Nigeria (cf. BN of 31.07.23, 09.10.23 and 18.12.23, and 26.02.24).²⁰

Palestinian Autonomous Territories / Israel

Gaza Strip: current developments; humanitarian situation

On 10.03.24, the Hamas-led Ministry of Health in the Gaza Strip stated that more than 31,112 people had been killed since the start of the war. More than 72,760 other people are said to have been wounded. The Ministry does not officially distinguish between combatants and civilians. According to Israeli sources, more than 10,000 Palestinian combatants have been killed. The fighting is continuing, particularly in the north and in central Gaza.

On 09.03.24, the Ministry of Health stated that 25 people had now died of dehydration or malnutrition. The information could not be independently verified.

On 09.03.24 and 10.03.24, first Canada and then Sweden announced that they had resumed payments following assurances from UNRWA that they would better monitor the use of funds in future. Several UNRWA employees are accused of having been involved in the massacres that occurred on 07.10.23. In addition, various indications that UNRWA facilities have been used by Hamas have been uncovered since the beginning of the ground offensive. On 08.03.24, UNRWA accused Israel in a statement of having forced several UN agency employees to make false confessions through torture.

Also on 08.03.24, according to eyewitness reports, several aid airdrop packages caused injuries to persons on the ground when parachutes failed to open. A total of five people are said to have been killed.²¹

West Bank: new settlements greenlighted for construction

On 06.03.24, the Defence Ministry body responsible for building permit procedures in the occupied territories approved the construction of almost 3,500 additional housing units for Israeli settlements in the West Bank. This is the first time since 07.10.23 that such a decision has been made. The decision was welcomed by settler representatives and large sections of the governing coalition. It was largely rejected by the parliamentary opposition and various Palestinian and international organisations.²²

Senegal

Date set for presidential election; government dissolved

Citing information provided by the presidency on 06.03.24, media outlets reported that the first round of the postponed presidential election is now to take place on 24.03.24 and thus – as demanded by sections of the

opposition and civil society – before the end of President Macky Sall's regular term of office (cf. BN of 04.03.24). The election date set by President Sall initially contradicted a decision recently rendered by the Constitutional Council. The Constitutional Council, which acted on a corresponding request from President Sall, had ordered that the first round of voting take place on 31.03.24 after it declared the election date in June 2024 proposed by the national dialogue and the associated extension of Sall's mandate to be incompatible with the constitution and null and void (cf. BN of 04.03.24). On 07.03.24, however, the Constitutional Council confirmed the election date set by President Sall. In its decision handed down on 06.03.24, the Constitutional Council also declared the list of presidential candidates eligible for the vote, which it had published on 20.01.24, to be valid and incontestable (cf. BN of 22.01.24). The election, which was originally scheduled for 25.02.24, will thus take place without the opposition leader Ousmane Sonko, who is in custody, and with his backup candidate Bassirou Diomaye Faye, who has also been in custody for months.

On 06.03.24, President Sall also dissolved the government. The Prime Minister and official presidential candidate of the government camp, Amadou Ba, has been replaced by the former Interior Minister Sidiki Kaba. This should reportedly allow Ba to concentrate fully on leading the presidential election campaign.²³

Parliament passes controversial amnesty law

On 06.04.24, parliament passed the controversial amnesty law under which all those arrested during protests since 2021 are to be released (cf. BN of 04.03.24) by 94 votes in favour and 49 against. Human rights NGOs and others fear that the amnesty law could allow security forces who have committed human rights violations in connection with protests to enjoy impunity. According to HRW, at least 40 people have been killed in connection with protests since March 2021, and those responsible have not been brought to justice to date. Amnesty International estimates that more than 60 people have been killed in protests and has also called for all those responsible to be held accountable.²⁴

Judicial supervision for presidential candidate

According to media reports, Moussa Diop was provisionally released and placed under judicial supervision on 05.03.24. The former official of the president's coalition and declared presidential candidate, who switched to the opposition, had been held in custody since his arrest in December 2023. He is accused of several criminal offences after alleging the purchase of weapons "by the presidency" and the existence of a contract for the exploitation of a diamond mine in which President Sall and a former mining minister, among others, are said to be involved (cf. BN of 18.12.23).²⁵

Sudan

Ceasefire efforts

On 08.03.24, the UN Security Council, with 14 votes in favour, adopted Resolution 2724 (2024) calling on all parties to the conflict in Sudan to cease hostilities at the beginning of Ramadan. The Council also called for the development of a sustainable solution to the conflict through dialogue between all the parties involved and the immediate provision of unhindered access for humanitarian aid.

Representatives of the Sudanese army announced on 09.03.24 and 10.03.24 that the army would only agree to a ceasefire if the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) militia fulfilled certain conditions. Among other things, the RSF was to guarantee that its fighters would withdraw from all civilian and public buildings. Furthermore, the commander of the RSF was to give up all future political and military ambitions and not hold any offices in these areas from now on. According to media reports, the RSF has welcomed the Security Council's resolution. However, detailed reactions from the RSF are not known.²⁶

Ongoing fighting

One day before the UN Security Council called for a ceasefire to coincide with the fasting month of Ramadan, fierce fighting broke out between army and RSF units in the regional capitals of El Fasher (North Darfur) and Sennar (Sennar). El Fasher is the last regional capital in Darfur that remains under SAF control. According to media reports, more than 30 people were killed in the recent fighting around El Fasher.²⁷

Türkiye

Nationwide rallies as part of International Women's Day

Despite an official ban, thousands of people took to the streets on 08.03.24, mainly in Istanbul, Ankara and Izmir, to celebrate International Women's Day.

They demanded equal rights and changes to the law in order to better protect women. Although the police had blocked access to the streets leading to Taksim Square in Istanbul several hours in advance, participants said they found ways to get to the venue and take part in the protest.

There were clashes with the police in the run-up to International Women's Day. On 07.03.24, security forces intervened at a demonstration by students from Istanbul University. Some of the demonstrators were subsequently arrested by the police. Clashes also erupted between demonstrators and the police on 08.03.24, particularly in Istanbul on the way to Taksim Square. Rallies organised by women's groups and the Peoples' Equality and Democracy Party (Halkların Eşitlik ve Demokrasi Partisi (DEM)) also took place in the Kurdish provinces to mark International Women's Day. Rallies marking International Women's Day took place in Diyarbakır, Batman, Şırnak, Mardin, Van, Mersin and Elazığ, among other places. At the rallies, the ruling AKP party in particular was criticised for its policies regarding women's rights.²⁸

Seven people arrested on charges of spying for Israel

On 05.03.24, the Turkish police arrested seven people who are suspected of having engaged in foreign espionage. One suspect was released on bail on 08.03.24.

Interior Minister Ali Yerlikaya said that the suspects were arrested during simultaneous raids in Istanbul. They are suspected of collecting data on individuals and companies in Türkiye and selling it to the Israeli secret service, Mossad. The state news agency Anadolu reported, citing unnamed security officials, that the detainees included a former civil servant who was currently working as a private detective.

Seven other people, including private detectives, were previously arrested in February 2024 on similar suspicions. Turkish police also arrested a total of 34 people in early January 2024 on suspicion of spying for Israel. Justice Minister Yılmaz Tunc explained that most of the suspects arrested in January 2024 had been charged with political or military espionage for the Israeli secret service.²⁹

Ukraine

UN Special Rapporteur judges torture by Russian forces to be a war strategy

According to the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture, Alice Jill Edwards, the Russian military and associated forces have systematically used torture and other inhumane acts against civilians and Ukrainian prisoners of war in different locations. The level of organisation indicates direct authorisation and a targeted policy, or at least official toleration on the part of Moscow. Edwards presented her report to the UN Human Rights Council on 08.03.24, based in particular on a trip she made to Ukraine in September 2023. In it, she also deals with the situation of Russian prisoners of war and other persons detained by Ukraine in connection with the war. Her account states that there were reports of verbal or physical violence or detention in unauthorised places during interrogation, among other things.³⁰

Civilian war casualties

Two firefighters were killed by a Russian drone strike during a firefighting operation near Kramatorsk (Ukrainian-controlled part of Donetsk Oblast) on 04.03.24.

During a meeting between President Volodymyr Zelensky and Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis held in Odesa on 06.03.24, a Russian missile strike hit the city. Five people were killed, and an unspecified number of people were injured.

On 08.03.24, a Russian missile attack on the city of Sumy injured 26 people and killed two. The attack damaged a school, a city hospital, a regional emergency medical care centre and the water utility. On the same day, a total of three people died in the Kharkiv region as a result of Russian artillery and mortar fire, which hit 18 villages. On the previous two days, Russian attacks with civilian casualties had already been reported from the region, one with five injured and the other with one dead and seven injured, including young people. Also according to local reports, a

teenager died and another person was injured on 09.03.24 when Russian artillery fire hit the village of Chervonohryhorivka (Dnipropetrovsk Oblast). On 10.03.24, a total of three people were killed by shelling in the Ukrainian-controlled part of the Donetsk region. Around a dozen people were also injured in Myrnohrad.³¹

Discharge of conscripts

According to agency reports, Zelensky issued a decree on 07.03.24 for the early discharge of conscripts. It provides for those who began their military service before 24.02.22 and were not subsequently discharged from it to be transferred to reserve duty in the next two months. They are to be exempt from further call-ups for the following 12 months.³²

Development of the war

The Ukrainian military stated that it had succeeded in containing the advance of Russian forces after the capture of Avdiivka (Donetsk Oblast), where they had particularly targeted the village of Orlivka. In addition, the Russian side had specifically concentrated its attacks on the town of Novomykhailivka, located further south in the Donetsk region.

According to the British Ministry of Defence, Ukraine has "almost certainly" accelerated the construction of defensive fortifications along several areas of the front line, for example, in the form of anti-tank obstacles and ditches, infantry trenches and minefields. This is seen as an indication of the nature of the conflict as a war of attrition, where attempts to breach fortifications will "highly likely be accompanied by high losses".

Media outlets cite a resolution by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) dated 07.03.24 in which it condemns the occupation of the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant by the Russian Federation and expresses grave concern about inadequate maintenance and staffing. Prior to this, IAEA chief Rafael Grossi had met Russian President Vladimir Putin and discussed the situation at the nuclear power plant.³³

Venezuela

Deutsche Welle removed from cable programming after reporting on corruption

Following a report on corruption in Venezuela and other countries, as well as possible links between politicians and organised crime, the Spanish-language channel of Deutsche Welle (DW) has, for the moment, been removed from the programming by at least two major local cable network operators. On 04.03.24, President Nicolás Maduro accused DW of spreading and promoting hate messages against his country, among other things, and announced that DW would be removed from all cable programming. DW reported that it had also been switched off briefly in 2019 following reports on the violent protests at the time. In recent years, radio stations, newspapers and other media have repeatedly been shut down or severely restricted in their activities due to critical reporting. It has been reported that some journalists, for example, from El País and the New York Times, have recently been banned from covering the upcoming elections.³⁴

Election campaign coordinator for Vente Venezuela arrested in Barinas, date set for presidential elections

On 09.03.24, Attorney General Tarek William Saab confirmed the arrest of Emil Brand Ulloa, head of the regional campaign committee of opposition politician María Corina Machado in the state of Barinas, on charges including conspiracy, insulting public officials and gender-based violence against several female police officers and female military personnel. He said these charges were linked to violent clashes that occurred on 15.01.24. Machado and other opposition activists, however, see the arrest as politically motivated. The campaign directors for the states of Trujillo, Vargas and Yaracuy from Machado's Vente Venezuela party were arrested back in January 2024 for alleged involvement in a conspiracy (cf. BN of 29.01.24).

Most recently, the electoral council, which is loyal to the government, set the date for the presidential elections as 28.07.24. It said that registration for candidates was possible between 21.03.24 and 25.03.24. However, Machado remains barred from political office.³⁵

Vietnam

Arrests of journalists and opposition activists continue

According to reports, five bloggers, journalists and government critics have already been arrested in 2024 for anti-state propaganda under the controversial Article 117 of the Criminal Code. In Reporters Without Borders' 2023 Press Freedom Index, the one-party state now ranks 178th out of 180 (2022: 174th), making it one of the countries that restrict journalism and freedom of expression the most, along with North Korea and China. HRW says that there are currently at least 163 prisoners of conscience in Vietnamese prisons and around 24 other people in pre-trial detention on politically motivated charges.³⁶

Two exile groups listed as terrorist organisations

According to state media, the US-based exile group Montagnard Support Group Inc. (MSGI) and the Montagnard Stand for Justice (MSFJ), which operates in Thailand and the US, were classified as terrorist organisations on 06.03.24. The government accuses them of recruiting and training people to carry out terrorist activities and of pursuing the establishment of a separate state in the Central Highlands. It accuses MSGI and MSFJ of being involved in an attack carried out on the headquarters of the People's Committee and two police stations in Dak Lak province in June 2023, in which nine people, including four police officers, were killed. The leadership of both exile groups denied involvement and emphasised that they were only working to defend the political and cultural rights of the Montagnard and Degar people. The designations encompass several ethnic minorities in the Central Highlands, including many Protestant Christians who fought alongside the US in the Vietnam War.³⁷

Yemen

Airstrikes

According to a report released by the Yemen Data Project (YDP) on 06.03.24, which has been collecting and analysing data on attacks on Yemeni territory since 2016, attacks carried out by the US-led coalition to protect shipping in the Red Sea in February 2024 claimed the lives of civilians for the first time since the operation was launched on 12.01.24.

According to the report, one civilian was injured in an attack carried out on an agricultural farm in Hajja governorate on 02.02.24; two more civilians were injured in an attack carried out on a pesticide factory in the capital Sanaa on 24.02.24; one civilian was killed and seven others were injured in another coalition attack on a telecommunications facility in Taizz, also on 24.02.24 (cf. BN of 26.02.24). According to the YDP, the frequency of attacks also more than doubled in February 2024 compared to January 2024, with a total of 79 coalition attacks recorded.³⁸

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Briefing Notes
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