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Briefing Notes

Group 62 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

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Afghanistan

Further earthquakes in Herat province

On 15.10.23 an earthquake of force 6.3 on the Richter scale occurred in Herat province, with its epicentre in the Rabat-e-Sangi district. Four people were reportedly killed and some 150 injured. A force 6.3 earthquake had only recently occurred in Herat province on 11.10.23, with the epicentre located in the districts of Injil and Guzara. Two people were reportedly killed, 117 injured and around one thousand homes were destroyed. Various historic buildings in Herat (including the Blue Mosque) are said to have been damaged.

An earthquake with its epicentre 35 km to the north-west of the city of Herat had already occurred on 07.10.23, with the Taliban reporting a death toll of at least 2,400 (cf. BN of 09.10.23). On 13.10.23 the Taliban more than halved the stated numbers of casualties, to approximately 1,000 killed and 2,000 injured.

Expulsion of Afghan refugees from Pakistan

On 11.10.23 the Capital Development Authority Islamabad began demolishing a number of homes of Afghan refugees without residence permits in the Margalla Town district. On 03.10.23 the Pakistani foreign minister, Bugti, ordered all persons who are in the country illegally (the majority of whom are Afghans) to leave Pakistan by 01.11.23 (cf. BN of 09.10.23)

Security situation and governance

Up to 30 people were reportedly killed and many others injured in an explosion during Friday prayers at the Shiite Imam Zamam mosque in Baghlan's provincial capital of Pul-e-Khumri. The Islamic State in Khorasan Province (ISKP) has claimed responsibility for the attack.

On 14.10.23 the Taliban government condemned "Israel's barbaric bombing of the Gaza Strip and the poor Palestinians" on its website, without mentioning the terrorist attacks carried out by Hamas before the bombing. They are calling on all Islamic countries to support the Palestinians. Back in February 2022, the Taliban consecrated a replica of the Al-Aqsa mosque at a roundabout as a token of solidarity with Palestine and in its monthly magazine Al-Somood (issue no. 196), they wrote that the twin city of Jerusalem must be "liberated" - as Kabul had been. There are unconfirmed reports that US weapons originating from Afghanistan have come to light in the possession of Hamas.

The Taliban government has been officially invited to next week's Silk Road summit, as a sign of growing cooperation. China has stepped up its involvement with the Taliban. It is the first country since the Taliban took over power to appoint an ambassador in Kabul and to invest in mining projects.

Angola

Arrests during protest in Lunda Sul province

It emerges from reports in the media that hundreds of inhabitants of Lunda Sul province in north-east Angola took part in a protest march in the provincial capital, Saurimo, on 08.10.23. The march is believed to have been led by the separatist movement Sociological Legal Manifesto of the Lundese People (MJSPL), which is calling for autonomy for the diamond-rich provinces of Lunda Norte and Lunda Sul.

According to a statement from the interior ministry, police forces arrested more than 130 of the demonstrators after the protests became violent. The police had called on the protesters to break up the rally, in response to which protesters allegedly began throwing stones and sharp objects. The statement claims that the use of tear gas brought the situation under control and enabled the arrests to be made. The separatist movement has complained that a number of people were injured, while the ministry has stated that no-one was injured in the clash between the police and the demonstrators.

Prison sentence for social media influencer

According to reports in the media, a court has sentenced social media influencer Ana da Silver Miguel, better known as Neth Nahara, to two years' imprisonment. Her conviction for insulting the president was reportedly based on statements which she had published on her TikTok account. She allegedly accused the president of "anarchy and disorganisation" and denounced social wrongs in the country.

Miguel was initially sentenced on 14.08.23 to six months' imprisonment and a fine. A court of appeal subsequently increased the sentence, after the public prosecutor's office called for more severe punishment. According to information from Miguel's lawyer, the verdict is final, as appeals can only be filed at the supreme court for sentences of three years or over.

Burkina Faso

Traoré: Security takes precedence over elections

The leader of the military junta, Ibrahim Traoré, stated on 29.09.23 that elections had no priority as long as they were ruled out by the security situation resulting from jihadist violence. According to reports in the media, Traoré had promised a return to democracy with presidential elections by July 2024. His purported aim is that all Burkinabé should be able to vote without any concerns as to security. The proclamation took place as hundreds of his supporters gathered waving Burkinabé flags at the Place de la Nation in Ouagadougou on 30.09.23 to mark the first anniversary of the coup. They also called for an amendment to part of the constitution which captain Traoré had announced. Traoré assumed power on 30.09.22, ousting lieutenant-colonel Paul-Henri Sandaogo Damiba, who had acceded to power in January 2022, after putschists had toppled president Roch Kaboré on 24.01.22 (cf. BN of 31.01.22).

Democratic Republic of the Congo

Broadcasting ban and arrest warrant for radio presenter

According to a report from the NGO Committee to Protect Journalists, on 06.10.23 the local authorities in the north-western city of Lisala placed a broadcasting ban on local radio station Radio Top Lisala and issued a warrant for the arrest of its main reporter on criminal charges. The city's mayor stated that the reporter had already defied an initial broadcasting ban ordered in August and had continued to make defamatory remarks about the provincial authorities. Both the reporter and the radio station's director deny that the authorities have been insulted, maintaining that one radio broadcast had merely denounced instances of arbitrary arrests by the police and the inadequate implementation of government programmes in the province.

Ecuador

Run-off for the presidency

In the run-off for the presidency on 15.10.23, the centre-right candidate Daniel Noboa (electoral alliance Acción Democrática Nacional, ADN) claimed the majority of votes cast, defeating left-wing politician Luisa González (Revolución Ciudadana). With more than 90 % of valid votes counted, Noboa had amassed a 52.3 % share of votes cast.

The election campaign was overshadowed by escalating violence between criminal cartels, in the course of which presidential candidate Fernando Villavicencio was shot dead in the capital, Quito (cf. BN of 14.08.23). It is unlikely that the murder will be solved, after six suspects were found dead in their cells in a prison in Guayaquil in the second week of October.

Egypt

Three femicides in the space of several days

According to reports in the media, three women were murdered on 27.09. and 28.09.23. All three cases concerned failed marriages or romantic relationships in which the men killed the women concerned after being rejected by them.

In some instances, the murder victims are said to have been subjected to harassment and intimidation by their murderers for several years. Numerous femicides were also reported in 2022. These murders are said to be anything but isolated incidents; rather, harassment and violence towards women are reportedly widespread in Egypt.

Opposition politician withdraws presidential candidature

On 13.10.23 former MP and opposition politician Ahmed Tantawi withdrew his candidacy for the forthcoming presidential elections due to his failure to secure sufficient expressions of support. 25,000 votes of support from the public in 15 governorates or expressions of support from 20 incumbent MPs are required in order to gain accreditation as a presidential candidate; Tantawi received 14,000 expressions of support. According to the national electoral authority, his claims that the authorities had attempted to prevent many people from voting in favour of his candidacy and had made it difficult for him to stage election rallies during the election campaign are unfounded (cf. BN of 09.10.23).

Eswatini

Parliamentary elections

On 02.10.23 the government announced the results of the parliamentary elections held on 29.09.23. 51 men and eight women were elected, with the pro-royalist candidates achieving a strong result. The country, which is an absolute monarchy, has been ruled by King Mswati III since 1986. As MPs have no executive powers, the election results will have virtually no influence on the country's politics.

The Gambia

Human rights activist and media representative released on bail; situation regarding freedom of expression and freedom of the press

The human rights activist and national representative of the Westminster Foundation, Madi Jobarteh, was arrested at his home on 09.10.23 and subsequently released on bail after three days in police custody. No official charges are known. Prior to his arrest, Jobarteh had reported that he had been placed under police surveillance. Jobarteh reportedly failed to comply with a summons to present himself to the police a number of days before his arrest. According to official information from the police, the arrest was linked to comments and posts in social media. No further details were provided. Jobarteh recently criticised president Adama Barrow on several occasions, after the president had personally subjected him to verbal intimidation (cf. BN of 09.05.22). Public criticism of various statements by the president has recently been growing. Among other utterances, president Barrow has threatened

to re-arrest people suspected of offences, even where they have been released on bail. President Barrow has furthermore described the traditional opposition party, the United Democratic Party UUDP), as the greatest threat to national security. He has also stated that the Kerr Fatou online media portal and the Mengbeking radio station, which are considered to be close to the opposition, would no longer exist if there were no democracy in The Gambia. Meanwhile, Bora Sisawo, a well-known comedian and co-presenter of a programme on Kerr Fatou, was taken into police custody once again in the period from 06.10. to 09.10.23, after his release on bail was revoked. Sisawo was reportedly detained without access to legal counsel and without his relatives being informed as to his whereabouts. A police spokesman later confirmed Sisawo's arrest to the Gambia Press Union (GPU), but was unable to state any grounds for the revocation of his release on bail. He also failed to confirm whether any charges had been brought or would be brought against Sisawo, who was subsequently released on bail once again. Sisawo was originally detained temporarily in August 2023 for criticising president Barrow and the inspector general of the police (IGP), and was subsequently conditionally released on bail.

GPU's president, Muhammed S. Bah, has stated that the GPU is alarmed at the deteriorating situation with regard to freedom of opinion and freedom of the press in the country. Among other things, the GPU has expressed its concern in the face of the frequent interrogations, arrests and detentions of people who criticise the Gambian president or the IGP. Gambian human rights activist Famara Jawneh has told Deutsche Welle (DW) that cases of detention without trial, arbitrary arrest and incommunicado detention are reminiscent of the era of former president Yahya Jammeh. DW has reported that critical voices are of the view that the democratic progress achieved under president Barrow is increasingly in jeopardy. Controversial arrests which have recently come to light have sparked concern in areas of civil society and the general public. Most recently, two UDP members were arrested in contentious circumstances and subsequently granted conditional releases on bail (cf. BN of 25.09.23). Following his arrest on 20.09.23, journalist Bakary Mankajang was released from police custody on bail on 23.09.23 (cf. BN of 25.09.23). He was accused of interfering with witnesses. According to Mankajang's own account, he was held by the police in solitary confinement, without access to a lawyer and deprived of food and water.

Iran

Religious minorities: Prison sentences for four Baha'i

Foreign media have reported that four members of the Bahá'í religious community received prison terms of several years on 10.10.23.

The individuals concerned are reportedly a woman and three men from Tehran province, who received prison terms of five, three and two years after their cases were referred to a court of appeal. The sentences were allegedly passed by the court of first instance on charges of membership of illegal groups with the aim of disrupting national security.

Protest against segregation of the sexes at universities

It was reported in the media on 10.10.23 that students at the Technical University (Sharif) had protested against measures to segregate the sexes in individual faculties and university facilities, including study halls and libraries. Pictures in social media showed a number of students of a faculty staging a sit-down strike in protest. In connection with increased controls on compliance with Islamic clothing regulations, measures to segregate the sexes have reportedly also been stepped up in the academic environment at the beginning of the current academic years.

In this connection, it has been reported that some 32,000 associate university teaching staff have been removed from their positions at branches of the Islamic Azad University as part of a nationwide restructuring of the higher education system. The university based in Tehran is a private university system whose president is appointed directly by the revolutionary leader. It comprises an extensive network of educational establishments covering 367 campus sites throughout the country. The suspended teaching staff are to be replaced by doctoral students who have undergone brief training. According to reports in the media, the wave of dismissals may be regarded as knock-on effect of the nationwide protests in September 2022, in the aftermath of which academic staff were dismissed and students were suspended (cf. BN 27.02.23).

Iraq

Conflict between PKK and Türkiye

According to Kurdish authorities, a Turkish drone hit a PKK vehicle in northern Dohuk (Kurdistan Region, KRI) on 14.10.23, killing three of its members.

On 13.10.23 the Turkish defence ministry announced that a Turkish soldier had been killed in exchanges of fire with the PKK in the Kurdish mountains. On the same day, a civilian was injured in a drone attack on the refugee camp in Makhmour. Türkiye is suspected of being behind the attack. Many of those living in the camp are Turkish Kurds. This was the second attack on the camp in the space of a week (cf. BN of 09.10.23).

Lebanon / Israel

Security situation at the border between Lebanon and Israel

The security situation has worsened at the border between Lebanon and Israel, with cross-border hostilities between Hezbollah and the Israeli military an almost daily occurrence. On 09.10.23 a number of Palestinians crossed the border into Israel. In the ensuing fighting two Palestinian fighters and one Israeli soldier were killed. On the same day, three Hezbollah fighters were killed by Israeli shelling. According to information from the Israeli side, 15 rockets were fired at Israel from Lebanese territory on 10.10.23. Israel responded with artillery fire. After Hezbollah fired rockets at Israeli military posts on 11.10.23, Israel carried out air raids on Hezbollah bases in southern Lebanon, in the course of which civilians were also injured.

On 13.10.23 a journalist of the Reuters news agency was killed in southern Lebanon by rocket fire from the direction of Israel. Six other journalists, including employees of Al Jazeera and Agence France-Presse, were injured. Israel has announced that an investigation will be carried out into the incidents.

Following further rocket attacks by Hezbollah on Israeli military posts and a village on 15.10.23, in which one civilian was killed, Israel responded with counter-attacks in southern Lebanon. The headquarters of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) was also hit in the cross-border fighting. On the same day, Israel declared the Lebanese-Israeli border a military exclusion zone. On 16.10.23 Israel subsequently announced the evacuation of civilians from towns and villages close to the border.

Iran-backed Hezbollah, which is a declared enemy of the state of Israel, possesses substantial military capabilities due to its arsenal of weapons and its fighters with combat experience from the Syrian civil war.

Liberia

Elections: Counting of the votes in progress

The presidential and parliamentary elections took place in Liberia on 10.10.23. According to reports in the media, the turn-out was very high following an election campaign which was dominated by the economic crisis and allegations of corruption. Election monitors have stated that the elections went off peacefully. The votes are still being counted. According to the vote counts which have already been published on the website of the Liberian electoral authority, NEC, it is a neck-and-neck contest between the incumbent Liberian president and candidate of the governing Coalition for Democratic Change (CDC), George Weah, and former vice-president Joseph Boakai, who is running for the opposition Unity Party (UP). It may come to a run-off, as was the case in 2017. In all, 20 candidates contested the presidential elections. The electoral commission has until 25.10.23 to announce the final election results. According to information from the director of the EU election monitoring commission, incumbent politicians have used state funds to finance their election campaigns, which constitutes a breach of Liberian election law. Neither president George Weah nor any other sitting politicians have commented on this accusation.

Libya

Fighting in Benghazi; telecommunications and internet interrupted

According to information in the media, fighting occurred from 06.10. until 08.10.23 in the city of Benghazi between units of the Libyan Arab Armed Forces, LAAF – formerly the Libyan National Army, LNA – and a rival local tribal group associated with Al-Mahdi Al-Barghathi.

Al-Barghathi, who has returned to his native region after a number of years and is a member of the Awaqir tribe, once led a unit on the side of Khalifa Haftar's forces, before joining the former Government of National Accord (GNA) in Tripoli. An unknown number of people are said to have been killed and injured in the fighting, in addition to which Al-Barghathi was allegedly arrested. Benghazi is under the control of the LAAF, which is led by Khalifa Haftar. No critical voices or groups are tolerated, let alone any form of opposition.

At the same time, it was reported that telecommunications and the internet were down in Benghazi from 06.10. to 10.10.23. The local authorities denied claims that this was linked to the hostilities.

Mali

Security situation in northern Mali

Attacks by armed Islamist groups and Tuareg rebels continue to increase in the north of Mali. The Malian army has so far been largely unable to counter these attacks in any way. At the same time, the last bases of the UN's MINUSMA peace mission will be closed by the end of 2023, as demanded by Mali's military government. The Malian army then plans to take over these bases. In the Kidal region, a Malian military convoy of over 100 military vehicles is reported to have begun its journey from the city of Gao towards the strategically important city of Kidal on 02.10.23. Along the route, fighting is continually breaking out between Malian soldiers and Russian Wagner soldiers and Tuareg rebels. Malian troops reportedly took control of the village of Anéfis, around 100 km south of Kidal, on 07.10.23.

In the Timbuktu region, the city of Timbuktu has been almost completely cut off from the outside world for some weeks now. Various reports in the media blame this situation on the terrorist group Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM), which is said to be blocking roads and waterways leading to the city. Timbuktu's residents are suffering from severe food shortages and the prices of food and fuel are rising sharply. According to a statement from the Malian military, at least ten soldiers were killed and 13 injured in an attack on the military in the town of Bourem, which is situated between Gao and Timbuktu. 46 "terrorists" are also alleged to have died.

Mozambique

Violence against members of the opposition

In the wake of local government elections in the country on 11.10.23, violent actions by the police ensued in the following days. According to HRW, tear gas was used to disperse a group of members of the opposition in Nampula province, in the course of which one person is said to have died. Arbitrary arrests and disproportionate use of force by security forces reportedly also occurred in other parts of the country.

Nigeria

North: Military strike against suspected terrorists

Security forces comprising members of the police, the military and the local civil defence militia have rescued at least 20 kidnap victims and killed around 67 suspected kidnappers in Tafawa Balewa Local Government Area (LGA) in Bauchi State. According to reports in the media, this was confirmed by the governor of Bauchi State on 09.10.23. The governor has reportedly donated a number of motorbikes and around NGN 10 million (approx. EUR 12,000 as per 16.10.23) in support of the local security forces.

Security forces of the Nigerian air force thwarted a possible attack when they killed dozens of actors described as terrorists who were believed to be about to stage an attack in Maru LGA in Zamfara state on 10.10.23. According to

a report in the media, the violent actors were intending to attack a military outpost in Danko Wasagu LGA, Kebbi State.

According to information from the Nigerian Defence Headquarters (DHQ), in the space of one week at the beginning of October 2023 the military killed some 50 actors described as terrorists in various operations in the north-east, centre and north-west of the country, arrested at least 114 such actors and freed around 49 kidnapped hostages. It is not rare for such announcements of successful operations to be propagated by DHQ (cf. BN of 06.02., 20.03., 03.04. and 18.09.23).

Nasarawa State: Students abducted

Attackers described as terrorists abducted at least four students of Nasarawa State University in the town of Keffi in Nasarawa State on the night of 09.10.23. Kidnappings of students to extort ransom money are no rare occurrence in the north of Nigeria (cf. BN of 31.07., 07.08., 28.08. and 09.10.23). According to information from the university authorities, as recently as on 25.09.23 security forces had freed around 16 female students who armed actors had abducted from student hostels of the Federal University of Gusau in the north-west of Zamfara State on 22.09.23 (cf. BN of 25.09. and 09.10.23). A number of days later, on 04.10.23, armed men abducted five female students from a university in the north-western state of Katsina (cf. BN of 09.10.23).

Trade unions suspend nationwide strike over pay

On 02.10.23 the two largest trade unions in Nigeria, the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) and the Trade Union Congress (TUC), suspended an indefinite strike which was to begin on 03.10.23. According to reports in the media, the trade unions were demanding a pay rise to the equivalent of US\$ 260 a month, in order to offset the rising cost of living. It has reportedly been agreed that the government will meet the employees' demands within 30 days, in return for which the unions will suspend the strike for 30 days. Following consultations with the unions and the federal government, on 01.10.23 president Bola Tinubu announced a temporary pay rise for 15 million low-income employees corresponding to around US\$ 70 a month for the next six months. He also promised to suspend value-added tax on diesel, in order to lower transport costs. According to reports in the media, Tinubu is under pressure to ease economic hardship after abolishing petrol subsidies which had been in place for decades and allowing a devaluation of the naira currency, which has led to a rise in prices.

Police officer sentenced to death

On 09.10.23 a court in Lagos State sentenced police officer Drambi Vandi to death by hanging for murder. According to reports in the media, the court found him guilty of having shot dead lawyer Bolanie Raheem from point blank range on 25.12.22. The crime occurred in connection with a traffic check which escalated out of control. The convicted man has a right of appeal. Should the sentence be confirmed, it will fall to the governor of Lagos to decide whether Vandi is to be executed. Citing information from AI, media report that seven death sentences have been executed since 2007, the most recent case being in 2016. Vandi's conviction is considered to be ground-breaking, as while members of the police and other security forces are frequently accused of arbitrary harassment, extortion and other criminal offences, they are rarely prosecuted. Dozens of people died in protests against police violence which were staged for several weeks under the #EndSARS banner in the commercial capital of Lagos in the autumn of 2020 (cf. BN of 26.10.20).

Palestinian territories / Israel

Vast numbers of people flee their homes in the Gaza Strip

According to reports in the media, more than a million inhabitants of the Gaza Strip have fled their homes since Hamas launched the attacks on Israel on 07.10.23. The Israeli army's international spokesman has stated that around 500,000 people have left the northern part of the Gaza Strip. On 13.10.23 more than 70 people died in an explosion on an evacuation route which Israel had declared to be safe. Israel has announced an impending ground offensive by its forces, increasing numbers of whom were moving into position along the border with the Gaza Strip as per 15.10.23. According to information from the Israelis, dozens of military targets have already been attacked and neutralised. Although entire districts have been destroyed in the Israeli air strikes, militant militias have continued firing rockets towards Israel. International and local aid organisations are warning that a ground

offensive by Israel could expedite a humanitarian crisis in the coastal enclave of the Gaza Strip. They point out that many areas already lack access to water, food, fuel and healthcare.

Rwanda

Suppression of anti-government actors

A report by HRW claims that Rwanda's government persecutes critics at both national and international level. The government's measures against individuals of a critical stance range from threats, enforced disappearances, unlawful detention and assaults - including on family members - to lethal attacks. HRW states that Rwanda also uses international police facilities, such as so-called "Red Notices", which serve to place individuals on the wanted list worldwide with the aid of Interpol.

Senegal

Civil society leader taken into custody once again

Aliou Sané, the leader of the civil society protest movement Y'en a marre and vice-coordinator of the heterogeneous opposition movement Mouvement des Forces vives du Sénégal (F24), who faces charges of offences against public security and order, was remanded in custody once again on 12.10.23. The Dakar court of appeal revoked Sané's provisional release in response to a petition from the public prosecutor's office (cf. BN of 24.07. and 31.07.23). The order to remand Sané in custody again provoked criticism from human rights NGOs. A number of human rights NGOs issued a joint statement demanding the unconditional release of Sané and all those who had been detained and taken into custody solely for exercising their fundamental rights of peaceful assembly and freedom of expression.

Court ruling: Sonko reinstated on the electoral rolls; use of tear gas

On 12.10.23 the presiding judge at the district court of Ziguinchor in the Casamance ordered that the leading Senegalese opposition politician Ousmane Sonko of the party Patriotes africains du Sénégal pour le travail, l'éthique et la fraternité (PASTEF), which has been banned since 31.07.23, be reinstated on the electoral rolls. This boosts his chances of running as a candidate in the presidential elections which are scheduled for 25.02.24. According to reports in the media, Sonko is now authorised to acquire sponsors from among elected representatives for the 2024 presidential elections (cf. BN of 09.10.23). The district court in the city, of which Ousmane Sonko has been mayor since January 2022, deliberated on the petition filed by the opposition politician's lawyers for almost twelve hours in camera on 04.10.23. Eight of his lawyers had submitted that their client's removal from the electoral register was unlawful. The government's legal representative rebuked the court's lack of jurisdiction and accused the judge of being biased and his ruling prejudiced. The government's legal representative asserted that the judge was related to one of the deputy mayors of Ziguinchor, who was furthermore a member of PASTEF. He further announced that the government would be appealing against the ruling.

Police used tear gas against supporters of Sonko who demonstrated their solidarity with the politician outside the court. A number of people are said to have been injured as a result. Bacary Diatta, mayor of Bignona (Ziguinchor region), was reportedly detained and taken into police custody for one day. It appears he was gathering information about the situation at the site of the demonstration after the use of tear gas. Diatta is a member of PASTEF.

Somalia

Flooding

Heavy rainfall marking the beginning of the Deyr rainy season, which lasts until around December, led to substantial flooding in several parts of the city of Baidoa and the surrounding areas on 04.10.23. Some 107,000 people, including 86,700 internally displaced persons, have reportedly been affected by the consequences of the flooding. 305 latrines have collapsed, for example, resulting among other things in a risk of exposure to diseases transmitted by water and a shortage of clean drinking water. A number of roads are unusable as a result of the flooding, making access to the area concerned difficult.

Sudan

Fighting continues

There have been reports in the media of various instances of fighting between the paramilitary militia Rapid Support Forces (RSF) and the Sudanese army (SAF) in the area of the capital and the neighbouring cities of Omdurman and Bahri. Two people were reportedly killed in fighting in the Omdurman district of El FitiHab on 09.10.23. In the El Ahamada district of Bahri (North Khartoum), four people are said to have died as a result of shelling by the RSF. The Sudan Emergency Lawyers organisation released a statement on 09.10.23 to the effect that 54 people had been killed and 164 wounded as a result of sustained shelling of the cities of Omdurman and El Obeid (North Kordofan). The statement further claims that increasing numbers of health facilities and hospitals are at risk of having to close as a result of continuing shelling and a lack of resources.

The Al Nao hospital in Omdurman, for example, was shelled yet again on 09.10.23 and is now no longer operational. Staff at the hospital allege that the RSF was responsible for the attack. The hospital is located in a district of the city which is under SAF control. According to the NGO Doctors Without Borders (MSF), four people were killed in the attack.

Humanitarian situation

The IOM estimates that more than 4.5 million people have been displaced within the country since fighting broke out between RSF and SAF in April 2023. It further states that more than 1.2 million people have fled the country. Khartoum State alone is said to account for around 70 % of the internally displaced people. The Darfur region, South Kordofan and North Kordofan are cited as other key areas from which people have been displaced. The UN coordinator for humanitarian aid has stated that it has not been possible to provide all internally displaced people with humanitarian aid due to a lack of funds.

On 10.10.23 UNICEF reported that an estimated 19 million children in Sudan were currently not attending school because of the continuing fighting, with at least 10,400 schools closed in the regions affected by the current conflict. According to the Council of Ministers, schools and universities are to re-open by the end of October 2023 in regions where the security situation allows. This announcement has been broadly criticised, however.

The International Monetary Fund's World Economic Outlook for October 2023 asserts that Sudan's economy is suffering very severely from the consequences of the fighting between SAF and RSF. The report states that the country's GDP will shrink by 18 % in 2023. The level of price rises in the country stood at approx. 138 % in 2022. Levels of 256 % and 152 % are expected for 2023 and 2024 respectively. It is to be noted in this connection that the estimates for 2024 are based on the assumption that the fighting will cease at the end of 2023.

Syria

North-west Syria: Sustained air raids by government forces

Since the attack on a military academy in Homs (cf. BN of 09.10.23), Russian and Syrian combat aircraft have stepped up raids on areas under the control of the Islamist Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) in the north-west of Syria.

More than 70,000 people have been displaced in recent days. According to relief agencies and human rights organisations, hospitals, schools and other locations belonging to the civilian infrastructure have been hit in the air raids. The UN's deputy regional director for the coordination of humanitarian affairs in Syria spoke of the largest escalation of hostilities since 2019.

A news portal citing figures from the Doctors Without Borders organisation (MSF) has stated that 46 people had died and 279 had been injured up to 12.10.23. The portal further puts the number of internally displaced people at more than 78,000.

Damascus / Aleppo: Israeli air strikes stop airline operations

A state news broadcaster has reported that the take-off and landing runways of the international airports in Damascus and Aleppo were damaged by Israeli air raids on 12.10.23. Airline operations were stopped. No-one appears to have been injured as things stand. The attacks took place one day before a planned visit to Syria by the Iranian foreign minister for talks on the volatile situation in the region.

Operations at Aleppo were resumed on 14.10.23, but had to be suspended again after the infrastructure there was destroyed by renewed air strikes. Five people were reportedly injured during the most recent bombing raids. The airport in Damascus was not yet operational again at this point in time. A report in the media cites undisclosed sources, according to which the air strikes were intended to disrupt Iranian supply lines in and through Syria.

Ukraine

Civilian war victims

All of the 59 people killed in a Russian rocket attack which hit a funeral congregation in the Kharkiv region on 05.10.23 (cf. BN of 09.10.23) have now been identified. It is reported that two brothers who previously lived in the region are suspected of having provided information for the attack.

A Russian attack on a school in Nikopol (Dnipropetrovsk oblast) on 11.10.23 reportedly killed four people and injured two. According to another report in the media, 23 people were injured and one person was killed when a social security building was hit by artillery fire in Pokrovsk (Donetsk oblast) on 13.10.23. According to local information, sustained shelling of the Ukraine-controlled part of the Kherson region on 14.10. and 15.10.23 killed two people and injured three. Two people died and one person was injured in a bomb attack on a village in the Kharkiv region on 15.10.23.

It was reported in the media on 15.10.23 that three exploding mines on the same day in different regions of the country killed two people, including two juveniles, and injured three, one of whom was also a juvenile. The explosions took place in the Mykolaiv region, Chernihiv and Kharkiv.

Further course of the war

According to its own accounts, Ukraine thwarted an attempt by an eight-strong Russian sabotage group to cross the border on the night of 11.10.23. The group was evidently intending to sabotage a critical object of civilian infrastructure in the Sumy region. The region continues to come under fire due to its location close to the border. According to the governor of the Sumy region, 93 explosions were recorded there on 15.10.23. There are no reports of any casualties.

After amassing troops and materials in the area, since 10.10.23, the Russian armed forces have been attempting to encircle and capture the town of Avdiivka, which has been largely abandoned (less than 2,000 of a total population in the order of 32,000 are said to have remained in the town) and which lies only a few kilometres to the north of Donetsk. This is reportedly one of the largest Russian offensives of recent months, and intense fighting is in progress. On the fourth day of the Russian attacks, representatives of the Ukrainian side stated that they were managing to hold the line.

A Ukrainian general was reported in the media on 14.10.23 as saying that fighting in the north-east had become markedly worse, with daily Russian attacks. He may have been referring to the fronts close to the city of Kupiansk (Kharkiv oblast) and to the east and north of Lyman (Donetsk oblast), from where fighting is reported. Direct fighting is also reported in the region around Bakhmut (Donetsk oblast), on the southern front in the centre of the Zaporizhzhia region and near Velyka Novosilka (Donetsk oblast, near to the border with Zaporizhzhia oblast).

Venezuela

Henrique Capriles withdraws from contest for presidential candidature

On 08.10.23 the candidate of the opposition Primero Justicia party, Henrique Capriles, declared that he no longer intended to run as the presidential candidate for the Plataforma Unitaria alliance. He stated that his decision was necessary in order to pave the way towards “a united and stronger Venezuela”. 51 year-old Capriles, who has already run for the presidency on two occasions, was considered one of the favourites for nomination as the opposition’s presidential candidate. The opposition intends to select its applicant for the 2024 presidential elections on 22.10.23.

Arrest warrant for opposition leader Juan Guaidó

On 05.10.23 the Venezuelan public prosecutor’s office issued an arrest warrant for opposition politician Juan Guaidó. The chief public prosecutor has accused him of high treason, false assumption of authority, embezzlement,

money laundering and forming a criminal organisation. Guaidó, who lives in exile in the USA, spoke of “physical and moral” persecution of the opposition.

Guaidó declared himself interim president in 2019 and was recognised by a number of countries, including the USA and Germany. The incumbent president, Maduro, was able to retain his hold on power, however. At the end of 2022, the opposition removed Guaidó as interim president because the strategy of a parallel government had not led to the anticipated political change.

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Briefing Notes
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