



Briefing Notes

Group 62 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

13 November 2023

Afghanistan

Expulsion of Afghan refugees from Pakistan

At a press conference on 08.11.23, Pakistan's interim prime minister Kakar stated that Pakistan would not be stopping the expulsion of illegally resident Afghan refugees to Afghanistan. He said that since the Taliban assumed power in 2021 there had been a dramatic rise in terrorist attacks in Pakistan, first and foremost by the Pakistani Taliban (TTP). He noted that the Afghan Taliban should decide whether they wanted to cooperate with the Pakistani government or with the TTP. According to information from the UN, approx. 280,000 refugees have already returned to Afghanistan, the majority of their own volition. According to information from Pakistan, by 01.11.23 approx. 7,400 illegally resident Afghans had been registered and deported to Afghanistan at the Landikotal holding camp in Pakistan, close to the Torkham border crossing. On the Afghan side there is a large refugee camp in Torkham which is being run by the Taliban. There is also the Chaman holding camp at the Spin Boldak border crossing point (cf. BN of 30.10. and 06.11.23).¹

Security situation: ISKP attacks on Hazaras

It was reported on 08.11.23 that there had again been a bomb attack by Islamic State in Khorasan Province (ISKP) in the west of Kabul (Dasht-e Barchi district). The attack on a bus carrying passengers killed eight people and injured 37. Ethnic Hazaras make up the majority of the population in the district concerned. The ISKP had previously carried out an attack in Dasht-e Barchi on 26.10.23, when a number of people were killed or injured at a boxing club (cf. BN of 30.10.23). On 13.10.23 there was an attack on a Shi'ite mosque in the city of Pul-e-Khumri in Baghlan province (cf. BN of 16.10.23). The current prevalence of reports indicates that the ISKP is stepping up attacks on Hazaras once again, after having broken with this strategy for a time and focusing instead on Taliban governors and foreign state visitors of the Taliban.²

Bangladesh

Textile workers strike and stage protests, some involving violent clashes

For around two weeks now, textile workers in Bangladesh have been demonstrating for higher wages. In some instances, the demonstrations have turned violent. The demonstrators are demanding a three-fold increase in their present pay, in order to be able to meet the increased costs of accommodation, food, healthcare and school fees. On 07.11.23, a government-appointed commission announced a roughly 56 % increase in the minimum wage as of December - the first such increase for five years. The textile workers' union rejected this as unacceptable. Prime minister Sheikh Hasina has ruled out any further increases in pay. On 08.11.23 the protests – which coincided with continuing demonstrations protesting against Sheikh Hasina and calling for free and fair parliamentary elections (cf. BN of 06.11.23) – erupted into violence when clashes occurred with the police. The police subsequently used

tear gas and rubber bullets to break up the demonstration. One woman died – the third person to be killed since the protests began. On 09.11.23 some 15,000 workers clashed with the police and looted around 70 factories. 150 factories were closed indefinitely.

The clothing industry is a key factor in the Bangladeshi economy, employing a workforce of some four million, the overwhelming majority of whom are women. The country is the world's second-largest exporter of clothing.³

Benin

Offensive operations in the north

Benin's defence and security forces carried out offensives against armed groups at the end of October and the beginning of November 2023. According to reports in the media, a number of unidentified armed individuals were killed during the operations. As a concrete example, the reports cite the killing on 09.11.23 of a man near to an army position in the village of Porga in the north-western department of Atakora, close to the border with Burkina Faso. The victim was reportedly suspected of spying for a violent group which operates in northern border regions of Benin. Security in the north of Benin is threatened by jihadist groups, among other factors. Since 2021 in particular, there have been numerous acts of violence against security forces and military facilities, as well as civilians, in the border region with Burkina Faso and in the north of neighbouring Togo (cf. BN of 19.06.23).⁴

Burkina Faso

NGOs criticise forced recruitment of dissidents

On 05.11.23 the Burkinabe human rights movement Mouvement burkinabé des droits de l'homme et des peuples (MBDHP) publicly criticised the targeted recruitment of media representatives, opposition figures, activists and people who are critical of the current military government for military service in the fight against jihadism. According to HRW, on 04.11. and 05.11.23 Burkinabe security forces informed a dozen activist civilians and members of the opposition parties that they are to be conscripted to participate in government security operations throughout the country. HRW is calling for an immediate end to the abuse of conscription provisions and the violation of fundamental human rights.

Some 15 trade unions of the Confédération générale des travailleurs du Burkina (CGT-B) which are also critical of the recruitment of dissidents had called for a rally to be held on 31.10.23 with the aim of taking a public stance against the introduction of the recruitment measures. The rally was prohibited by Ouagadougou's municipal administration on the grounds of the threat to the security situation posed by jihadist violence.

In April 2023 Ibrahim Traoré signed a one-year decree on general mobilisation which enables people aged 18 or over to be recruited for the fight against jihadist groups. According to MBDHP and CGT-B, the decree was drafted and passed with the aim of suppressing dissidents.⁵

Dozens die in attack on village

Unknown armed actors attacked the village of Zaongo in the Centre-Nord region on 06.11.23, killing dozens of civilians. According to reports in the media, women and children were among the victims. Military sources contacted by news channel Jeune Afrique claim that jihadist groups were responsible for the crimes. Other sources attribute the atrocity to members of the military or the paramilitary group Volontaires pour la défense de la patrie (VDP). These sources allege that the attack was carried out because the villagers had refused to join the paramilitary VDP group in order to support the fight against the jihadist groups. The village's residents were accused of complicity with members of the jihadist organisations. The EU has called for an investigation into the fatal attack.⁶

Cameroon

Civilians killed in attack

It has been reported in the media that an armed attack took place on a village in the anglophone South-West region on 06.11.23. Armed separatist fighters reportedly attacked the village of Egbekaw in the municipality of Mamfe,

killing at least 24 civilians, including women and children, and injuring several others. They also set fire to houses. No-one has claimed responsibility for the attack to date.⁷

Democratic Republic of the Congo

Fighting in the east and preparations for elections

The violent conflict between the M23 rebel group and pro-government armed groups in the east of the Congo which flared up once again in October 2023 (cf. BN of 30.10.23) continues. It emerges from reports in the media that the UN Stabilisation Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) announced on 03.11.23 that it has launched operation “Springbok” together with the Congolese army to prevent the M23 rebels from capturing the city of Goma.

As the capital of North Kivu province, the city of Goma serves as a place of refuge for thousands of people displaced by the war. The UN estimates that the most recent fighting has forced some 300,000 more people to flee their homes, taking the total number of people displaced by the M23 conflict to over one million. The camps for internally displaced people on the periphery of Goma have reportedly already been crowded for a number of years, and the continual influx of new arrivals is now making the situation increasingly precarious. Water, food and electricity are in short supply.

The electricity supplier stated on 07.11.23 that the most important power supply lines to the city of Goma had suffered outages as a result of fighting and shelling between the Congolese army and the rebel group in Virunga National Park. As the national park is responsible for 80 % of the power in Goma, the power outages have reportedly already led to blackouts in hospitals and at water supply facilities.

The fighting and attacks by the rebel group place the civilian population in the region’s villages in danger. On 07.11.23 the residents’ association of the villages of Kibati, Kiziba and Muja reported that at least 15 traders had been killed by M23 in nearby Virunga National Park. It appears that such killings have been no rare occurrence in recent weeks.

While the population in North Kivu province is in a state of emergency on account of the fighting, the rest of the country is preparing for the final weeks of campaigning ahead of the general elections which are scheduled for 20.12.23. The general elections in the Democratic Republic of the Congo comprise the presidential, parliamentary and provincial elections as well as some local government elections. On 08.11.23 the Independent National Electoral Commission (CENI) announced that preparation of the election materials had been completed and the further preparations were well on schedule. The civilian population, as well as some of the 26 presidential candidates, had previously criticised a lack of transparency in the election preparations, noting among other things that the electoral rolls had not been posted.

On 06.11.23 the EU announced that it would be dispatching an election monitoring commission comprising more than 50 experts to the Democratic Republic of the Congo in mid-November, in response to an invitation by the Congolese foreign minister. On election day the commission is to be additionally supported by local observers.

Meanwhile, the population in North Kivu fear being excluded from the elections as a result of the prevailing conflict. So far, it has only been possible to carry out voter registration in four of the six districts. The International Crisis Group has warned that up to a million voters in the east of the country could be excluded from the elections, should the unstable conditions persist. North Kivu is the province with the second-largest number of potential voters, after Kinshasa province, in which the capital of the same name is situated.⁸

The Gambia

Situation regarding freedom of the press and the safety of media representatives

On the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes Against Journalists, the Gambia Press Union (GPU) called on the government to protect and promote freedom and security for journalistic work. The GPU pointed out that reforms have yet to materialise in the area of media legislation, which is still repressive in some respects. The legislation was used by the previous government to persecute media representatives and continues to present obstacles to free journalistic work (cf. BN of 09.05.22). The GPU called once again for an end to impunity and justice

for victims (cf. BN of 07.11.22 and 08.05.23), stating that impunity had been instrumental in maintaining the cycle of violence against media representatives for 29 years. The union said that to date no-one responsible for human rights violations and crimes against media representatives under former president Yahya Jammeh or the current incumbent, Adama Barrow, had been brought to justice. It stated that more than 15 physical attacks on media representatives which had gone unpunished had been documented since the change of government, alleging that these attacks were attributable either to the police or to supporters of political parties.

Most recently, media representatives and media companies have been the targets of threats by the Barrow government and media representatives have been arrested and held incommunicado for up to 48 hours. In one case, a media representative was reportedly subjected to physical police violence after his release.

In response to recent statements by president Barrow, which the GPU did not go into in any greater detail and which it described as an attack on the freedom of the press and freedom of speech, supporters of the ruling party allegedly incited violence against individual media representatives and companies online.

Only recently, the GPU's president had expressed his concern at the deteriorating situation with regard to the freedom of the press and freedom of opinion in the country (cf. BN of 16.10.23).⁹

Leading human rights activist charged

According to reports in the press, Madi Jobarteh, the national representative of the Westminster Foundation, who had been arrested on account of online posts and subsequently conditionally released on bail, was charged on 09.11.23 with seditious intent, incitement to violence and spreading false information. Jobarteh, who has suffered harassment in the past and been verbally intimidated personally by president Barrow (cf. BN of 09.05.22), denied all charges. He invoked his constitutionally guaranteed right to freedom of opinion, for example, and said that the case against him was purely politically motivated. A human rights activist has expressed concern at Jobarteh's indictment, saying that it was not acceptable for the police – as in the Jammeh era – to be used to intimidate the civilian population and to question people merely for having expressed their opinions. He concluded that no progress of any substance had been achieved in reforming the security sector, noting that civil servants who had served under and complied with the regime under the former president were still serving under the present president. As things stand, it appears that only limited progress has been made so far regarding the announced proceedings to suspend, dismiss and revoke the eligibility for office of civil servants accused of crimes under the previous government headed by Jammeh (cf. BN of 08.05.23).¹⁰

Compensation for unlawful imprisonment

According to a report in the media, the High Court in Banjul has found the imprisonment of anti-government comedian Bora Sisawo to be unconstitutional and arbitrary, and has awarded him compensation to the sum of GMD 500,000 (approx. EUR 6,952 as per 13.11.23). The competent judge stated that the Gambian constitution prohibits arbitrary arrest and imprisonment and grants victims a legally enforceable entitlement to compensation. Sisawo was held in police custody for three days in October 2023 – allegedly without any contact to the outside world (cf. BN of 16.10.23).¹¹

Guinea

Several people killed in prison breakout

It has been reported in the media that at least nine people were killed in the prison breakout on 04.11.23 in which ex-junta chief Moussa Dadis Camara allegedly attempted to escape together with Moussa Tiegboro, Blaise Goumou and Claude Pivi (cf. BN of 06.11.23). There are unconfirmed reports that many more people were killed when fighting broke out between two rival army units in the course of the attempt to free the prisoners.

Of the four individuals who were freed in the violent attack, all except Claude Pivi are said to have been recaptured and returned to prison. Tiegboro, Goumou and Pivi were formerly members of the military when Camara was in power from 2008 to 2009. All four face charges in the trial over the stadium massacre of 2009 (cf. BN of 10.10.22 and 10.07.23) and are said to have been held in a joint prison cell.

According to the present military government, Verni Pivi, the son of Claude Pivi, is allegedly responsible for the prison breakout. 58 officers, soldiers and prison wardens were dismissed on 06.11.23. After knowledge of the prison

breakout spread, road blocks were set up in Guinea's capital, Conakry, and security measures were stepped up. Members of the military have been accused of violence, intimidation and making unlawful arrests in the search for Pivi. On 08.11.23 the Guinean authorities offered a reward for Pivi's capture.¹²

India / Pakistan

Kashmir: Border soldier killed in exchange of fire

According to reports in the media citing information released by the Indian authorities on 09.11.23, an exchange of fire occurred between Indian and Pakistani soldiers at the highly militarised demarcation line (Line of Contact) in the disputed Kashmir region. An Indian border soldier is said to have been killed in the incident. Prior to the firefight, Pakistani soldiers had allegedly shot without cause at Indian border posts in the southern Kashmir region of Jammu. No statement was forthcoming from Pakistan in the direct aftermath of the incident.¹³

Iran

Religious minorities: Baha'i arrested

It was reported in the media on 08.11.23 that several members of the Bahá'í religious community had been arrested in the cities of Hamadan (in the province of the same name) and Karaj (Alborz province).

According to the spokesman for the global community of Bahá'í, armed security forces searched the homes of around 20 Bahá'í families in Hamadan and arrested ten people. Nine Bahá'í were reportedly arrested in Karaj. Eye witnesses have reported that the security forces behaved violently and personal property was seized. Meanwhile, a human rights organisation has cited reports that two of ten members of the religious community who were arrested in Isfahan in October 2023 (cf. BN of 30.10.23) have been released.

It is estimated that the Bahá'í religious community has some 300,000 members in Iran, whose constitution does not recognise it as a religious minority. Its members are continually subjected to repressive measures by the state, such as arrests, convictions, and discrimination, including exclusion from higher education and from access to the labour market. After the nationwide protests began in 2022, a further marked increase in measures by the state against Bahá'í ensued.¹⁴

Armed clash in border region with Pakistan

According to reports from 13.11.23 citing a news agency associated with the Revolutionary Guards, the governor of the city of Saravan (Sistan and Baluchestan province) has reported an armed clash between Iranian border guards and members of an unspecified hostile group. One member of the border guard was reportedly killed and two members of the military injured.¹⁵

Protests against shortage of teachers in Khuzestan province

According to reports in the media, a protest rally took place in the village of Qala Seyed Moghim in Khuzestan province on 08.11.23. Pupils' parents who were demonstrating against the shortage of teachers for the third and fifth grades were reportedly attacked by security officers. Four people are said to have been arrested. Eye witnesses have reported that members of the security forces threatened people who took part in the demonstration.

The government announced at the end of October 2023 that a shortage in teaching staff to the tune of at least 250,000 to 300,000 teachers was impending, with the extent of the shortages varying according to province. The shortage in Tehran province was estimated at around 4,000 teachers, while the corresponding figure for Sistan and Balochistan province was put at around 15,000.¹⁶

Students face disciplinary measures for attending mixed-sex party

It has been reported in the media that Qom University of Medical Sciences (in Qom province) has imposed disciplinary punishments on a group of students for attending a student party at which there was no segregation of the sexes. An unknown number of students involved have reportedly been banned from studies for between one and four terms. According to the secretary of the university's disciplinary committee, the measures were taken on

account of concerns relating to the promotion of immorality and unlawfulness in the social media and due to protests against the party by other students.¹⁷

Iraq

Attacks on US military facilities

According to the Kurdish authorities, the Harir military base near to Erbil airport was attacked by a total of three drones loaded with explosives on 07.11.23. Two of the drones were intercepted, while one drone crashed to the ground without exploding.

A renewed attack on the base took place on the night of 08.11.23, causing a fire to break out. No information on casualties or damage to property has been forthcoming as yet. The base is used primarily by the US military. All troops of the anti-IS coalition who were stationed there left the base on 20.10.23 as a consequence of the attacks, however.

These are only the most recent in a series of attacks on US troops in Iraq (cf. BN of 23.10. and 30.10.23). The Pentagon has put the number of such attacks in Iraq between 17.10. and 06.11.23 at 18. So-called Islamic Resistance in Iraq has claimed responsibility for the attacks, stating that they were a response to the USA's support for Israel in the ongoing Gaza war. Islamic Resistance is an alliance of Shiite militias loyal to Iran.¹⁸

Conflict between Türkiye and PKK

Two people were injured in a drone attack in Raparin (Sulaimaniyya governorate) on 06.11.23. While the Kurdish authorities have yet to release any information on the origin of the drones, pro-PKK media are blaming the attack on Türkiye.

It has been reported that a Turkish mortar shell hit a residential building in Amadiya (Dohuk governorate) on 10.11.23, causing material damage. On 11.11.23 the Turkish military carried out air strikes on PKK positions, again in Dohuk governorate. Material damage was reported.

As part of a military operation, Türkiye has been carrying out attacks on PKK positions on a regular basis for a number of years. The main focus of the attacks is the territory bordering on Türkiye in Dohuk governorate.¹⁹

Lebanon

Effects of the war between Israel and Hamas

The military conflict between Israel and Hamas remains the overriding domestic policy issue in Lebanon.

Following a further public address by Hassan Nasrallah, the secretary-general of Hezbollah, it appears that Hezbollah has no plans to escalate hostilities into a full-blown war at the country's southern border. While most Lebanese political parties are attempting to work towards peace, many Palestinian groups are calling for an escalation. Recent forecasts estimate that the Lebanese economy will shrink by up to 23 % of GDP due to the effects of the Gaza conflict. While tourism is the most severely affected sector here, the conflict is also having an adverse effect on large parts of southern Lebanon and impacting supply chains and potential investments.²⁰

The situation in the south of Lebanon and the north of Israel

In view of the large number of individual armed clashes and military developments at the southern border of Lebanon/northern border of Israel, developments are summarised in brief here:

There are many reports of individual incidents along the border every day. In most cases, only short exchanges of fire take place. Missile systems are now being used to an increasing extent from the Lebanese side. Both sides have increased the range of their strikes, with attacks now possible up to approx. 45 km north of the Lebanese border and, according to Hezbollah, as far as Akkon in Israel.

In addition to the increased frequency of attacks by Hezbollah, it is particularly noticeable that other groups are also participating to a greater extent in attacks on Israel. Hamas' military arm in Lebanon, which has claimed responsibility for a number of missile attacks, plays a particularly prominent role in this context. For the first time,

a member of the militia belonging to the Shiite AMAL movement – the second-largest Shiite party in Lebanon after Hezbollah – has been killed by an Israeli drone strike.

The number of combatants killed on both sides remains unclear, as the information from Hezbollah and the Israeli Army respectively is rarely consistent. The death toll on the Lebanese side now stands at around 100. 11 of the dead have been identified as civilians, while the remainder are comprised for the most part of Hezbollah fighters. On the Israeli side, hundreds of people are believed to have been injured, while the death toll remains in single or low double-digit figures.

Towns and villages in the north of Israel are continuing to be evacuated. The Israeli defence minister has sent out a clear warning to Hezbollah not to escalate the situation any further.²¹

Nigeria

Borno State: Fatal attacks on villages

Suspected members of the Islamist Boko Haram group attacked three villages in Mafa Local Government Area (LGA) in Borno State in the north-east of the country on 05.11.23, killing at least ten people and abducting a number of people. According to reports in the media, those killed were sedentary farmers who were harvesting rice at the time of the attack. They were reportedly killed in a barbaric manner. The attack apparently took place because the villagers had failed to deliver the demanded food and funds. Only a few days before, on 30.10.23, suspected Boko Haram members had attacked the village of Gurokayeya in Geidam LGA in the north-eastern state of Yobe, killing around 40 people in all (cf. BN of 06.11.23). Boko Haram has been carrying out attacks and other acts of violence against the military and the civilian population for many years, above all in the north-east of Nigeria (cf. BN of 30.05.22 and 27.03.23). On 28.11.20 Boko Haram members killed dozens of people in an attack on a number of localities in the same area of Borno State (cf. BN of 30.11.20).²²

Katsina State: Killings and abductions

On 05.11.23 armed attackers killed at least 13 people, most of whom were children, and abducted 20 people in the community of Rugar Kusa in Musawa LGA, Katsina State. According to a report in the media, the victims were pupils of an Islamic school who were taking part in a religious ceremony. Around 20 pupils were injured. The attack was allegedly an act of reprisal. On 07.11.23 violent actors attacked another community in Katsina State, killing around five people and abducting five others. According to a report in the media, the attackers were looking for objects of value and livestock. A number of people were reportedly injured. Attacks on communities and kidnappings by armed groups are no rare occurrence in Katsina State (cf. BN of 11.09.23).²³

Positive announcements on national health service

Two announcements concerning Nigeria's health service indicated a positive course of development at the beginning of November 2023: According to reports in the media on 03.11.23, Nigeria's federal government and the United States Center for Disease Control and Prevention (US CDC) have reinforced efforts to fight the spread of HIV by stepping up corresponding health initiatives. The broader availability of HIV tests, treatment and care services is cited as one specific area of improvement. According to reports in the media on 09.11.23, 2.3 million children in Anambra State received polio vaccinations in September 2023. The government campaign is still ongoing and is being carried out in cooperation with the WHO, among other partners. Nigeria's public health system is generally considered to be underfunded and disadvantaged by a very limited infrastructure in some areas. There is also a substantial disparity between urban and rural areas with regard to the available levels of healthcare.²⁴

Ratification of protocol to protect the rights of older persons

On 24.10.23 president Bola Ahmed Tinubu issued approval for ratification by Nigeria of the protocol to the African Charter on Human Rights, Peoples' Rights and the Rights of Older Persons. This emerges from an announcement by Amnesty International on 25.10.23, which notes that this makes Nigeria the 13th member state to affirm its obligations to strengthen the rights of older persons via binding legal instruments.²⁵

Pakistan

Measures to expel Afghan refugees without documented residence status

The nationwide arrests and expulsions of Afghan nationals who are in the country without a right of residence is continuing. On 09.11.23 a minister of Balochistan province stated that the expulsions would be extended to also include Afghan refugees who are legally resident in the country as soon as the return of Afghans without a documented residence status was completed. No date for such a measure was announced. According to reports by relevant agencies, an estimated 250,000 to 300,000 Afghans have left Pakistan so far. The prime minister of the interim government, Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar, stated on 08.11.23 that the expulsion of Afghan refugees without documented residence status was a response to the Afghan Taliban's refusal to support Pakistan in its fight against Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). Pakistan holds the TTP responsible for the increase in attacks.²⁶

Palestinian territories / Israel

Current developments / humanitarian situation

According to reports in the media, Israel is continuing its campaign against the ruling Hamas organisation in Gaza. The two largest hospitals in the Gaza Strip, Al-Shifa Hospital and Al-Quds Hospital, have been closed. Israeli snipers are continuing to shoot at individuals in the vicinity of Al-Shifa Hospital, in which an unknown number of people are still trapped as a result of the hostilities. A number of vulnerable patients and three newborn babies have died as a result of the power outages since 12.11.23.

The WHO's director-general stated in a social media post that Al-Shifa Hospital had been without a water supply for a number of days and was no longer able to serve as a hospital. According to information from the hospital management, around 650 patients and seriously injured people are being treated by some 500 doctors and nursing staff at Al-Shifa Hospital. Around 2,500 displaced people are also said to be sheltered in the hospital buildings. On 11.11.23 the Palestinian health ministry in Gaza estimated that some 3,000 medical staff and patients and around 15,000 to 20,000 displaced people are currently located at the hospital. A UN health official has stated that ambulances and other special methods would be necessary in order to relocate most of the remaining patients.

Israel's prime minister Netanyahu has rejected urgent international calls for a ceasefire, stipulating as a pre-condition the release of all of the approximately 240 hostages which were taken by Hamas in the attack of 07.10.23 which sparked the war. According to information from the health ministry in Gaza, which does not distinguish between civilians and combatants, more than 11,000 Palestinians have been killed since the beginning of the war, with minors and children accounting for two thirds of this total. Some 2,700 people have been reported missing. Hamas continues to hold around 240 hostages who were abducted in the course of the attack, including men, women, children and elderly people. According to information from the Israeli military, 48 members of the Israeli military have been killed in the course of the ground offensive in the Gaza Strip.²⁷

Republic of Moldova

European Commission recommends opening of accession negotiations

On 08.11.23 the European Commission published the "2023 Enlargement Package", in which it pronounced itself in favour of opening accession negotiations with the Republic of Moldova (and also with Ukraine). A corresponding unanimous resolution is required at the European Council session on 14./15.12.23 in order to open negotiations. The European Council granted the Republic of Moldova EU candidate status on 23.06.22 (cf. BN of 27.06.22). According to coverage in the media, the European Commission considers its reports to show substantial progress with regard to the improvement of electoral law, fighting organised crime, the protection of human rights and in particular the rights of vulnerable groups, the reform of public finances, the involvement of civil society and reforms to the public administration. Greater efforts are considered to be necessary in particular with regard to combating corruption, de-oligarchisation and the reform of the judicial system.²⁸

Senegal

Long investigation procedures; high numbers of remand prisoners

The NGO Forum du Justiciable (FJ) has called for an end to holding people for lengthy periods on remand and for remand prisoners to be released while investigations are in progress. FJ has expressed regret that people are held for prolonged periods without being arraigned and without any court judgement. A human rights NGO recently criticised the “systematic” rejection of applications for provision release, also reporting numerous alarming cases of people being remanded in custody indefinitely (cf. BN of 15.05.23).

There has recently been a sharp rise in the numbers of people being held on remand. According to recent figures, remand prisoners account for around 54 % of all prison inmates. Judiciary figures in March 2023 put the number of remand prisoners at 4,548 (cf. BN of 06.03.23). According to the latest information released by the justice minister, this figure had risen to around 7,120 as per 04.09.23. By comparison, around 6,065 convicts were being held at the country’s 37 penal institutions.²⁹

Action against dissenting opinions in online media

On 02.11.23 president Macky Sall described social networks as a new form of disturbance of public order and a danger to national stability. According to the NGO Africivistes, president Sall’s statement came only days after a number of people had been arrested on accusation of “unlawfully disseminating documents” on the internet. No further information has been provided. Africivistes claims that Sall has already attacked users of social networks on a number of occasions in the past. The NGO criticises a narrowing of the realm of civil society on the internet, noting that a number of dissidents, including pro-democracy activists and opinion leaders, had recently been censored or detained. Africivistes has reported on the case of anti-government rap activist Nitt Doff (cf. BN of 23.10.23) and numerous other cases involving activists of the banned opposition party Patriotes africains du Sénégal pour le travail, l’éthique et la fraternité – including the case of Falla Fleuer, who has been convicted once again (cf. BN of 30.10.23). All the stated individuals have reportedly been arrested on the basis of online posts and accused of disseminating fake news and other criminal offences. Amnesty International has already reported in the past on cases in which individuals were arrested for expressing opinions critical of the government on the internet (cf. BN of 13.03.23).³⁰

Man sentenced for domestic violence

It has been reported in the media that a court in Dakar has handed down an unsuspended six-month prison sentence to a man in a domestic violence case, as requested by the prosecution. Among other charges, the man was accused of having threatened to kill his mother and of being violent towards her on repeated occasions. Domestic violence is widespread and is surrounded by a culture of silence and general impunity.³¹

Somalia

Flooding

Heavy rainfall has led to flooding in 21 regions of Somalia. Southern and central Somalia and the south of Puntland have been particularly severely affected. At least 31 people have been killed and around 500,000 people have fled their homes. UN OCHA reports that more than 1.24 million people have been affected by the flooding and it is estimated that this figure could rise to around 1.6 million by December 2023. The UN office states that 1.5 million hectares of farmed land could be lost, concluding that this could be one of the most serious instances of flooding in Somalia in recent decades.³²

Sudan

Continued fighting and mediation talks

A number of media have reported further military successes for the paramilitary militia Rapid Support Forces (RSF) in the Darfur regions, including its capture of the city of El Geneina in West Darfur (cf. BN of 06.11.23). Mass killings

and violent attacks on the civilian population are reported to have occurred during the RSF's operations, including at a camp for internally displaced people in the village of Ardamata which has since been disbanded. Ardamata is located in the direct vicinity of the city of El Geneina, and was also attacked by RSF forces in the course of an offensive against a nearby base of the Sudanese army (SAF) on 04.11. and 05.11.23.

In addition to looting and rapes, targeted killings of people of non-Arab origin – for the most part members of the Masalit – are also reported to have taken place in and around El Geneina in the course of the RSF's operations. According to reports in the media, up to 700 people have been killed in this area. Some 300 people are still missing. A local human rights organisation puts the death toll at up to 1,300.

Another army base has been captured by RSF units near Um Keddada in North Darfur. RSF soldiers reportedly carried out looting and thefts in the town itself.

Referring to eye witnesses, reports in the media state that many people are unable to leave the affected regions because frequently used routes are controlled by RSF forces and large amounts of money are demanded for permission to leave.

Fighting is also continuing in the capital region. Both the Sudanese army and the RSF repeatedly claim to have inflicted heavy losses on each other and to have wrested territories from each other's control. The ongoing fighting is a continual cause of deaths and injuries among the civilian population.

The first week of talks in Saudi Arabia between representatives of the SAF, the RSF and a number of mediators ended on 07.11.23. The talks have reportedly so far yielded only vague undertakings to allow deliveries of humanitarian aid. No agreements have been achieved on a possible ceasefire.³³

Humanitarian situation

The UNHCR's Director of External Relations stated in a press release on 07.11.23 that the continuing fighting was leading to an unimaginable humanitarian crisis. She said that the war had broken out unannounced and had since become ever more brutal in scale and intensity, adding that it was scandalous that the world was barely taking any notice of the conflict and its consequences. The director explained that 4.5 million people had been displaced within Sudan since the war broke out, while an additional 1.2 million people had fled to neighbouring countries. As schools are among the facilities being used to accommodate many of the internally displaced people, schools in Sudan have remained closed over past seven months. She noted that the numbers of people fleeing the war were continuing to rise, with regard to both internally displaced people and those fleeing the country.³⁴

Syria

Eastern Syria: At least 21 militiamen killed in IS attack

According to reports in the media, at least 21 fighters belonging to a militia were killed in an attack by IS fighters near to the village of Al-Kawm (Homs) on 08.11.23.

A news channel has reported that those killed were part of the pro-government National Defense Forces.³⁵

US military carries out attacks on Iran-backed militias

Following a number of attacks by Iran-backed militias on US troops in Syria and Iraq in recent weeks, on 08.11. and 12.11.23 the US military carried out attacks on targets linked to the militias.

Among the targets hit in the air strikes, a number of arms depots and training facilities of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps and other militias were destroyed near to Maysulun in Deir ez-Zor governorate and in the vicinity of Abu Kamal and Mayadin. 32 members of the US military have been injured in the attacks on the Al-Tanf military base in south-eastern Syria.³⁶

Uganda

Arrests based on Anti-Homosexuality Act

It has been reported that two persons who had allegedly engaged in homosexual acts were arrested in Kampala on 20.10.23. The two were apparently filmed by a civilian and the footage was passed on to the police. If convicted of

“homosexual acts” they face life imprisonment. In addition to arrests, there have also been numerous cases of hostility, ostracization and discriminatory behaviour towards LGBTIQ people and supporters since the act became law in May 2023 (cf. BN of 05.06.23).³⁷

Ukraine

Course of the war

In its daily bulletin of 07.11.23, the Ukrainian general staff announced that the Ukrainian army had repelled 15 attacks by the Russian army near to Kupiansk, 18 attacks near to Marinka and 9 attacks in and around Avdiivka in the preceding 24 hours.³⁸

Civilian casualties and humanitarian situation

A Russian missile exploded outside the National Art Museum in Odesa on the night of 04.11.23. The explosion caused serious damage to Potocki Palace, which dates from the 19th century, and a number of exhibited paintings were destroyed. The art museum is well-known for its unique collection of works of art from the 19th to the early 20th century.

According to information from Ukrainian authorities in Donetsk oblast, two people were killed in Toretsk and one person was killed in Minkivka in Russian attacks on civilian targets on the night of 11.11.23. On the same day, a 64 year-old man was killed and his wife seriously injured in Russian shelling of the city of Kherson, according to information from the regional governor, Oleksandr Prokudin.³⁹

No presidential election to be held in 2024

In his evening video address on 06.11.23, president Volodymyr Zelenskyy emphasized that the presidential elections would not be held according to schedule in March 2024, as “the defence of the nation, the fight for freedom and the destruction of the occupiers” must take priority. The decision is in compliance with the Ukrainian constitution, which prohibits elections when martial law is in force. Martial law has been declared eight times for a period of 90 days in each instance since the beginning of the Russian war of aggression and is to be further extended.⁴⁰

Ukrainian parliament approves budget plan for 2024

The Ukrainian parliament passed the country’s national budget plan for 2024 on 09.11.23. More than half of the expenditure totalling approx. EUR 86.8 billion is to be allocated to the defence sector and to funding support for the war against the Russian army. According to information from the Ukrainian government, this will result in a large budget deficit of approx. EUR 40.7 billion.⁴¹

Yemen

Attacks on Israel

On 09.11.23 the Israeli air defence system Arrow 3 intercepted a missile over the Red Sea which was allegedly aimed at the city of Eilat in the south of Israel. According to the Israeli military, the missile was fired from Yemen.

The spokesman for the Houthis announced on the same day that a number of missiles had been fired at Israel. Since the beginning of the Gaza war the Houthis have fired a number of missiles in the direction of Israel, none of which have reached their targets to date. The Houthis have an explicitly anti-Israeli and anti-Semitic agenda, their motto being “God Is Great, Death to America, Death to Israel, Curse on the Jews, Victory to Islam”.⁴²

US drone shot down

On 08.11.23 the Houthis shot down a US drone over the water close to the Yemeni coast; this has been confirmed by the USA. Along with Israel, the USA is the Houthis’ principal ideological adversary.⁴³

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