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Briefing Notes

Group 62 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

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Afghanistan

Attacks, fighting and civilian casualties

Over the past few weeks there have been clashes in several provinces as well as sometimes targeted attacks on civilian victims.

On the morning of 17 January 2021 two government workers were shot by unknown assailants on their way to work. The victims were two female judges in Afghanistan's Supreme Court. Nobody claimed responsibility for the attack, but the government is blaming the Taliban.

On 16 January 2021 there was a major explosion close to Kandahar airport, followed by an exchange of fire. The target was a building used by the Afghan intelligence service. According to security forces, the attackers were shot. In Kabul two policemen were also killed in an attack when their vehicle was hit by an explosive that went off at the side of the road.

On 12 January 2021 unknown assailants in Mazar-e Sharif shot two female police officers who were on their way to work.

According to research carried out by the New York Times, 50 civilians and 100 members of government security forces have been killed thus far in January (as of 14 January 2021).

On 17 January 2021 the US embassy in Afghanistan warned of terror attacks, abductions, criminal offences and similar incidents, which have been on the increase throughout Afghanistan in the last few weeks. US citizens were advised to consider leaving the country.

Armenia / Azerbaijan

Reconstruction program agreed for Nagorno-Karabakh

With the mediation of Russian President Vladimir Putin, the hostile neighbouring states of Armenia and Azerbaijan agreed on new steps towards rebuilding the disputed southern Caucasus region of Nagorno-Karabakh at their first joint meeting in Moscow on 11 January 2021. This was emphasized by Putin after a meeting of around four hours with the Azeri President Ilham Aliyev and the Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan. Around two months after the end of the fighting over Nagorno-Karabakh, the three top politicians gathering in the Kremlin stressed that the ceasefire agreement is largely being adhered to, although not all its points have yet been implemented, according to Pashinyan. The question of Armenian prisoners of war in Azerbaijan is particularly painful for the country, he claimed, emphasizing at the same time that the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh had still not been definitively resolved and that its political status, in particular, remains unclear.

The agreements now reached for the development of the economy and the infrastructure of Nagorno-Karabakh are to lead to more reliable security guarantees for both sides. The deputy heads of government for both Azerbaijan and Armenia as well as Russia are apparently now to form a working group for the implementation of projects to

re-establish trading and transport links. The first meeting of the new working group is supposed to be scheduled by 30 January 2021.

Belarus

Localised protests against President Lukashenko

On 17 January 2021 people again gathered in several cities to protest against President Alexander Lukashenko. At the same time, participants called for criminal proceedings against the security forces who had used violence against protesters on previous occasions. To make it harder for the security forces to intervene, the rallies were once again organised as flash mobs, with small groups gathering in parks and residential areas after the location of the gathering had been announced on social media shortly before. Since the official announcement of his victory in the presidential election concluded on 9 August 2020, President Lukashenko has regularly been the target of protest rallies.

Bosnia and Herzegovina

Human rights organizations call on Bosnia to provide adequate protection for migrants

According to current media reports from 12 January 2021, international human rights organisations (Amnesty International, “Refugee Rights Europe”, etc.) have released a joint declaration urging authorities in Bosnia and Herzegovina to immediately provide refugees and asylum-seekers in north-western Bosnia with adequate protection and emergency aid. Around 2,500 people, including 900 inhabitants of the Lipa camp close to the Croatian border which was closed down on 23 December 2020, have apparently had to endure severe cold without adequate accommodation. The authorities have provided dozens of heated tents, but almost 400 people, including families with children, remain in emergency shelters or are taking shelter in parks, abandoned buildings, decommissioned factories and forests in snowy conditions. The organisations are critical of what they claim is a consistent lack of suitable accommodation despite the EU providing Bosnia and Herzegovina with more than 88 million euros for migrants and refugees over the last three years. They also claim, however, that the ongoing humanitarian crisis is a result of current EU policy involving a stricter regime at the EU’s external borders.

Brazil

COVID-19 pandemic: Oxygen shortage in Manaus

According to current press reports, a growing number of COVID-19 cases have led to overburdening of the healthcare system in Manaus, a major city in the Amazonas region. This has meant there are no longer sufficient supplies of oxygen for ventilation purposes and many patients have apparently had to be ventilated manually. The price of oxygen has doubled since 15 January 2021. The Brazilian Air Force has started transporting oxygen to Manaus, according to reports, and patients from the city have been moved to other federal states for treatment. Experts believe the situation was caused by the loosening of pandemic restrictions over the holiday season and by the rapid spread of a more infectious mutation of the pathogen, which originated in the Amazon region and has apparently already been discovered in travellers from this region arriving in Japan. Furthermore, a large number of the intensive-care beds made ready during 2020 have supposedly been dismantled over the past year, leading to a capacity bottleneck.

Central African Republic

Rebel attacks on the capital beaten back

After heavy fighting, on 13 January 2021 security forces were able to beat back an attack on the capital Bangui by the rebel alliance Coalition des patriotes pour le changement (CPC). A UN peacekeeping soldier from the Mission multidimensionnelle intégrée des Nations Unies pour la stabilisation en République centrafricaine (MINUSCA) and at least 30 rebels were killed. The rebels oppose the re-election of the serving President Faustin-Archange Touadéra

in the presidential election of 27 December 2020 (see BN of 11 January 2021). As reported by the UNHCR on 15 January 2021, since the end of 2020 around 60,000 people have fled the violence that broke out in the wake of the election to the neighbouring Democratic Republic of Congo. In addition, tens of thousands have fled to neighbouring Cameroon and Chad or have been internally displaced.

China

Hong Kong: Suspected escape agents arrested

On 14 January 2021 the police arrested eleven people who are supposed to have aided twelve activists in their attempt to flee to Taiwan in August 2020 (see BN of 11 January 2021). They are accused of aiding and abetting criminal offenders.

Columbia

Casualties in grenade explosion

According to press reports from 13 January 2021, the previous day a person in Barranquilla (Departamento Atlántico) threw a grenade from a motorcycle onto a street on which there are several automotive and motorbike workshops. The explosive went off and injured 14 people, according to official reports. The authorities believe the incident was an intimidation tactic by a local gang attempting to extort money from the workshop owners based there. The police arrested four suspected gang members and seized a motorcycle along with multiple extortion letters. Charges include not only extortion but also unauthorised possession of weapons and explosives, terrorism and attempted murder, according to the public prosecutor.

DR Congo

Many killed in another suspected militia attack

In an attack on the village of Walese Vonkutu on the border between the provinces of Ituri and North Kivu that took place on 14 January 2021, 46 civilians were killed, according to information from authorities. The victims, many of whom were decapitated, were supposedly members of the Mbuti demographic group (also known as the Bambuti). It seems those responsible were the Allied Democratic Forces militia (ADF), to whom two attacks on villages in the area of Beni (North Kivu) were recently also attributed (see BN of 11 January 2021). According to an agency report, the ADF, who originally stemmed from Uganda, are accused of having carried out around 1,200 killings in the approximately 14 months since the beginning of an offensive by the Congolese army against militias on 30 October 2019 (see BN of 11 November 2019 and 3 February 2020).

Ethiopia

Reports of massacre in front of Tigray church

According to media reports, clashes between the Ethiopian army and units of the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) in Aksum resulted in a blood bath involving the civilian population. It seems 750 people, who had sought shelter from the fighting in the Mariam of Zion Church, were herded onto the forecourt and shot by soldiers and Amhara militias on 15 December 2020. Witnesses stated that the units believed the church was a hideout for the TPLF. Since internet and mobile communications are largely blocked and journalists are being denied access to the region, it is not possible to verify the information.

More than 80 killed in militia attacks in the regional state of Benishangul-Gumuz

In Ethiopia's regional state of Benishangul-Gumuz there was another massacre on 12 January 2021 in which at least 80 civilians were killed, according to information from the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC). Back in December there were reports of a similar attack by a militia which claimed the lives of more than 200 victims (see BN of 11 January 2021). Both incidents occurred in the Metekel Zone. The background remains unclear, but it is

known that the region is home to ethnic minorities who have been victims of attacks of this kind repeatedly in the past. According to information from the United Nations, since July 2020 more than 100,000 people have been displaced as a result of violence in the regional state.

UNHCR “very worried” about the conflict in Tigray

The UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Filippo Grandi, announced on 14 January 2021 that he was “very worried” about the humanitarian crisis in Tigray, referencing primarily the situation of the Eritrean refugees in the refugee camps in Shimelba and Hitsats in the north of the region, to which there has been no access for more than two months. He mentioned reports about serious violations of human rights such as killings, abductions and return of the refugees to Eritrea, and called upon the Ethiopian government to permit unlimited access and aid deliveries to the camps.

Guinea

Government steps down

According to media reports of 15 January 2021, President Condé has accepted the resignation of the Fofana government and instructed the Prime Minister to continue in office until a new government team has been formed. The offer of resignation was expected following the disputed parliamentary and presidential elections of October (see BN of 2 November 2020).

Government critics sentenced

Two members of the FNDC (Front National pour la Défense de la Constitution), which led protests against the third term of President Condé, were sentenced on 13 January 2021 to one year in custody with an additional fine for incitement of unrest. According to Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, hundreds of people were arrested around the time of the elections.

India

COVID-19 pandemic: Vaccination campaign launched

On 16 January 2021 India launched its vaccination campaign against coronavirus. The first 30 million doses of the vaccine will be given to health workers and other groups exposed to a higher risk of infection as a result of their work. By summer 2021, supposedly 300 million people are to be vaccinated.

Demonstrations call for release of Jesuit activist

On 15 January 2021 Christians held a procession in Dumka in the state of Jharkhand calling for the release of the Jesuit priest Stan Swamy, who campaigned for the rights of the disadvantaged indigenous population and was incarcerated in October 2020. Swamy stands accused of having links with Maoist rebels and of involvement in the 2018 unrest in Bhima Koregaon in the state of Maharashtra.

Iraq

Protests in Nasiriya

Since the death of two demonstrators, there have been increasing protests in Nasiriya and demonstrations of solidarity in Baghdad. On 14 January 2021 protesters were calling primarily for the release of activists who had been imprisoned or had disappeared. According to eye-witness reports from the previous week, there seem to have been circumstances when at least one unit of the army inserted itself between demonstrators and the security forces who were attempting to break up the demonstration by force. Multiple videos of the incident are circulating on the internet.

Postponement of elections

The Iraqi parliamentary elections, which were scheduled for June, are set to be postponed for several months until 16 October 2021, according to a proposal by the Iraqi Electoral Commission on 17 January 2021. The reason for this is the major problems in the practical implementation of the election, which was scheduled at very short notice, as a result of the pandemic. The very short deadlines meant that only a few parties would have been able to register and most voters had no realistic chances of updating their details, hence sizeable portions of the population would have been de facto excluded. These problems, so the proposal, will be at least reduced to a considerable extent by the postponement, which is widely supported by parliamentarians.

Iran

COVID-19 pandemic: Disputed statistics and delays to the vaccination campaign

In the greater Tehran area infection rates have risen slightly again, with current hotspots including two provinces on the Caspian Sea. According to official statistics, thus far in Iran 56,538 people have died due to COVID-19 and more than 1.3 million people have been infected. The statistics are disputed, however, and Iranian media abroad are assuming much higher figures. Even aside from this, Iran remains the country most severely affected by corona in the Middle East. In the meantime, Iran and Cuba have reached an agreement on the joint research and development of a vaccine, which is set to be trialled on Iranian test subjects in the spring. Until then, the Iranian Health Minister aims to purchase two million doses of the vaccine from India, China and Russia. A vaccine created by the Iranians themselves is still in the early test phase (see BN of 11 January 2021). While vaccination has already begun in many other countries, payment difficulties resulting from sanctions and a lack of transportation and cooling facilities are causing delays. On 28 December 2020 Khamenei issued a ban on the import and usage of Western vaccines (see BN of 11 January 2021), so it remains unclear when vaccinations will begin in Iran.

Incarceration of 27 Kurdish activists

Over the past few weeks 27 Kurdish activists have been arrested in the province of Kurdistan and in the city of Karaj (near Tehran). The wave of arrests began on 9 January 2021 in various towns and cities in the Kurdish-settled region. According to reports from the Kurdish human rights organisation Henago, those involved are people working in the cultural sphere and in student and environmental affairs. It seems no official charges have yet been brought. Those affected were taken to Urmia to the 7 Tir security prison, which is controlled by the Pasdaran.

Death sentence for another Iranian wrestler

The death sentence given to the 29-year-old Mehdi Ali Hosseini has prompted worldwide criticism. The wrestler, who comes from Khuzestan, was arrested after a fight in his home province in 2015 and sentenced to a qisas punishment (penalty analogous to the crime). Following the execution of Navid Afkari on 12 September 2020, Hosseini now becomes the second Iranian wrestler to be sentenced to death.

Israel / Palestinian Autonomous Territories

Elections for the Palestinian Autonomous Territories

On 15 January 2021 President Mahmoud Abbas announced a new election date for the Palestinian Legislative Council (22 May 2021) and the presidential office (31 July 2021). Unlike with previous announcements of this kind, this time Hamas has also come out in favour of holding the elections.

The last elections for the Legislative Council took place in 2006, when the radical Islamic group Hamas inflicted a crushing defeat on the ruling Fatah. The majority of Western states refused to cooperate with the coalition government arising from this (the National Unity Government”) due to Hamas’s refusal to renounce violence overall or to recognise Israel’s internationally agreed right to exist. A brief civil war between Fatah and Hamas ended in June 2007 and since then the authorities of the Palestinian Autonomous Territories have been divided into the Gaza Strip, ruled by Hamas, and the West Bank, ruled by Fatah.

President Abbas (85) has been President of the Palestinian Autonomous Territories for 16 years even though his term in office should actually have ended after four. He refuses to comment on whether he will stand again in the scheduled elections or step down.

Kazakhstan

Parliamentary election

In the parliamentary election on 10 January 2021, the ruling party Nur Otan triumphed over the five other pro-government parties standing with 71.09 % of the vote, according to reports from the Electoral Commission. The National Social Democrat Party boycotted the election. In the months preceding the voting and on the election day itself, dozens of opposition members were arrested. Nursultan Nazarbayev – President from 1990 to 2019 – continues to exercise considerable influence over the country's politics as chairman of the Nur Otan party and head of the National Security Council.

Election observers from the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) criticised the fact that the authorised parties did not hold any kind of genuine election campaigns. During the counts and evaluation of the votes submitted, irregularities were supposedly identified and the transparency of the election process was apparently not fully ensured on the part of the authorities.

Kyrgyzstan

Presidential election and referendum on constitutional reform

Following violent unrest arising from accusations of voter fraud relating to the parliamentary elections on 4 October 2020, the delayed presidential election took place on 10 January 2021. The Central Electoral Commission declared the National Socialist politician Sadyr Zhaparov the winner with 79.2 % of the vote. He had been released from prison during the course of the unrest. Election observers from the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) concluded that despite a largely free election campaign among the competing candidates, access to greater funds and abuse of administrative resources meant that Zhaparov was nevertheless advantaged during the campaign.

On the same day, a referendum was held on a constitutional reform giving greater powers to the presidential office. According to official information, 81 % of voters approved the reform. The country is therefore facing a transition from a parliamentary to a more presidentially defined republic.

Lebanon

Security incident in Baalbek

On 17 January 2021 there was a clash between an army patrol unit and members of the Jaafar clan on the border with Syria following the confiscation of a pick-up truck loaded with smuggled goods. The Jaafar clan is widespread in the region and maintains close ties with Hezbollah. For years there have repeatedly been security incidents as a result of a conflict with the Shamas clan, which is also close to Hezbollah.

COVID-19 pandemic

Starting on 14 January 2021, Lebanon imposed a 24-hour curfew provisionally for 11 days, during which it is theoretically also forbidden to go out to buy food. The reason behind the radical measure is the sharp rise in infection rates following substantial relaxation of restrictions over Christmas. On 15 January 2021 Lebanon, which has a population of approximately 6.8 million people, recorded new record figures with 6,154 new infections and 44 deaths. Despite substantial increases in capacity over the last few months, intensive care units are seeing occupancy rates of 90 %, while even normal hospital beds are occupied at a rate of 86 %. Relative to the region, Lebanon's population has quite a high average age of over 30 years and therefore includes a higher number of risk patients.

Mali

UN blue-helmet soldiers killed

On 13 January 2021 three UN peacekeeping soldiers from Côte d'Ivoire were killed and five injured in the region of Timbuktu when their convoy drove over an explosive and then came under fire from armed attackers. Then on 15

January 2021 there was another attack on UN peacekeepers. Close to Tessalit in the Kidal region, an explosive went off underneath a vehicle, killing one blue-helmet soldier from Egypt and severely injuring another. Thus far, no one has claimed responsibility for the assaults. UN Secretary-General António Guterres condemned the attacks.

Nigeria

Islamist attacks in the northeast

On 9 January 2021 Islamists in the state of Yobe attacked a military convoy in an ambush using heavy artillery and rocket-launchers. The attack killed 13 soldiers and injured several more, according to media reports based on information from military circles. The region is an Islamist stronghold. On 15 January 2021, according to information from an officer in the Nigerian army, Islamists succeeded in capturing an important military base in the city of Marte in the state of Borno. Media reports state that several hundred inhabitants of the area fled as a result of the attack. Only two months previously, the inhabitants had been returned to their homes as part of a government program after having been driven out by Islamist attacks in the past. One day before the attack on Marte, a landmine in the area of Chibok in the south of the state of Borno killed five soldiers and wounded 15 more, so military reports claim. Observers have expressed concern about the developments in the security situation of northeast Nigeria.

Latest abductions

According to media reports, on 13 January 2021 in a village in the northern Nigerian state of Kaduna, 18 people were abducted, including several infants. In early January the abduction of a man who himself was known to be the head of a kidnapping group gained nationwide attention. Media reports stated that around 1.5 million naira had to be raised for his release, which equates to around 3,150 euros. Kidnappings occur relatively frequently in Nigeria (see BN of 30 November 2020), whereby the kidnappers are generally aiming to extort ransom money. In December 2020 the abduction of several hundred schoolchildren from a boys' boarding school in the city of Kankara in the state of Katsina also made international headlines (see BN of 21 December 2020).

North Macedonia

Bulgaria blocks start of EU accession negotiations

Media reports from 14 January 2021 state that the start of EU accession negotiations has once again been put on hold. The progression of North Macedonia's route to membership of the European Union (EU) hangs crucially on the resolution of its dispute with Bulgaria. Bulgaria's objections raised in autumn 2020 apparently threaten to heighten nationalistic tendencies and to undermine the trust of North Macedonian citizens in their EU future, making the diplomatic task of its Prime Minister Zoran Zaev even more difficult. In the current dispute, Bulgaria accuses North Macedonia of merely feigning friendship, of falsifying history and of cultivating anti-Bulgarian sentiment. Bulgaria also refutes the existence of the country's own Macedonian language, considering it solely a dialect of Bulgarian.

Pakistan

Police officer killed in polio vaccination campaign

On 12 January 2021 unknown assailants close to Karak in the province of Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa shot a policeman who was accompanying healthcare workers on a polio vaccination campaign. The goal of the latest initiative is to immunize 40 million children under five years old against polio across Pakistan.

In the past, vaccination workers and the security forces who accompany them have repeatedly been victims of targeted killings. Against this background, there are fears that vaccination campaigns against coronavirus will come up against similar challenges.

Kashmir: Soldiers killed on the Line of Control

On 14 January 2021 four Pakistani soldiers were killed in two incidents on the border running through Kashmir in an exchange of gunfire between the Indian and the Pakistani military.

Russian Federation

Navalny arrested upon return

Alexei Navalny, the prominent opposition politician and opponent of Putin, was immediately arrested upon landing at Moscow's Sheremetyevo Airport on the evening of 17 January 2021. Navalny was led away from passport control and taken to a nearby police station. Pressure is growing on Russia following Navalny's arrest, with politicians in the EU and the USA calling on Russian authorities to release the 44-year-old immediately. Amnesty International considers President Vladimir Putin's best-known opponent to be a political prisoner of Russia. Originally Navalny's flight was due to land at Moscow's Vnukovo Airport, where a crowd of his supporters had gathered. Here, there were multiple arrests by the anti-terror unit OMON, including of Navalny's closest colleague, the lawyer Lyubov Sobol.

Background

Russian judicial authorities had placed Navalny on its wanted list because he is supposed to have broken conditions of probation from an earlier offence during his stay in Germany. This was a risk he was willing to face in returning to his home country. Navalny was in Germany recovering from an attack involving the nerve agent novichok, which is banned as a chemical weapon. Laboratories in several countries and the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) all confirmed the use of novichok independently of one another. The poisoning is supposed to have taken place on 20 August 2020 in the Siberian city of Tomsk. There have so far been no investigations into this by the Russian judicial authorities, and Navalny has repeatedly laid blame for the attempted murder at the feet of the Russian President Vladimir Putin and the domestic intelligence service FSB, an accusation Putin denies. The attack prompted international condemnation and the imposition of EU sanctions against representatives of the Russian apparatus of power. Navalny has stated many times that his place is in Russia and it is there that he wishes to continue his fight against "the Putin system". Parliamentary elections in Russia are due in the autumn.

Somalia

Attacks on journalists

In the year 2020 the organisations Reporters Without Borders (RSF) and the National Union of Somali Journalists documented 32 indiscriminate arrests of journalists. These included the arrest on 27 December 2020 of a freelance journalist who works for a Facebook news page. One day prior, he had reported on a protest in Garowe against price increases in the region. He was held in isolation for two weeks and is said to have been tortured by the Puntland intelligence service. He was then moved to the central prison in Garowe and charged with attempted murder before a military court. Another journalist was arrested in Puntland on the same day and held for two days. In Beledweyne in the region of Hiiraan, a journalist who had reported on demonstrations in the city was arrested on 26 December 2020 and held for five days. Also in Beledweyne, another journalist was arrested on 23 December 2020 after holding an interview with a local rebel militia and was held for one day.

Police officers killed

On 11 January 2021 a landmine explosion that hit a vehicle carrying police officers in Mogadishu killed two people and injured seven. Al-Shabaab claimed responsibility for the attack.

Sudan

Outbreak of violence in West Darfur

Violent clashes in and around the city of El Geneina (West Darfur province) between members of different ethnic groups have apparently killed at least 83 people and injured 160 since 15 January 2021, according to local reports. The violence began on 15 January 2021 in El Geneina when an Arab man was stabbed to death in a camp for internally displaced persons. On 16 January 2021 relatives of the deceased are said to have attacked the camp and set buildings alight, and the fighting continued on 17 January 2021, resulting in the imposition of a curfew in the province on the same day.

This represents the most severe fighting since the official end of the UN peacekeeping mission UNAMID at the end of December 2020. On the request of the Sudanese government, the UN's UNAMID peacekeeping mission was concluded after 13 years, despite the human rights organisation Amnesty International (AI) calling for the mission to be prolonged and warning against the consequences of withdrawal.

Syria

Flight connections re-established between Aleppo and Beirut

On 15 January 2021 the national airline Syrian Air ran its first flight between the Lebanese capital and Syria's second-largest city since the outbreak of the civil war in 2011.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, all those travelling had to undergo PCR tests and the number of passengers was limited to 44. There are already three flights a week from Damascus to Beirut, and there are now to be weekly connections from Aleppo.

Aleppo was recaptured back in 2016, but for several years remained in close proximity to the fighting in the areas in the administrative district of the same name.

Turkey

COVID-19 pandemic: Vaccination begins

The Turkish authorities began their mass vaccination campaign against coronavirus on 14 January 2021. The vaccine they are using comes from the Chinese pharmaceutical company Sinovac, which was given emergency approval in Turkey. According to information from the Health Minister Koca, healthcare workers are to be immunised first, followed by people over 65. He and the government's scientific advisers have already received the vaccination, as has President Erdogan. On 17 January 2021, according to reports from Turkey's Ministry of Health, 148,636 tests had revealed 6,436 new infections of coronavirus, with the number of people falling ill at 803 and deaths in the last 24 hours amounting to 165. The number of people who were seriously ill stood at 2,201, while the occupancy rate of intensive care beds per week was 60.6 %. Hospitals are apparently working to 45.5 % capacity. Since the pandemic began, 2,387,101 have fallen ill and 2,262,684 have recovered.

Sect leader sentenced to more than 1,000 years in prison

On 11 January 2021 the Muslim television preacher and sect leader Adnan Oktar was sentenced by a court in Istanbul to 1,075 years and 3 months in prison. Among other things, he was pronounced guilty of supporting an armed terror organisation, espionage and a total of 34 cases of abuse, seven of which involved children, as well as deprivation of liberty, torture and founding and leading a criminal organisation. He was also accused of having supported the Gülen movement. Oktar was arrested in July 2018. According to media reports, 13 of Oktar's companions were likewise given long custodial sentences for similar offences. Oktar denies the accusations and is likely to appeal.

As a television preacher, Oktar became famous in Turkey with his show on channel A9, on which he surrounded himself mainly with women, whom he called his "kittens" and whom he had dance for him. Under the pseudonym Harun Yahya, he also published a series of books in which, among other things, he outlined his support for the literal interpretation of the creation story (Creationism).

Uganda

Museveni re-elected as President

The serving President Museveni has been declared the winner of the presidential elections held on 14 January 2021. Museveni, who has been in power since 1986, gained 59 % of the vote. The most promising challenger, Bobi Wine, a popular singer who is now active as a politician and enjoys a high level of popularity among young Ugandans in particular, won 35 % of the vote. However, the opposition claims that the election was fraudulent and Wine has announced his intention to contest the results in court. Museveni, meanwhile, declared the election to be free and fair and announced that security forces would be deployed to quell any unrest. The European Union (EU), the United Nations (UN) and human rights organisations have expressed criticism of the election. The voting was observed only by one mission from the African Union (AU), since other national and international election observers were refused accreditation. As ordered by the government, the internet has been blocked since the evening prior to the election after Facebook closed the accounts of several government officials for apparently manipulating the public debate. Bobi Wine is now under de facto house arrest, as security forces have surrounded his house since election day. The election was described as one of the most violent in Uganda in decades, with opposition candidates and their supporters repeatedly arrested and harassed in advance of the voting and more than 50 people killed in protests in November (see BN of 19 October and the 9, 23 and 30 November 2020).

Venezuela

Activist under house arrest

According to media reports of 11 January 2021, the women's rights activist and social worker Vannesa Rosales has been released from Mérida prison after three months' incarceration with no formal charges, and has now been placed under house arrest. Rosales was arrested in October 2020 for supposedly providing a 13-year-old rape victim with information and medication to terminate her pregnancy, an accusation which still stands. The prosecution authorities are charging the activist with working towards legalisation of abortion and forming a criminal association. Numerous non-governmental organisations have launched a media protest campaign in support of Rosales. Criminal law in Venezuela permits abortion solely in cases where the woman's health is in danger as a result of the pregnancy. The penalty for this is between six months and three years, while for the formation of a criminal association it can be up to ten years. As yet, there is no date for the start of the court proceedings.

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