



Briefing Notes

Group 62 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

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Afghanistan

Security situation

On 09.05.23, armed clashes were reported between fighters of a district governor and the Taliban army in Parwan province. Also on 09.05.23, the Taliban reportedly killed a senior member of the Islamic State of Khorasan Province (ISKP) in Kabul's Shakardara district.

On 08.05.23, a rocket attack targeted the office of the governor of Kapisa province. According to the Afghanistan Freedom Front (AFF), which claimed responsibility for the attack, three Taliban were killed in the incident.

On 07.05.23, the Taliban launched house raids in Khost district, Baghlan province, leading to a ten-hour armed confrontation between members of the National Resistance Front (NRF) and the Taliban. According to various reports, between seven and 25 Taliban fighters and one to three NRF members were killed in the confrontation.

Persecution situation

Media report that on 11.05.23 Mohammad Baqir Moballeghzada, a Hazara commander from Daikundi province who had defected to the Taliban, was arrested by the Taliban. His weapons were confiscated.

On 09.05.23, three directors of media companies and a journalist were arrested by the Taliban in Khost province for allegedly disobeying instructions from the Ministry of Virtue. According to a report on 09.05.23, the Taliban's intelligence service arrested an employee of their Ministry of Martyrs and Disabled Affairs. Both the background to the arrest and the employee's whereabouts are unclear.

On 08.05.23, a former soldier was shot dead in Jabul Seraj district, Parwan province. There is no information on the circumstances of the incident.

Burkina Faso

Attack on civilians

On 11.05.23, at least 33 civilians were reportedly killed in an attack by suspected jihadists on Youlou village in western Mouhoun province. The villagers were working in their fields when they were attacked. No one has yet claimed responsibility for the assault.

Massacre of civilians

Various media report that on 20.04.23, there was a massacre in the north of the country in the village of Karma (Yatenga province), killing more than 150 civilians, among them women and children. Initial reports put the death toll at 60. According to eyewitnesses, men in military uniforms, presumably members of the armed forces, first surrounded and then attacked the village in the morning, burning houses and looting property. The background to the massacre remains unclear.

After initially refraining to comment on the events in Karma, the military government strongly condemned the 'barbaric acts'. The public prosecutor's office has meanwhile opened an investigation.

Cameroon

Attack on military post near Douala city

Authorities have informed that on 01.05.23, at least 15 armed men attacked a military post in Matouke, about 40 km from the port city of Douala, killing several people. This has been the first attack so close to the city of Douala.

Chad

Dead in attack on Christian villagers

Press reports say that a village near the Central African Republic was attacked on 08.05.23. The inhabitants of the village are mainly from the Kabba community, an agricultural, Christian ethnic group living in the south of Chad. The region is prone to inter-faith conflicts between nomadic Muslim herders and local residents over grazing land.

China

Long prison sentence for human rights activist

On 11.05.23, a court in Guangzhou sentenced human rights activist and prominent legal advisor Yang Maodong, known by his pen name Guo Feixiong, to eight years in prison for inciting sedition. Yang had spent decades campaigning for democracy, helping marginalised groups to exercise their rights, and demonstrating against censorship, corruption, and torture. Until his arrest in January 2022, he was one of the last remaining active human rights lawyers in China.

Egypt

81 people added to the national 'terrorism' list

By the end of April 2023, the authorities reportedly classified at least 81 people as terrorists and placed them on the (national) terrorism list which had been introduced in 2015 as part of the anti-terror legislation. The list includes many human rights activists as well as media workers, some of whom are apparently staying abroad. Human rights groups have criticized the authorities' move as arbitrary and a tool to silence dissent.

Individuals and groups classified as terrorist can be subjected to restrictive measures for up to five years after which the listing and accompanying measures can be renewed by the authorities. These measures include travel bans, the confiscation of passports, the prevention of obtaining or renewing of passports, and the freezing or confiscation of assets.

Family members and acquaintances of opposition politician arrested

Since the end of April 2023, the security authorities have reportedly arrested twelve family members and acquaintances of former MP and opposition politician Ahmed Tantawy on the orders of the public prosecutor. They are charged with membership of a terrorist organisation; some of them are also accused of possessing firearms, explosives and publications that endanger public security. Tantawy, who had lived in Lebanon since August 2022 due to security concerns but has apparently returned to his home country on 11.05.23, announced in March 2023 that he intended to run in next year's presidential elections. Human rights organisations suspect that the arrests are politically motivated to intimidate him.

The Gambia

Charges against presidential adviser; Barrow alliance wins 2023 council elections

President Adama Barrow's adviser and key mobiliser for the National People's Party (NPP), Dou Sannoh, has been charged with common assault and wilful damage to property, according to a police source. Apparently, he was released on bail. A member of the opposition Gambia Democratic Congress (GDC) had reported Sannoh to the police for an incident on 06.04.23. He was accused of starting a scuffle with members of the GDC during the campaign for the council elections on 15.04.23.

The council elections, which were described as largely peaceful, confirmed the dominance of Barrow and his alliance. According to the official final results, Barrow's NPP emerged as the largest force with 52 of the 120 seats, ahead of the main opposition United Democratic Party (UDP), which secured 46 seats.

Convictions for trafficking and smuggling; authorities under-resourced

According to a media report, the Banjul High Court sentenced a Nigerian woman to 15 years imprisonment on two counts of trafficking for sexual exploitation and 'smuggling of persons'. She was also fined 50,000 GMD (approx. 766 EUR, as of 12.05.23) on each count.

In its Annual Report 2022, the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) once again called on the government to provide the National Agency against Trafficking in Persons (NAATIP) and other relevant authorities with sufficient resources and capacities necessary for the effective performance of their functions, including law enforcement (cf. BN of 18.07.22).

Ghana

Muslim coalition supports anti-LGBTIQ law

On 09.05.23, the president of the Coalition of Muslim Organisations of Ghana (COMOG), Hajj Abdel Manan Abdel Rahman, called for the swift passage of the anti-LGBTIQ bill, reportedly stressing in this context that COMOG's mission is to prevent all activities related to LGBTIQ persons in Ghana and that the coalition will co-operate with other religious organisations to do so. Furthermore, he said, the coalition is committed to supporting members of parliament who will work for the early passage of the bill.

The draft Promotion of Proper Human Sexual Rights and Ghanaian Family Values Bill, which seeks to increase the criminalisation of LGBTIQ acts and activism, was presented to parliament on 02.08.21. The bill has met with strong criticism by human rights organisations (cf. BN of 16.08.21).

Guinea

Protests: Several people killed, police deny deaths

After the Forces Vives de Guinée (FVG) alliance announced the resumption of demonstrations against the ruling transitional authorities (cf. BN of 08.05.23), protests were staged on 10.05.23. While in other major cities of the country the FVG's call for protests met with little or no response, demonstrators in Conakry reportedly set car tyres on fire and threw stones. According to the FVG, seven people were killed and 32 injured by the security forces who used firearms. Fifty-six people were arrested. The demonstrators' demands included the release of leading activists (see below). On 11.05.23 a police spokesperson denied the number of deaths and accused the organisers of the protests of trying to discredit the (security) authorities with this information, adding that the authorities did everything to avoid deaths. The police have not given their own assessment of the events.

Three opposition activists released

On 10.05.23, the three leading activists of the civil society-party political alliance Front national de défense de la Constitution (FNDC) Oumar Sylla ('Foniké Menguè'), Ibrahima Diallo and Mamadou Billo Bah were released from prison. They had been detained since July/August 2022 and, in Bah's case, since 21.03.23 (cf. BN of 06.02.23). Their lawyers' collective said that the unconditional release was preceded by offers of release in exchange for a renunciation of political commitment, which the three refused. According to media reports, there is no precise information on the basis of the release, such as a court decision.

Guinea-Bissau

Parliamentary elections: official start of the campaign

On 13.05.23, the three-week official election campaign period began for the parliamentary elections, which were called for after President Umaro Sissoco Embaló dissolved parliament, but were then postponed again significantly and are due to take place on 04.06.23 (cf. BN of 23.05.22 and 19.12.22). The elections were reportedly on the brink of collapse again due to a lack of sufficient international financial support. According to further media reports of 10.05.23, a total of 20 individual parties as well as two party coalitions were allowed to participate in the elections following a decision by the Supreme Court. The largest opposition party, the African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde (PAIGC), is running under the 'Platform Inclusive Alliance - Terra Rança'.

Attack on PRS politician

Media report that Fransual Dias, a political analyst and member of the Social Renewal Party (PRS), was attacked on 05.05.23. Initially, Dias himself apparently reported on social media that armed assailants fired at his house. Although he was at home, he was left uninjured, he said. On 09.05.23, he resigned from his post in the Council of State, an official advisory body to the President of the Republic, describing the attack as an attempt to intimidate him before the elections scheduled for on 04.06.23. He also indirectly blamed President Embaló for the attack, which the president denied. Previously, in an interview published on 02.05.23, Dias had said that Embaló's interest was to rule the country alone.

Iran

Religious minorities: Acquittal of imprisoned Christian converts

Media report that on 09.05.23, a married couple who converted to Christianity were acquitted and released from Tehran's Evin Prison. The couple had been detained since August 2022, after being sentenced to several years in prison for participating in house church meetings in 2020. On the Supreme Court's order, an appeals court reviewed the case. The subsequent verdict stated that organising, belonging to and participating in Christian groups did not constitute acts against the security of the country.

According to a Christian human rights organisation, the verdict echoed a landmark Supreme Court ruling in 2022, in which nine convicted Christian converts were acquitted. The reason given was that the promotion of Christianity and the establishment of house churches were not crimes and did not constitute acts against national security (cf. BN of 07.03.22). In the Iranian judiciary, however, a ruling by the Supreme Court has no binding effect on courts of first instance. Convictions of first instance in similar cases are therefore still possible. Christian human rights organisations, however, stressed the possible signal effect of the ruling.

Death penalty: several prisoners executed

On 09.05.23, the High Commissioner of the United Nations Office for Human Rights (OHCHR) Türk informed that more than 200 executions have already been documented in Iran this year, which means that on average more than ten people have been executed every week. The main focus has been on drug-related offences and murder charges against people from the province of Sistan and Baluchistan.

Foreign media have reported several executions in different prisons since the beginning of May 2023: on 08.05.23, two atheist activists were executed who had been arrested in 2020 on charges including burning the Quran and running several explicitly atheist Telegram channels. On 10.05.23, three members of a major drug cartel called Panjak were executed. The most prominent among them was known as the 'Sultan of Cocaine' and was considered the head of the cartel. On 11.05.23, a further seven executions became known, with charges ranging from drug trafficking to rape. Protesting family members and friends were dispersed by security forces.

At least three more demonstrators accused of killing three Basij members are facing execution in the near future. According to their families, the confessions were extracted under torture. Families and supporters have demonstrated against the planned executions.

Detention conditions: Prisoner dies after alleged mistreatment in custody

According to a report by a Kurdish human rights network, a detainee in Tehran's Evin prison died on 09.05.23, allegedly as a result of ill-treatment by security personnel. The man, who had been detained on charges of theft and injuring police officers, was subjected to repeated physical abuse by prison staff. The last time similar incidents were reported was in 2021, when images and video footage from the Tehran prison were released to the public. The footage showed physical assaults by guards on prisoners (cf. BN of 30.08.21).

Iraq**Popular mobilisation units: Doubling in size**

The number of troops in the Popular Mobilisation Forces (PMF) has doubled within the last two years. This is according to media reports based on documents related to the draft budget. According to these documents, around USD 2.7 billion has been earmarked for the PMF, with a manpower of 238,000.

The PMF is an umbrella group of mostly Shia militias that had been formed in 2014 as part of the fight against IS. They are formally subordinate to the Iraqi government and receive salaries from there, but in reality the Iraqi government has very limited control over the militias who largely pursue their own agendas.

New border crossing with Türkiye

On 10.05.23, a new border crossing was opened between the Autonomous Region of Kurdistan (KR-I) and Türkiye. Located between Zet (Erbil province, KR-I) and Derecik (Türkiye), this is now the third border crossing between the two countries.

Lebanon**Economic situation**

Protests over the economic situation continue to be frequent and sometimes violent. On 09.05.23, clashes broke out between demonstrators and police during attempts to storm the parliament building and an attack on the prime minister's private residence. Banks were also ransacked, and roads blocked throughout the country.

The World Bank has informed that last year, food prices more than doubled, after tripling the previous year. Lebanon is currently the country hit hardest in the world by food price inflation. Food insecurity now affects 42 percent of the people and is on the rise.

Malawi**Three Chinese nationals arrested at airport for human trafficking**

Press reports say that the Malawi police have arrested three Chinese nationals, two men and a woman, at Kamuzu International Airport when they were attempting to smuggle two Malawian girls into the People's Republic of China. According to the airport authority, the incident took place on 05.05.23. During the arrest of the suspects, marriage certificates issued by the Lilongwe District Administration were found. One of the victims said that she was forced to put her signature on the certificate. Malawi police authorities told the media that the arrest uncovered different syndicates and also how the suspects obtained marriage certificates, identity cards and passports for the victims. The trafficking ring was able to obtain national identity cards and passports within seven days with the help of Malawian translators and corrupt officials and officers from the National Registration Bureau (NRA) and the Department of Immigration and Citizenship. By contrast, ordinary nationals can only obtain a Malawian identity card or passport after years of waiting, according to the authorities.

Nicaragua

Red Cross dissolved, new foundation under government control

Following accusations of lacking neutrality during the socio-political protests in 2018, the National Red Cross was dissolved, and a legal successor with the same name was established under the health ministry, according to information provided by the National Assembly on 10.05.23. Also, the assets of the predecessor organisation were confiscated.

Nigeria

Kaduna State: Worshippers kidnapped from church

On 07.05.23, a group of unknown gunmen attacked the Bege Baptist Church in Chikun Local Government Area (LGA) in the northern Nigerian state of Kaduna and abducted 25 worshippers, including several children. This is according to media reports quoting authorities and other sources. The kidnappers initially held 40 people, but some of them managed to escape on the day of the attack. Eleven people were released a short time later. The remaining hostages are believed to be held in a nearby forest for ransom. Media report that this is already the fourth attack on a Baptist church in Kaduna State in 2023. Violence in the state, which is not far from Nigeria's capital Abuja, has been reported frequently (cf. BN of 02.01.23, 13.03.23, 17.04.23 and 24.04.23). In the same LGA where the Baptist church was attacked, the military recently freed 14 hostages (cf. BN of 13.03.23). A survey by the NGO Global Rights published on 05.05.23 stats that a total of 658 people were kidnapped across the country in the first quarter of 2023, with the north of Nigeria more affected by violence than the south.

Edo State: Cluster of attacks in rural areas

According to media reports in late April 2023, there has been an increase in attacks by armed groups on villages in remote areas of southern Edo State. Observers of the security situation in the region believe that the perpetrators are herdsmen who have migrated from more northern areas of Nigeria and are operating with collaborators. Ten small villages in the Ovia North-East Local Government Area (LGA) were the latest to be affected when groups of unidentified men apparently went from house to house killing and kidnapping people for ransom. Reportedly, the communities of Igolo and Abumwenre are now completely deserted. Witnesses say that Igolo was attacked three times within one week. Many parents have stopped sending their children to school because of security concerns. Some of the affected people are now living in an IDP camp in the same LGA. There are complaints about the low presence of state security forces. Although military posts have been set up in strategic locations in Edo State, this at best curbs the attacks, but does not put a permanent end to them. The latest incidents may reflect a further escalation in the conflicts between sedentary and nomadic people, which have so far claimed victims mainly in the central region (cf. BN of 13.03.23 and 24.04.23).

Northeast: UN fears food crisis

Around 4.3 million people in north-eastern Nigeria may face a severe food crisis between June and August 2023. This is according to media reports from late April 2023, citing assessments by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). Above all, children are at risk, particularly in the states of Borno, Adamawa and Yobe. WFP and UNICEF need to step up their efforts in the region. However, funding for scaling up these activities is not yet secured.

Pakistan

Mass protests across the country following the temporary arrest of former Prime Minister Imran Khan

On 09.05.23, a military police unit arrested former prime minister Imran Khan on corruption charges during a hearing at the Islamabad High Court where he appeared in connection with another case pending against him. Media report that more than 100 different cases are pending against him, including several corruption cases, terrorism, and blasphemy.

Following Imran Khan's arrest, violence erupted across the country, particularly in the strongholds of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party. In Punjab, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and the capital Islamabad, thousands of angry people

fought street battles with security forces and set fire to cars and buildings. Al Jazeera reported that at least nine people died and more than 4,000 people were arrested, most of them in Punjab, among them many leading PTI politicians. Mobile internet has been shut down indefinitely and social media have been blocked. Schools and universities were closed on 10.05.23.

For the first time, the mass protests were openly directed against the army, which is considered the real power in Pakistan. By way of example, PTI supporters entered the military headquarters in Rawalpindi, and in Lahore an angry crowd looted the house of a military official.

Imran Khan himself had relied on the army's power apparatus during his time in office. Since his ouster in a no-confidence vote in April 2022, he has become increasingly outspoken in his criticism of the powerful military. As opposition leader, he has also exploited popular discontent over the dire economic situation.

On 12.05.23, the Islamabad High Court granted Imran Khan two weeks' bail. After his temporary release, Khan once again called on his supporters to protest against the government and to demand 'real freedom' (Haqeeqi Azaadi).

Palestinian Autonomous Territories / Israel

Escalating violence between Israeli military and armed group in Gaza

On 09.05.23, the Israeli military killed three senior members of the armed group Islamic Jihad in Palestine (PIJ) in air strikes on Gaza. Ten civilians were also killed, among them relatives of the militants, but also a neighbouring family. The air strikes marked the beginning of five days of intense mutual shelling by the Israeli military and PIJ. A ceasefire was not reached until 13.05.23.

Six senior PIJ members have reportedly been killed by Israeli air strikes. The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) has recorded a total of 34 people killed (including 13 civilians), six members of an armed group, and 15 people whose status has yet to be determined. Israeli sources reported more than 1,400 rockets fired from Gaza towards Israel, with one-fifth of them hitting the ground inside Gaza. According to a Palestinian human rights organisation, these misfires left at least three people dead, among them two children. In Israel, the rockets have killed two people.

More than 948 people have fled their homes, OCHA stated. The responsible ministry inside Gaza said that more than 940 housing units were damaged, 51 destroyed, and 49 others severely damaged and uninhabitable. The military claims that only the PIJ was targeted, but that its members often hide in residential buildings. The military further said that it tries to warn civilians living in these areas of air strikes on such targets but that civilian casualties still continue to occur. Crossings into Israel for people and goods remained closed for five days. As a result, people from Gaza were unable to receive medical treatment in the West Bank and Jerusalem.

Hamas, which runs Gaza, has kept a low profile in this latest escalation, but welcomed the PIJ's action.

West Bank: Three killed in clashes with the Israeli military

According to media reports on 14.05.23, the Israeli military killed two Palestinians in an armed confrontation during a raid on the Balata refugee camp. In addition, a Palestinian was shot dead near the town of Jenin after border police said he had threatened security forces with a knife.

Senegal

Poor prison and detention conditions and ill-treatment; practice of pre-trial detention

In a press released dated 05.05.23, the NGO L'Observatoire national des lieux de privation de liberté (ONLPL) reported poor prison conditions and ill-treatment of some detainees in the prisons that the organisation visited in the country. Detainees had described torture and similar violations of human dignity suffered in police custody and during prisoner transport. The reports came from people who were arrested during demonstrations by the opposition and in particular by Ousmane Sonko's Patriotes africains du Sénégal pour le travail, l'éthique et la fraternité (PASTEF) party in Diourbel, Mbacké, Bignona, Ziguinchor and Dakar (cf. BN entries in recent months). Also, the ONLPL said that cases of ill-treatment of prisoners have been documented in the Rebeuss prison (Maison

d'Arret) in Dakar and the Maison d'Arret et de Correction in Ziguinchor. The ONLPL called on the authorities to respect the rights and dignity of those arrested and detained.

In a statement of 05.05.23, the Senegalese Human Rights League (LSDH) also expressed concern about the continued pre-trial detention of a 'large number of Senegalese citizens for alleged offences not punishable under ordinary law'. The LSDH also deplored the systematic rejection of requests for provisional release.

Press reports indicate that on 08.05.23, nearly 300 PASTEF members held in prisons in Diourbel, Ziguinchor and Dakar went on an indefinite hunger strike over prolonged pre-trial detention and political imprisonment.

Sonko's presidential bid in jeopardy

Following appeals lodged by both the prosecution and the plaintiff, Minister Mame Mbaye Niang, the Dakar Court of Appeals on 08.05.23 sentenced PASTEF party leader Ousmane Sonko in his absence to a suspended prison sentence of one year and two months for defamation and public insult (cf. BN of 03.04.23). Sonko's lawyers have appealed against the verdict to the Supreme Court (Cour suprême).

A Senegalese expert on electoral law and others believe that the status consequence of this criminal conviction - if it were to become final - would be the automatic loss of Sonko's eligibility under the current electoral law. There have been only sporadic reports in the media of legal opinions to the contrary.

Sonko criticised the appeal ruling as politically motivated and spoke of 'judicial banditry'. He called for civil disobedience and resistance. The opposition coalition Yewwi Askan Wi (YAW) and other opposition forces also condemned the verdict. It was also in the presidential elections of 2019 that political rivals such as Khalifa Sall and Karim Wade were barred from participating due to previous convictions.

The announcement of the appeal verdict led to sporadic rioting and vandalism in Dakar and elsewhere.

On 16.05.23 Sonko will be facing charges of rape and death threats in another pending court case (cf. BN of 23.01.23).

Mass protest against President Sall's third candidacy

Media report that on 12.05.23, several thousand people protested in Dakar's Place de la Nation in Dakar against the possible candidacy of incumbent President Macky Sall for a third term in office. The demonstrators also demanded the release of political prisoners, and some expressed solidarity with Sonko. The demonstration was called for by the recently formed heterogeneous opposition movement Mouvement des forces vives du Sénégal (cf. BN of 24.04.23) and was authorised in advance by the prefect of Dakar.

According to several consistent media reports, the mass protest was peaceful, notably without any intervention by the security forces. Some media reported clashes between supporters of Sonko and of Khalifa Sall, who had signalled his participation in the political dialogue called for by President Sall. After the demonstration, violent protesters apparently attacked and threw stones at security forces who responded with tear gas. Also, media workers were affected by the tear gas attack.

Violence in Dakar over land dispute; use of firearms and deaths

According to unanimous media reports, serious violent clashes broke out in mid-May 2023 between residents of the north-western Ngor neighborhood of Dakar and the security forces, following a long-running land dispute between the ethnic Lébou community and the Senegalese state. Amnesty International (AI) reported on 12.05.23 that a girl was killed by the gendarmerie using live ammunition against the protesters - the government has denied any such use of firearms. The leader of the 'Ngor debout' movement confirmed another death as a result of the unrest without giving further details. According to government and media reports, a security guard was lynched by a group in Ngor on suspicion of being a member of the gendarmerie. In addition to extensive property damage, dozens of people were injured and arrested, according to media reports.

AI condemned the excessive use of force by members of the gendarmerie against civilians in Ngor on 09.05.23 and during earlier protests. Citing video and photographic evidence the organisation had analysed, AI reported excessive use of force, the use of firearms and tear gas in closed spaces. According to AI, videos showed gendarmerie forces beating detained and handcuffed people and using people as human shields to advance further into the district cordoned off by the security forces.

Amnesty International called on the authorities to investigate the use of lethal weapons by security forces in Ngor on 09.05.23 and in previous incidents so that those responsible can be identified and held accountable. During demonstrations in March 2021, a total of 12 people had been killed as a result of the use of live ammunition by the

security forces. The most recent apparent use of firearms to kill a youth during protests was reportedly on 20.03.23 (cf. BN of 27.03.23).

Somalia

ATMIS: Troop withdrawal

According to the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS), the withdrawal of 2,000 ATMIS troops out of a total of around 20,000 ATMIS is to be accelerated by the end of June 2023. In some bases, the number of ATMIS troops will be reduced and the Somali National Army (SNA) will increase the number of its forces accordingly. This is the first phase of the Somali Transition Plan (STP). The UN is pushing for compliance with the STP and for a strategic withdrawal, followed by a handover of security responsibilities to the SNA. According to ATMIS, the troop withdrawal should not affect security measures against al-Shabaab.

Flooding

On 14.05.23, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) said that according to initial estimates, at least 460,470 people have been affected by flash floods following heavy rains, particularly in Beledweyne (Hiiraan region) and Baardheere (Gedo region). Nearly 219,000 people, including many IDPs, have been displaced from their homes. At least 22 people are reported dead. Homes and farmland were flooded, and schools and health facilities were temporarily closed. Localised flooding has also been reported in other regions, including Somaliland, Puntland, Galmudug and Jubaland.

Sudan

Talks in Saudi Arabia

Talks between representatives of the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) in Jeddah (Saudi Arabia), which began on 06.05.23, led to an agreement on 11.05.23 on guidelines for allowing humanitarian aid. Media report that both the SAF and the RSF committed themselves to respect international humanitarian law and to allow humanitarian assistance. Accordingly, the protection of civilians was agreed to be the top priority for both actors. However, a ceasefire could not be reached within this framework. In another attempt to reach an agreement on a ceasefire, talks were resumed in Jeddah on 14.05.23. In an earlier interview with an Egyptian TV station, Sudanese army general Burhan had confirmed that the SAF was only willing to ease the pressure on civilians as part of an agreement, whereas a political agreement with the RSF was not in the army's interest.

Ongoing fighting

Media report that despite the Jeddah agreement, fighting continues, particularly in and around the capital Khartoum and in Geneina (West Darfur). The RSF reportedly controls several districts in Khartoum, including the presidential palace. The SAF is attempting to capture the parts of the capital currently controlled by the RSF through massive attacks. On 13.05.23, there were reports of fierce fighting with little regard for the agreed protection of civilians, with the RSF continuing to use civilian buildings as protection against SAF attacks. Attacks by combatants on civilians have also continued. Due to the ongoing violence, the airspace in Sudan will remain closed until 31.05.23, with the exemption of relief and evacuation flights.

On 12.05.23, fighting reportedly intensified in Geneina, West Darfur, and continued until 13.05.23, leaving over 100 people dead. The RSF has denied any involvement in the fighting.

With the police unable to carry out their original duties due to the ongoing fighting, a security vacuum has appeared in many places, resulting in a sharp increase of criminally motivated attacks and looting of apartments, houses, shops, bank branches and warehouses.

According to the UN, at least 675 people have been killed and at least 5,576 injured so far. However, the number of unreported cases is estimated to be much higher. For the period from 15.04. to 03.05.23, the data analysis platform ACLED registered more than 750 victims in the ongoing fighting.

Media report that in the capital of White Nile State, Kosti (also Kusti), there have been days of clashes between armed groups of the two ethnic groups Hausa and Nuba. A direct link to the power struggles between the SAF and

the RSF seems unlikely. Fighting reportedly broke out on 06.05.23, killing up to 25 people and injuring around 50. On 10.05.23, the leaders of the two ethnic groups agreed on a ceasefire.

Humanitarian situation

As stockpiles of humanitarian supplies continue to be bombed or looted, the UN predicts a massive increase of up to 2.5 million people suffering from hunger if the conflict continues. The states of West Darfur, West Kordofan, Blue Nile, Red Sea and North Darfur would be particularly affected.

Despite the ongoing fighting and problems with the delivery and storage of humanitarian goods, WFP has started distributing food to the people in Gedaref, Gezira, Kassala and White Nile states. The plan is to reach up to 384,000 people in the short time. However, due to the current situation, WFP estimates that up to 19 million people in Sudan may face difficulties getting a meal a day in the future.

The EU has set up an airlift of humanitarian supplies to Port Sudan and pledged further funding for humanitarian aid. Already on 09.05.23, a total of 30 tonnes of relief goods arrived in Port Sudan, where they will be distributed by UNICEF and WFP.

Thousands of people on the run

According to media reports on 09.05.23, citing IOM surveys, more than 700,000 people have fled since the outbreak of fighting. The number has doubled since last week. In addition, over 200,000 people have crossed the border into a neighbouring country, which is also double the number from last week (cf. BN of 08.05.23).

Syria

Readmission to the Arab League

On 07.05.23, the 22-nation confederation agreed to readmit Syria to the Arab League. The official readmission is expected to take place on 19.05.23. Syria had been suspended from the organisation in November 2011 following the Assad government's crackdown on its own people.

Lebanon and Jordan, in particular, hope that a diplomatic rapprochement will allow the return of refugees to Syria and an effective fight against the Captagon trade. The Gulf states hope that the Iranian (military) presence in Syria will be pushed back. Other states, such as Egypt, are more reluctant to re-establish bilateral relations and might set preconditions for Damascus. The US, on the other hand, believes that normalisation with Syria can only take place through a political process, at the end of which the Syrian people would be able to vote out the Assad government.

Rapprochement with Türkiye

On 10.05.23, the Syrian and Turkish foreign ministers announced their intention to draw up a plan to improve diplomatic relations. The two had travelled to Moscow for talks together with the Iranian foreign minister at Russia's invitation. It was the highest-level diplomatic contact between Ankara and Damascus since the outbreak of the Syrian conflict.

The Syrian government continues to make the full withdrawal of the Turkish military from northern Syria a condition for normalising relations with its neighbour. In Türkiye, the fate of the more than 3.5 million Syrians who have fled their country has become one of the biggest issues in the current election campaign: While President Erdogan has largely avoided addressing the issue in his campaign rallies, all of his rival candidates have promised to return the refugees back to Syria in various ways.

Sweida: Well-known drug dealer and family killed in air strike

Local media and the opposition-affiliated Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR) unanimously report two airstrikes on 08.05.23 in the south of the country, apparently targeting a prominent figure in the Captagon drug trade. According to the SOHR, the first bombing, near the village of Shuab in Sweida governorate, killed Merhi al-Ramthan, his wife and six children. In a second attack in the neighbouring Dar'a governorate, a drug laboratory was reportedly destroyed. Neither the Syrian nor the Jordanian authorities have commented on the incident. The SOHR believes that Jordanian security forces carried out the attack. Al-Ramthan was listed by the Jordanian authorities as one of the most wanted drug traffickers and was said to have had good contacts with pro-Assad militias and Lebanese Hezbollah.

Türkiye

Presidential and parliamentary election results

According to the first provisional results of the presidential election held on 14.05.23, there will be a run-off after neither of the two leading candidates won an outright majority. About 99.38 percent of the votes have been counted so far. Presidential candidates need to win more than 50 percent of the votes in the first round to be declared winner. If no one passes this threshold, a run-off will be held in the coming weeks. According to the official election commission, incumbent President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, leader of the AKP, has so far secured around 49.42 percent of the vote. Kemal Kilicdaroglu, leader of the opposition Republican People's Party (CHP), received 44.95 percent of the votes cast, while a third candidate, Sinan Ogan of the right-wing alliance Ata İttifakı (ATA Alliance, 'Alliance of Ancestors'), surprisingly gained around 5.2 percent of the votes.

Erdogan and Kilicdaroglu will now face each other in a run-off on 28.05.23.

Voters also cast their ballots for the 600 seats in the country's parliament. According to the official count, the AKP-led parliamentary bloc 'Republican Alliance' won almost half of the seats in parliament with 49.39 percent, while the CHP-led 'National Alliance' gained 35.14 percent of the seats. The left-wing 'Labour and Freedom Alliance', which was co-founded by the HDP, secured 10.53 percent of the seats.

According to the election commission, the turnout was more than 88 percent of Türkiye's 64 million eligible voters.

Tunisia

Synagogue attack during pilgrimage

Media report that on 09.05.23, several Jewish people were killed and others injured in an attack on the El Ghriba synagogue in Djerba. The attack took place during an annual pilgrimage that attracts many worshippers from abroad. Police officers were also killed, and the attacker was shot dead. Despite accusations to the contrary, President Kais Saied insisted that his country remained a safe place for people of the Jewish faith and that the case would be investigated.

Ukraine

Development of fighting in and around Bakhmut

The town of Bakhmut remains a major theatre of ongoing fighting. There are increasing signs that the dynamics of the conflict around the town and the surrounding area have shifted slightly in favour of the Ukrainian armed forces. Media reports say that last week, Russian army units withdrew on the southern flank, allowing Ukrainian forces to retake at least one kilometre of previously occupied territory. Ukrainian Deputy Defence Minister Anna Maljar said that not a single position near Bakhmut was lost last week. Yevgeny Prigozhin, leader of the Wagner mercenary Group, which was heavily involved in the fighting on the Russian side, also reported on Telegram about the withdrawal of regular Russian combat units near Bakhmut and publicly criticised the Russian defence ministry.

First conviction of a UPC Metropolitan

The district court in the central Ukrainian city of Kropyvnyzkyj has sentenced Metropolitan Iosaf, former head of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Ukrains'ka pravoslavna cerkva; UPC) diocese in the Kirovohrad region, to three years' imprisonment with a two-year suspended sentence. In addition, he is banned from holding positions as head of church administrations and dioceses for one year. This is the first conviction of a UPC metropolitan since the beginning of the armed conflict with Russia. The conflict had led to increasing tensions between the Ukrainian state and the UPC, which is canonically affiliated to the Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate. The UPC has the largest number of parishes, priests, and monasteries in the country and is regularly accused by the security services and politicians of sympathising and cooperating with Russia's state structures and armed forces. However, the UPC denies these allegations. In the recent past, there have been numerous searches of UPC clergy and church properties (cf. BN of 12.12.22). In a report on the human rights situation between 01.08.22 and 31.01.23, published on 24.03.23, the UNHCHR expressed concern that measures taken against the UPC might be discriminatory. The UPC sees itself as a victim of religious persecution and compares the Ukrainian government's actions to repressive

measures during the Soviet era. The conviction of the aforementioned cleric was for 'violating the equality of citizens' (punishable under Article 161 of the Ukrainian Criminal Code). He was accused of publicly supporting the occupation of Ukrainian territory and inciting sectarian discord in favour of Russia. According to the Ukrainian authorities, Metropolitan Iosaf belonged to the inner circle of Moscow Patriarch Kirill with whom he coordinated subversive activities against Ukraine.

USA / Mexico/ Colombia/ Guatemala

End of Title 42 directive; announcement of new regional migration centres; asylum restrictions

On 11.05.23, the Title 42 directive expired which, since March 2020 and in connection with COVID-19 health risks, had allowed the US Border Patrol to expel migrants arriving at the US-Mexican border swiftly and unbureaucratically back into Mexico - without the possibility of applying for asylum. Between March 2020 and March 2023, an estimated total of 2.8 million people were deported under this programme. President Biden announced the deployment of 1,500 additional military personnel to assist with administrative tasks at the border and to reduce the burden on the Border Patrol, as the influx of people is expected to increase. In addition, new regional migration centres will open in Colombia and Guatemala in the coming weeks, with an aim of shifting the initial registration or filing of an application for entry into the US. An app to book an appointment with the US border authorities to file an asylum claim has also been introduced. However, media report that this app is already overloaded and the number of available appointments is limited.

In addition, Homeland Security Secretary Mayorkas announced that Title 8, which bans illegal entrants from re-entering the country for five years, will be re-enforced with immediate effect. Under the new asylum rule, those who enter the country without authorisation after travelling through another country are no longer entitled to asylum in the US as of 11.05.23. Although UNHCR and IOM welcomed the creation and expansion of legal entry routes to the US, they criticised the new restrictive regulations, saying that they limit the fundamental right to asylum and are incompatible with the principles of international refugee law. In a press release, the two organisations also recalled that any return agreement must respect the principle of non-refoulement.

Yemen

New demand for independence of South Yemen

On 08.05.23, a 'National Charter' was adopted by the Southern Transitional Council (STC) with the participation of other pro-secessionist groups. Among other things, the charter calls for an independent state of South Yemen within the pre-May 1990 borders.

The STC is an organisation formed in 2017 that formally cooperates with the Yemeni government but has its own agenda; violent clashes between STC-affiliated militias and the Yemeni military occur regularly.

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