



# Briefing Notes

Group 62 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

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## Afghanistan

### Security situation

The National Resistance Front (NRF) says it killed one Taliban fighter and injured two others in Parwan province on 25.08.23. The Afghanistan Freedom Front (AFF) informed that it killed three Taliban fighters and injured seven others in Laghman and Kandahar provinces on 27.08.23.

### Persecution situation

On 22.08.23, the United Nations Assistance Mission Afghanistan (UNAMA) published its report on the persecution of members of the former government by the Taliban. In the period from 15.08.21 to 30.06.23, UNAMA documented at least 800 cases of human rights violations, including extra-judicial killings (218), arbitrary arrests and detentions (424), torture and ill-treatment (144) as well as enforced disappearances (14) linked to the former government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and its security forces. The media are reporting more incidents all the time. On 23.08.23, residents of Kandahar province alleged that certain local Taliban leaders are operating private prisons where they are reportedly holding former officials and military personnel of the former republic. According to news reports on 22.08.23, a military official of the former government was arrested by the Taliban in Parwan province. According to media reports on 23.08.23, a young man from Panjshir who wanted to leave for Iran was detained by the Taliban in Herat province. He died after 22 days in detention from the torture he had been subjected to. On 27.08.23, the Taliban allegedly fired on a motorcade of a wedding in Laghman province because loud music was being played. One student was reportedly killed.

### Further restrictions for women

On 24.08.23, the Taliban stopped about 100 women who had received a scholarship to study in Dubai and wanted to travel there in a chartered plane from leaving the country. Some of the women had the male escort demanded by the Taliban with them. On 26.08.23, the Taliban-appointed Minister of Virtue, Mohammad Khaled Hanafi, declared that women were forbidden to visit the Band-e Amir chain of lakes in Bamyan province, which is very popular as a holiday destination.

## Algeria

### Prison sentences sought for journalists

As announced on 23.08.23, two journalists are facing three-year prison sentences each. Mustapha Bendjemaa, editor-in-chief of the private newspaper Le Provincial based in Annaba, had been arrested in mid-February 2023, as had Raouf Farrah, an Algerian-Canadian researcher and analyst for the Global Initiative against Transnational Organised Crime (GI-TOC).

Bendjemaa is accused of receiving foreign funds, violating public order and publishing confidential information. According to the National Committee for the Release of Prisoners (Comité Nationale pour la Libération des Détenus - CNLD), Farrah is facing accusations of publishing online or on social media information and documents whose content is classified as partially or fully secret.

## **Bangladesh / Myanmar**

### **Sixth anniversary of the Rohingya mass exodus from Myanmar**

Since 25.08.23, thousands of Rohingya refugees have been protesting in several camps in Cox's Bazar district to mark the sixth anniversary of their mass exodus from Myanmar. The protests were linked to demands for a safe return to their homeland. Since 25.08.17, Bangladesh has been hosting around 1.1 million Rohingya in refugee camps in Cox's Bazar; they had been displaced by the Myanmar military's targeted violence. On 27.08.23, the Bangladeshi Foreign Minister announced that the government would start repatriating about 1,000 Rohingya refugees to their home country this year. In the process, it must be ensured that families are not torn apart, he said. The activities of criminal groups pushed up the crime rate in the refugee camps since 2022. For example, in the past six years 186 homicides have been officially recorded in the refugee camps. Of these, 85 occurred between 25.08.22 and 24.08.23 alone. These crimes are said to be related to drug trafficking, extortion, kidnapping and turf wars by groups active in the camps, such as the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (Arsa) and the Rohingya Solidarity Organization (RSO).

## **Brazil**

### **LGBTIQ rights: Court ruling allows prison sentences for homophobic hate speech**

According to a Supreme Court ruling handed down on 22.08.23, homophobic hate speech is now legally on a par with racist hate speech and can thus also be punished with imprisonment. The current ruling once again tightens a 2019 decision that criminalised collective hate speech in general against the LGBTIQ community, but not necessarily individual homophobic insults. Organisations advocating LGBTIQ rights welcomed the ruling. Despite progressive legislation, violence and societal discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity remain widespread. According to Transgender Europe, more than 1,740 trans people have been killed between 2008 and 2022. According to the National Observatory of Deaths and Violence against LGBTIQ in Brazil, the highest number of LGBTIQ people worldwide were killed in 2022, there were 273 victims. Trans women and gay men were affected most. This negative trend continued in the first quarter of 2023, with 80 homicides.

## **Burkina Faso**

### **Government bans homosexuality on television**

The Burkinabe government's Supreme Council for Communications banned the broadcasting of television channels that publicly address homosexuality on 24.08.23. According to media reports, the reason for the ban is the increase in audiovisual programmes with homosexual content, which are accessible to minors, among others.

Same-sex partnerships meet with social rejection in Burkina Faso. Although not explicitly mentioned in the penal code, homosexuality can be prosecuted in Burkina Faso as a "disturbance of public order" and punished with up to three years in prison.

### **Suspected terrorists killed**

The Burkinabe police unit in the east of the country killed at least 30 armed men designated as terrorists on 25.08.23. According to the Burkina Faso news agency (Aib), the task forces of the national police (Groupement d'unités mobiles d'intervention de la police nationale) and the paramilitary group "Volontaires pour la défense de la patrie" (VDP) destroyed a terrorist base in Yamba in Gourma province. At least 13 other members of the terrorist group were reportedly captured in the process. News of this kind is not uncommon in Burkina Faso (cf. BN of 21.08.23).

## **Egypt**

### **Publisher and activist arrested for libel**

On 21.08.23, the authorities arrested the publisher and political activist Hisahm Kassem for insulting and abusing state officials, according to media reports.

Kassem is a co-founder of the political group al-Tayar al-Hurr, formed in June 2023. The group plans to support an opposition candidate to run against the current president, Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, in the upcoming presidential elections next year. Al-Sisi is expected to run again.

### **Family members of dissidents living abroad arrested**

Numerous media report the arrest of the father of the exiled journalist and human rights activist Ahmed Gamal Siada, Gamal Abdelhamid Siada by the security authorities on 22.08.23. Siada is accused of abusing social media, spreading false news and membership in an outlawed association.

According to media reports, also Alaa Eladly was arrested by the security authorities when entering the country at Cairo airport on 18.08.23. He is the father of Fagr Eladly, a German-Egyptian doctor living in Germany, who harshly criticised incumbent President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi at a press conference in Germany in 2015.

International human rights organisations as well as the affected families suspect that the authorities intend to intimidate and exert pressure on Ahmed Gamal Siada and Fagr Eladly by arresting Siada and Eladly. Family members of government critics living abroad have been regularly subjected to harassment, even arrests, by the Egyptian authorities in the past as well.

## **Ecuador**

### **Early election result; run-off in October 2023; another local politician killed**

In the early elections on 20.08.23, left-wing politician Luisa González (Revolución Ciudadana) and centre-right candidate Daniel Noboa (Acción Democrática Nacional, ADN) won the run-off for the presidency on 15.10.23. According to information from the Supreme Electoral Authority (CNE) on 26.08.23, the voting for the 137 seats in the National Assembly will probably be partially repeated due to technical problems on election day. Only Ecuadorian citizens living abroad who are eligible to vote will be affected.

After the fatal attack on the presidential candidate Villavicencio (cf. BN of 14.08.23), security measures for the elections had been considerably stepped up once more and voter turnout was high. In the run-up to the ballot, Pedro Briones (Revolución Ciudadana), another politician, was killed in the municipality of San Mateo, province of Esmeraldas.

## **El Salvador**

### **Criticism of hotline for anonymous reporting of alleged gang membership**

Already in May 2022, the Salvadoran government had set up a telephone hotline for members of civil society to anonymously report alleged collaborators of the MS-13 or Barrio 18 gangs, whose cases would then be investigated by the police. With reference to various national NGOs, this form of reporting is criticized in a report of the Spanish newspaper El País of 26.08.23, as it could easily be abused by people to settle neighbourhood feuds or personal scores. The organisation Socorro Jurídico claims to be aware of many such cases of denunciation; stating that about 14,000 people are still imprisoned innocently and without any relation to a gang. The article mentions examples of presumably unjustified cases of imprisonment after anonymous tip-offs; also a judge has his say and deplores a progressive reversal of the burden of proof in the Salvadoran justice system.

## Iran

### **Prison sentence against prominent university activist confirmed**

According to media reports, the multi-year prison sentence against a prominent former initiator of student protests at Tehran's Amir Kabir University has been upheld by an appeals court. The convicted activist announced this on social media.

He said that the sentence amounts to a total of six years in prison. In addition, he was sentenced to two years' banishment from Tehran and a ban on leaving the country. A two-year ban on online activities was also imposed on him.

The convicted protest leader had been first arrested in 2007 and was imprisoned from 2009 to 2013. He was temporarily detained again at the start of the nationwide protests in September 2022.

### **Prison sentences upheld against eight people on security guard murder charges**

According to media reports on 23.08.23, eight people, including a woman, were sentenced to prison terms ranging from five to 15 years in connection with the death of a member of the Basij volunteer militia during the 2022 nationwide protests in Karaj (Alborz province). The sentence has been upheld by the Supreme Court after an appeal and the convicts were charged with accessory to murder and other offences, the media said. As the main perpetrators in the case two men had been sentenced to death and executed in January 2023 (cf. BN of 12.12.22 and 09.01.23).

### **Kurdish human rights activist sentenced**

On 24.08.23, a Kurdish human rights network reported that an activist and teacher from Sanandaj (Kordestan province) was sentenced to one year in prison, banishment to Dizel Abad prison in Kermanshah (province of the same name) and 40 lashes on 22.08.23.

The man is accused of disturbing public order and of propaganda against the system. He had already been briefly arrested in Sanandaj on 06.01.23 and 18.01.23 and released on bail in February 2023.

## Iraq

### **PKK-Türkiye conflict**

On 27.08.23, a suspected Turkish drone attacked a vehicle in the town of Zangidar (Sulaimaniyya province), reportedly killing three PKK fighters.

Already on 26.08.23 Türkiye flew air strikes in the Iraqi-Turkish border area in Dohuk province after an explosion had killed a Turkish soldier on the day before. No personal injuries were reported in connection with the Turkish air strikes.

Also on 24.08.23, a Turkish soldier was killed presumably by the PKK. On the same day, two Turkish drones attacked Sidakan (Erbil province), killing a total of seven PKK supporters.

The Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan officially visited Erbil on 24.08.23 and called on the Iraqi government to classify the PKK as a terrorist organisation.

### **Clearance of landmine-contaminated areas progresses**

On 21.08.23, Iraqi Minister of Environment, Nizar Amidi, announced the clearing of 59% of the landmine-contaminated area in Iraq. The remaining 41% correspond to about 2,000 km<sup>2</sup>.

Because of the multitude of conflicts Iraq saw in the past decades, it is considered one of the most landmine-contaminated countries, most recently IS had made extensive use of mines.

### **Withdrawal of the Emtidad Party**

The Emtidad party, which emerged from the 2019 protest movement (Tishreen Movement), announced on 21.08.23 that it would not participate in the upcoming provincial elections on 18.12.23. The party cited time delays in electing a new party leadership as the reason.

The Tishreen movement of 2019 had protested against the existing political system, corruption and high unemployment.

### **Freedom of the Press in the Kurdistan Autonomous Region (KR-I)**

On 24.08.23, journalist Islam Kashani was arrested. Kurdish authorities cited suspected links to the PKK as the reason for his arrest, but the US-based Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) holds that it is due to Kashani's criticism of the Kurdish Regional Government. Kashani was released on bail on 26.08.23.

Meanwhile, journalists Sherwan Sherwani and Guhdar Zebari remain in prison, where they have been held since October 2020, although they should have been released in August and September 2023 respectively. Instead, Sherwani was sentenced to a further four years in prison in July 2023 (see BN of 24.07.23), and further charges were brought against Zebari on 16.08.23.

Numerous NGOs as well as a press release of the German Foreign Office describe the trials of Sherwani and Zebari as not in accordance with the rule of law and unfair. Sherwani and Zebari had previously participated in protests against the Kurdish regional government.

Freedom of the press and freedom of expression in the KR-I are progressively restricted. Time and again journalists and activists experience violence, especially in response to criticism of the Kurdish regional government.

## **Lebanon**

### **Jnoud el-Rab**

On the evening of 23.08.23, the Christian group Jnoud el-Rab ("Soldiers of the Lord") verbally attacked the guests of a bar in Beirut's Mar Mikhail district which is also known as a local meeting place for homosexuals. The street is dominated by nightlife activities.

A video taken by someone in the group and spread online, shows patrons of the pub barricading themselves inside. The group has been making news for several months and is said to number around 100 people. The video set off an intense public debate. Lebanon is considered one of the most LGBTIQ-friendly countries in the region, but rhetoric directed against sexual minorities has increased drastically in recent years. In the political debate as well as online, both extremist Islamic as well as Christian camps expressed considerable support for the group, as did many secular voices. Most often the methods used by the group rather than its objectives were criticised or concern was voiced about the interference with economically important nightlife activities. However, there was also public support for the attack's victims, as well as general condemnation of attacks on people. Overall, the situation for LGBTIQ persons tends to deteriorate.

## **Libya**

### **Central bank reunification announced**

On 20.08.23, the Central Bank of Libya announced its reunification. During the civil war that began in 2014 a parallel government was formed in the country's east and since then the financial institution has been divided into a western and an eastern unit. The unit that remained in Tripoli had joined the government also based in the capital. The central bank unit established in Benghazi in eastern Libya, on the other hand, had supported the government based in the east.

The Libyan Central Bank receives the country's oil revenues and is responsible for their distribution. In the past, this repeatedly caused tensions between the two camps. The eastern Libyan government and its supporters accused Tripoli of receiving most of these revenues, although much of the oil comes from the east of the country.

### **Leading IS member arrested**

The authorities informed that they arrested a leading member of IS on 22.08.23. The detained person allegedly played a leading role in the planning and execution of three IS attacks in Tripoli in 2018. These include the attack on the High National Election Commission headquarters in May 2018, which killed 14 people; the attack on the National Oil Corporation (NOC) headquarters in September 2018, which resulted in the death of two NOC employees and ten injured; and the attack on a Ministry of Foreign Affairs building in late December 2018, which caused three deaths.

## **Morocco**

### **King issues pardons**

On the occasion of Youth Day on 21.08.23, King Mohammed VI issued 760 pardons. The pardons consisted of reductions in prison sentences, commutations of life sentences to fixed sentences, remissions of imprisonment or residual imprisonment (601 and 37 persons) and annulments of fines (107 persons).

## **Niger**

### **Current developments**

On 22.08.23, the African Union (AU) publicly announced the suspension of Niger's membership. According to the AU, the decision shall apply until constitutional order is restored in Niger. The AU supports the efforts of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to restore the constitutional order in Niger. The AU had also temporarily suspended the memberships of Burkina Faso and Mali, after their respective military coups.

Mali and Burkina Faso have deployed fighter jets in Niger after ECOWAS activated a task force to forcibly reinstate ousted President Mohamed Bazoum, according to media reports of 23.08.23. Nigeria has agreed to provide the bulk of troops and weapons for ECOWAS, according to media reports.

The junta, which has been in power since the military coup, formed a military alliance with the neighbouring countries Burkina Faso and Mali on 24.08.23 as reported by the media. According to the report, Niger has authorised the armed forces of Mali and Burkina Faso to intervene and send their troops to Niger in the event of an attack. The agreement allows for military assistance in case of military intervention against the coup plotters in Niger. A similar agreement is already in place between Burkina Faso and Mali, which are also led by military governments.

According to media reports, the junta put its armed forces on high alert on 26.08.23. In view of a possible military intervention by ECOWAS, potential enemy contacts are to be reported immediately to the military hierarchy. According to Brigadier General Moussa Salaou Barmou, the aim was to deny the enemy the element of surprise. ECOWAS had provided an intervention force for deployment in Niger (cf. BN of 21.08.23). At the same time, the priority was to seek a peaceful solution to restore constitutional order in the West African country, the reports said.

### **Several fatalities in attack**

Suspected jihadists killed twelve Nigerien members of the military in the Tillabéri region in the south-west of the country on 20.08.23.

The Tillabéri region is located in the so-called tri-border area near Burkina Faso and Mali and is a haven for Sahel jihadists belonging to al-Qaeda and IS. Attacks by armed groups are not uncommon in the region despite the deployment of anti-jihadist troops.

## **Nigeria**

### **North: Several abductions**

Violent actors abducted at least 13 people in two separate incidents in Zamfara State on 19.08.23 and 25.08.23. According to media reports, members of the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC), a village headman and several sedentary people from a farm are among those abducted. Ransom was reportedly demanded.

Armed actors described as bandits raided villages in Ningi and Toro Local Government Areas (LGA) in Bauchi State on 21.08.23, abducting at least 13 people.

Members of the Islamist group Boko Haram abducted at least 48 women from their fields in Mafa LGA, Borno State, on 22.08.23. According to an expert on the Chad region, they were freed again on 23.08.23 because their family members had paid ransom to Boko Haram. Boko Haram members also abducted at least eight sedentary people in a village near Maiduguri in Borno State on 27.08.23.

Kidnappings for ransom are not uncommon in northern Nigeria (see BN of 17.07.23, 31.07.23 and 07.08.23).

## **Pakistan**

### **Fighting in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa**

On 22.08.23, six Pakistani soldiers and four members of the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) were killed in a firefight in the North Waziristan tribal district of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province.

## **Palestinian Territories / Israel**

### **Injured Palestinian dies after raid**

On 26.08.23, it was reported that a 20-year-old Palestinian from the town of Jaba, near Jenin, succumbed to his injuries one month after he was shot during the Israeli army raid in the occupied West Bank (see BN of 10.07.23). His death brings the death toll of people killed in connection with the two-day raid up to 14. The Israeli army claimed to have inflicted heavy damage on the militant groups in the Jenin refugee camp and to have confiscated weapons and money during the raid.

## **Russian Federation**

### **"Wagner Group": leadership killed in plane crash**

Two months after the failed uprising of the private paramilitary organisation "Wagner Group" against the Russian military leadership (cf. BN of 26.06.23), a civilian aircraft of the military company crashed on 23.08.23 on its way from Moscow to St. Petersburg, presumably as a result of an explosion on board. According to the Federal Investigation Committee, citing a DNA examination of the remains, all ten occupants died in the incident, including Yevgeny Prigozhin, the head of the company, and the officials responsible for military operations and logistics, Dmitry Utkin and Valery Chekalov. While the presidential administration has rejected any involvement of the Russian leadership in the crash, numerous Western observers from politics, academia and security circles assume a state-commissioned assault. The think tank Institute for the Study of War, for example, sees the crash as an act of retaliation ordered by President Putin to take revenge for Prigozhin's march on Moscow in June 2023, which was perceived as a betrayal and humiliation, and to put potential challengers and critics of warfare in Ukraine in their place, this time from the nationalist camp.

In the aftermath of the failed rebellion, the Russian authorities reportedly pursued the marginalisation of the "Wagner Group" and therefore poached mercenaries from the group for private military service providers controlled by the Ministry of Defence. In addition, at least 13 high-ranking members of the regular armed forces are said to have been arrested in the weeks following the rebellion and 15 others suspended or dismissed, among the latter the commander-in-chief of the air and space forces and a key Prigozhin ally, Sergei Surovikin. According to observations by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, a major purge of Wagner associates and sympathisers, which was originally expected, has (so far) failed to materialise.

## **Senegal**

### **Petition for the release of Sonko**

More than 140 high-profile figures from Senegal and other countries have signed a petition calling on President Macky Sall to release opposition politician Ousmane Sonko and reverse the dissolution of his PASTEF party, according to various media reports between 21.08.23 and 24.08.23. The media reports say that the intellectuals' petition is damaging to the current government. The imprisoned opposition politician has been charged, among other offences, with inciting insurrection and has been in intensive care since 16.08.23 as a result of his hunger strike since 31.07.23 (cf. BN of 21.08.23).

## **Somalia**

### **SSC militia captures an army base**

In a statement on 25.08.23, the SSC militia, an armed unit composed of the three disputed regions of Sool, Sanaag and Cayn and loyal to the Somali government, said it had taken control of Goojacade, a key Somaliland Armed Forces base outside Las Anods, and other checkpoints after fierce fighting. Reportedly, there were casualties on both sides. In addition, members of the Somaliland army were reportedly captured. According to official Somaliland sources, the army is preparing for a counter-attack. Military mobilisation is reportedly taking place in Las Anod. In a statement issued by Somalia's international partners, including the African Union, the EU and the UN, the escalation was "strongly condemned". Violent clashes between the Somaliland military and the militia have been taking place since the beginning of 2023 (cf. BN of 13.02., 27.02., 06.03., 24.04. and 26.06.23).

### **Recapture of important al-Shabaab stronghold**

On 25.08.23, the Somali army, supported by allied militias, recaptured the strategically important town of El Buur (Galguduud region) from al-Shabaab after days of violent clashes. El Buur had been under al-Shabaab's control since 2017. This is one of the biggest successes since the beginning of the military offensive against al-Shabaab in August 2022 (cf. BN of 10.10.22, 23.01.23 and 17.04.23).

## **Sudan**

### **Security situation**

According to the Darfur Bar Association (DBA), there is an increasing number of reports that child soldiers are used in the ranks of the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) and the Sudanese Army (SAF). According to these reports, children wearing the respective uniforms have been found among soldiers of both armies killed in action. In addition, the DBA bases its allegations on video footage which is said to show child soldiers operating military motor vehicles. On 24.08.23, the commander of the SAF, al-Burhan, appeared outside the command post in Khartoum for the first time since the fighting began in April 2023. After visiting troops in various places in Sudan, al-Burhan was to travel to Egypt and Saudi Arabia for talks on the ongoing conflict and a possible peace.

### **Humanitarian situation**

On 25.08.23, the UN warned that the current conflict would result in an exceptionally bad humanitarian situation. Hunger, disease and displacement are threatening the entire country. In South Kordofan, food supplies are almost completely depleted, as aid agencies no longer have direct access to the suffering regions due to the fighting, the UN said.

## **Syria**

### **Southern Syria: Ongoing protests**

In Suweida city and numerous other towns, protests triggered by the poor economic situation continued (cf. BN of 21.08.23).

Also in Dar'a, protests were held in several localities. Participants in both governorates demanded the ousting of the government and the roll back of Iranian influence in the region. In Suweida city, protesters blocked the offices of the ruling Ba'ath party.

### **North-east: One dead in Turkish air strike**

On 24.08.23, a civilian was killed in an attack of a car by a suspected Turkish combat drone in north-eastern Syria. According to media reports, the man killed had been hired by a regional media station as a driver for a journalist who was injured in the attack.

The attack occurred on a main road near the town of Qamishli in the Kurdish-led SDF-controlled north-east.

### **Several Israeli air strikes**

According to Syrian state media, an Israeli air strike on targets near the capital Damascus on 21.08.23 wounded a Syrian soldier.

An air strike on the international airport in Aleppo on 28.08.23 destroyed a runway and caused a temporary interruption of operations. In the past, Israel has flown air strikes on airports in government-controlled areas to prevent Iran from supplying weapons.

### **North-west: Two killed by Russian air strikes**

According to the Russian military, 17 people were killed on 21.08.23 in Russian air strikes on positions held by Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), which controls large parts of the north-west. The attacks were directed against targets near the city of Idlib in the governorate of the same name.

On the night of 23.08.23, two civilians died in Russian air raids on a water station that was no longer in use and served as their shelter. Five other people were wounded. According to state media, this was followed by a missile attack on the town of Qardaha from the north-west that is controlled by the Islamist HTS. One person was killed.

On 26.08.23, according to a report by the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR), around eleven Syrian military personnel were killed and 20 others injured in an attack by Ansar al-Tawhid, which is allied to al-Qaeda.

## **Thailand**

### **New head of government elected**

On 22.08.23, parliament elected Srettha Thavisin of the formerly largest opposition party Pheu Thai as the new prime minister. Srettha will lead a coalition of eleven parties, including the pro-military and former ruling party Palang Pracharath and the pro-military United Thai Nation. The progressive Move Forward Party (MFP), which emerged victorious in the May 2023 general election, will constitute the opposition. Military-appointed members of the Senate (upper house of parliament) had blocked the appointment of MFP frontrunner Pita Limjaroenrat as head of government including because the party wanted to reform the military and abolish the lese-majesty paragraph, which is used to suppress voices critical of the monarchy. Pheu Thai describes itself as pro-democracy, but does not share the MFP's liberal agenda. Observers expect Srettha to enter into numerous compromises with conservative forces, otherwise he could be forced out of office.

## **Türkiye**

### **Attempted attack on party building foiled**

On 20.08.23, a person left explosives and a flammable substance in a party building shared by HDP and YSP (Yeşil Sol Parti, Green Left Party) in Adana province. Two suspects were arrested. The Adana provincial branch of the HDP said a woman entered the building, placed several bottles she had taken from her bag on a staircase and then left the building. While police were investigating the scene, the woman and another person were caught by party members and handed over to the police. The Adana governor's office stated on its website that the alleged perpetrator was "mentally unstable" and had given contradictory answers when asked why she had tried to carry out the attack.

### **Merger of HDP and YSP**

During the HDP party congress in Ankara on 27.08.23, the party formally decided to merge the HDP and the Yeşil Sol Parti. In future, the pro-Kurdish HDP will only be active under the banner of the green-leftist YSP. This is HDP's response to the threat of a party ban that had been looming since 2021, after it was accused of being close to the PKK. Cahit Kirkazak and Sultan Ozcan were elected as new co-chairs.

## **Uganda**

### **Arrests for same-sex activity**

On 19.08.23, four people were reportedly arrested in Buikwe (central Uganda) for alleged same-sex acts. The arrests were made as part of a raid on a massage parlour after police followed up on a tip-off from members of the public. In May 2023, President Museveni passed the "Anti-Homosexuality Act", which provides for harsh penalties for homosexual acts, among other things (cf. BN of 05.06.23).

## **Ukraine**

### **Civilian war victims (selection)**

Citing Ukrainian authorities, a total of three civilians were reportedly killed and others injured in Russian artillery attacks on two locations near the small town of Lyman (Donetsk oblast) on 22.08.23. Four people were injured by shelling of the border village of Seredyno-Buda (Sumy oblast) on 23.08.23. In the town of Romny, also in the Sumy region but inland, two people died and at least three were injured in an attack on a school. According to information from the region's governor on 24.08.23, seven people were injured by rocket fire in the major city of Dnipro. A Russian attack that hit a café in the village of Podoly in the contested area of Kupyansk (Kharkiv oblast) killed two people and injured another person, as reported on 26.08.23. Furthermore, on the night of 28.08.23, a missile attack on an industrial plant in the Poltava region, which had been less frequently affected by the war, reportedly killed two people and injured two others; two more people are still missing.

### **Development of the war effort**

The Russian Federation continues to attack Ukrainian grain storage and distribution infrastructure in the Odesa region. For example, on the night of 23.08.23, the sea-Danube port of Ismajil was damaged which resulted in reduced export capacities and the destruction of significant quantities of grain.

Similar to the weeks before, direct fighting was reported along the Kupyansk-Svatov-Kreminna line (Kharkiv and Luhansk oblasts), around Bakhmut, along the Avdiivka-Donetsk line and in central areas of the Zaporizhzhya region. The Institute for the Study of War (ISW) analysed that both sides managed to make certain advances in various sections of the front. In particular, the Ukrainian side succeeded in advancing behind the village of Robotyne (Zaporizhzhya oblast). This was later also announced by a representative of the Ukrainian army on 27.08.23.

In general, according to the Ukrainian military, the Russian forces can currently be observed to regroup which suggests the preparation of a new Russian offensive.

The Crimean Peninsula annexed by the Russian Federation also continues to be affected by the war. According to information from the Russian Defence Ministry, picked up by media on 25.08.23, its forces had destroyed 42 drones over Crimea. Two days earlier, the destruction of an anti-aircraft system in Crimea by Ukrainian military intelligence had been reported. There had already been repeated reports of (repelled) attacks by Ukrainian drones in Crimea. On 24.08.23, on the occasion of the Ukrainian national holiday (declaration of independence in 1991), special forces allegedly crossed over to the peninsula by boat. According to Ukrainian sources, the Russian army suffered losses and the Ukrainian flag was raised; according to Russian media, however, the Ukrainian attackers were killed.

## **Venezuela**

### **Announcement of the new governing body of the Supreme Electoral Council**

On 24.08.23, the National Assembly, dominated by the ruling party, announced the new leadership of the Supreme Electoral Council (CNE). Three of the new senior figures are considered close to the government, two close to the opposition. In addition, ten substitutes were appointed. The new chairman will be the pro-government Supreme Comptroller Elvis Eduardo Hidrobo Amoroso. His office had recently banned presidential candidate María Corina Machado, along with other opposition politicians, from holding public office.

## Zimbabwe

### **Numerous NGO workers and election observers arrested by police during elections**

According to press reports, during the presidential, parliamentary and local government elections in Zimbabwe on 23.08.23, about 40 employees of civil society organisations were arrested. Local media reported that they are being charged with violating the Electoral Act. The Zimbabwean police announced on 24.08.23 that numerous election observers were under arrest. The organisations concerned are the Zimbabwe Election Support Network, the Election Resource Centre and Team Pachedu. In Harare and Bulawayo, polling had to be extended at many polling stations because many could not open on time due to lack of ballot papers. The opposition complained about irregularities in the elections, which led to the elections having to be continued on 24.08.23. A presidential decree allowed the affected constituencies to extend voting for another day.

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