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Group 62 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

Briefing Notes

30 March 2020

Afghanistan

Hostilities, attacks and civilian casualties

According to media reports last week, fighting took place in Nangarhar, Ghazni, Herat, Helmand, Zabul, Kunduz, Kandahar, Samangan, Balkh, Sar-e-Pul, Jawzjan, Faryab, Baghlan, Badghis, Logar and Ghor, and attacks were reported in Kabul, Paktia, Maidan Wardak, Kapisa, Helmand and Kandahar. Civilians were also injured.

Attack on Sikh temple in Kabul

On 25.03.20, at least 25 people were killed and eight others were wounded in an attack carried out by suicide bombers on a Sikh temple in Kabul (Dharamshala, Shor Bazar district). Around 200 worshippers who were reportedly in the building at the time were taken hostage. All the assailants were killed by security forces after several hours. The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant – Khorasan Province (ISKP) has claimed responsibility for the attack. On 26.03.20, a bomb exploded near a Sikh crematorium in Kabul. One child was injured. The most recent attack to be carried out by ISKP on Sikhs took place in Jalalabad (Nangarhar) on 01.07.18.

Prisoners released due to COVID-19 pandemic

The government is set to release up to 10,000 prisoners who have been detained for minor offences over the next ten days. Other reports, however, say that prisoners over 55 years of age are to be released. The measure is intended to contain the spread of coronavirus in prisons. The government imposed a three-week long curfew in Kabul effective from 28.03.20.

Agreement on exchange of prisoners appears to be within reach

After weeks of wrangling over the arrangements for the exchange of prisoners which was as a precondition for peace talks (cf. BN of 23.03.20), there are now signs that agreement may soon be reached. Representatives of both sides want to meet for preliminary talks within the next few days. The Afghan government published a list of 21 delegates. However, the Taliban refused to negotiate with the delegation, arguing that they do not represent all Afghan interests.

Wheat supply at risk

The government of Kazakhstan announced on 24.03.20 that it was closing its border for the movement of goods with Afghanistan because of the coronavirus. Kazakhstan is Afghanistan's main importer of wheat. As deliveries from Pakistan will also be lower (a plague of locusts reduced the harvest there, cf. BN of 03.02.20), the food supply in Afghanistan could be further endangered.

Albania

Plans to release prisoners owing to COVID-19

According to recent media reports, the government is planning to temporarily release hundreds of prisoners who have been convicted of minor offences as well as older prisoners suffering from chronic illnesses. The Minister of Justice had announced on 24.03.20, that against the background of the COVID-19 pandemic, about 600 prisoners are to be released for three months on a special permit. The released prisoners are being ordered

to stay at home. Albania has a prison population of about 5,500 people and its penitentiary system is almost always over capacity.

Azerbaijan

Crackdown on opposition

Several opposition politicians say they have been faced with intimidation, physical attacks and arrests. For example, the Islamic Unity Movement had distributed protective masks and brochures about COVID-19 in front of a subway station in Baku. The following day, an activist of the movement was sentenced to one month's imprisonment for alleged resistance to the police. A member of the Popular Front Party had received serious threats via the WhatsApp messenger service. During his speech delivered on the Muslim New Year (Nowruz) on 19.03.20, President Ilham Aliyev described the opposition in the country as a fifth column that intends to destroy Azerbaijan, incite uprisings and bring about a coup. He said if a state of emergency is declared because of the pandemic, the isolation of representatives of the fifth column will become a historical necessity. According to the official announcement, the parliament passed amendments to the law on information two days earlier in order to take action against the coronavirus. Internet users and companies have been threatened, among other things, with consequences if they disseminate information that is harmful to people's lives and health and poses a massive threat to public safety.

Chad

92 killed in attack on military base

The news portal Tchadinfos.com reports that 92 soldiers have been killed and at least 47 have been injured in fighting with Boko Haram on the Boma peninsula on Lake Chad on the border with Nigeria. They were reportedly ambushed. The army says that the attack on the base in Boma began in the early hours of 24.03.20 and lasted at least seven hours. Troops sent to reinforce the base had also been attacked by the jihadist militia. According to the head of state, Idriss Déby, this was the most serious attack Boko Haram has ever carried out in the country. Experts stated that the jihadists must have accomplices in the military to be able to attack the army in this way. Boko Haram has been fighting violently for an Islamist state in north-eastern Nigeria since 2009 and has now split into two factions. One splinter group is committed to ISIS, the other to the terror network al-Qaeda. It is still unclear which splinter group is responsible for the attack.

Colombia

Humanitarian crisis in Chocó intensifies

According to media reports, the Catholic Church of Colombia has accused the government of systematically ignoring human rights violations in the department of Chocó. In an appeal published on 26.03.20, representatives of the Catholic Church together with representatives of local ethnic groups demanded an end to the violence perpetrated by various armed groups.

The letter states that the human rights situation has deteriorated considerably in March 2020. It says violence faced by indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities in Colombia's poorest economic region has increased. The state is not in a position to guarantee basic human rights. Observers have long accused the Colombian state of abandoning the department of Chocó.

Once case of COVID-19 among native population

A member of the indigenous Yukpa people has become infected with the coronavirus. According to media reports, a 250-strong Yukpa group has been cordoned off by local authorities in a neighbourhood of the border town of Cúcuta.

Representatives of the indigenous party MAIS (Movimiento Alternativo Indígena y Social – Alternative Indigenous and Social Movement and ONIC (Organización Nacional Indígena de Colombia – National Indigenous Organization of Colombia) deplore the poor state of health of the now isolated people and are calling on the government of President Ivan Duque to ensure they have healthcare. The approximately 15,000 Yukpa people have a nomadic way of life and are living in both Colombia and Venezuela.

Egypt

Activists released from prison

On 19.03.20, the Supreme State Security Prosecution (SSSP) decided to release 15 opposition activists who had been held in pre-trial detention for several months. The SSSP did not clarify why the 15 activists were released.

Last week, a group of women had gathered in front of the headquarters of the Cabinet in central Cairo calling for the release of prisoners to prevent the spread of the coronavirus pandemic in Egyptian prisons. The women had been arrested by security forces but were released a short time afterwards.

International organisations say that Egyptian prisons are characterised by poor detention conditions, a lack of medical care and overcrowding.

Ethiopia

Battle against coronavirus: President pardons prisoners

Ethiopian President Sahle-Work Zewde has pardoned more than 4,000 prisoners in an effort to contain the spread of coronavirus in severely overcrowded prisons. The directive only covers those given a maximum sentence of three years for minor crimes and those who were about to be released from jail.

Guinea

Constitutional reform and parliamentary elections

Parliamentary elections and a referendum on a constitutional amendment were held on 22.03.20. In the referendum, 91.6% of voters supported the planned change of government, according to the Independent Electoral Commission. 8.4% had voted against it. Turnout was 61%. Originally, the referendum was to take place at the beginning of March 2020. However, the opposition and non-governmental organisations had called for a boycott. In the run-up, protests were repeatedly held and violent clashes erupted between various groups. According to the opposition, the police used violence against opposition supporters during the ballot. Many people were arrested, the security forces fired uncontrolled shots, killing at least ten people. The constitutional reform is controversial as it paves the way for incumbent Alpha Condé who has been in office since 2010 to serve a third term. In the parliamentary elections, some 7.8 million voters were called upon to elect 114 members of parliament. Representatives of 29 parties stood in the election at the 19,000 polling stations. The outcome of the election is not yet known. In Guinea, a state of emergency with restrictions on public life has been in effect since 27.03.20. So far, two confirmed cases of coronavirus have been registered, which is why the heads of government of four of Guinea's seven administrative regions called on 20.03.20 for the voting to be postponed in order to prevent a catastrophe in the country. The borders were to be closed on 21.03.20 to prevent an outbreak of the virus. Election observers from abroad cancelled their participation. Guinea had already been hit particularly hard during the Ebola crisis between 2014 and 2016. More than 2,500 people lost their lives at that time.

India

Impact of the coronavirus

On 24.03.20, the government issued a three-week curfew for the entire country. The police are cracking down with brute force on anyone who flouts the rules. There are reports of beatings and harassment. In addition, there are nationwide reports of healthcare workers and airport and airline employees being threatened. Some of them have been denied access to or have been evicted from their homes. Particularly affected are the homeless and slum dwellers, as well as tens of thousands of migrant workers who have lost their jobs and accommodation and are unable to return home.

Iran

COVID-19 pandemic: open letter to the WHO

In an open letter to the World Health Organization (WHO) dated 25.03.20, around 300 Iranian activists at home and abroad joined the demands of the relatives of political prisoners in Iran who are calling for their temporary release during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Iranian judiciary claims to have already granted temporary release to 80,000 detainees. According to a directive issued by Chief Justice Ayatollah Ebrahim Raisi, this also applies to political prisoners, but only if they have been sentenced to less than five years imprisonment and their respective competent officials in the prison system approve their release. For these reasons, according to the letter, only a few political prisoners have been released temporarily compared to the number of prisoners who have already been released. Hundreds of known, but above all unknown political prisoners remain behind bars in the more than 200 prisons.

Prison breakouts due to risk of pandemic

Riots broke out in several Iranian prisons last weekend. In the evening of 27.03.20, about 70 prisoners reportedly broken out of the prison of the city of Saqqez in the northwest to avoid the coronavirus epidemic. In the meantime, some of the inmates are said to have turned themselves in, while others have been arrested. Prison breakouts are very unusual in Iran.

Iraq

Curfews to prevent the spread of coronavirus

The government is extending the curfew imposed until 11.04.20. Until then, educational and recreational facilities will remain closed, religious gatherings such as pilgrimages will be prohibited, and shops will only be open a few hours a day to meet daily needs. The population has been urged to stay at home. Travel between the provinces is prohibited except in emergencies and for the maintenance of freight traffic. Domestic flights are currently suspended. Commercial passenger flights to and from Iraqi airports have been suspended for the period between 17.03.20 and 28.03.20. Existing restrictions are being renewed on an ongoing basis.

The Kurdish Regional Government is also imposing curfews. Public transport is limited to a minimum and travel between the Kurdish provinces and between the Kurdish and Iraqi provinces is only permitted in exceptional cases. The security forces are authorised to arrest people flouting the curfew. In Dohuk province, curfews have been imposed on all refugee and IDP camps. This has brought public life inside the camps to an almost complete standstill and has stopped all movement outside the camps. This means that day labourers can no longer get to work and have no income. In addition, the work of relief organisations has been disrupted. As a result, food, for example, is no longer being delivered

Kenya

Police enforce ban on assembly in church communities

According to local media, clashes erupted between churchgoers and the police in Mombasa on 22.03.20 after worshippers had ignored the ban on assembly due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Security forces stormed the Sunday service of a free church to disperse the congregation. A Catholic service had also been prematurely terminated by the authorities. Near the capital Nairobi, chaotic scenes erupted briefly when the police dispersed worshippers at a Catholic church with tear gas shortly before the service began.

Kosovo

Government toppled

After just six weeks in office (cf. BN of 10.02.20), the new government has been brought down after a vote of no confidence against the government of Prime Minister Albin Kurti backed by 82 of 120 members of parliament.

According to media reports, the fall of the government was preceded by a dispute between the two largest coalition partners. Albin Kurti's left-national party Vetevendosje (Self-Determination) and the conservative Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK) failed to agree on how to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic. In this context, Kurti had sacked the Interior Minister Agim Veliu, who had been appointed by the LDK. He had demanded that the state of emergency be declared. Informed circles suspect that Kurti rejected the declaration of a state of emergency also because of the increase in the competence of the President of Kosovo, Hashim Thaçi, which goes hand in hand with this measure.

According to the constitution, Vetevendosje, as the parliamentary group with the strongest mandate, has 15 days to appoint a new prime minister.

Lebanon

Tent camps cleared away in Beirut

The tent camps set up by protesters in several places in Beirut were cleared away on 28.03.20. The day before, a curfew and a ban on gatherings had come into effect. Some of the activists refused to leave the tents, resulting in a brawl with the police. Activists accuse the authorities of using the COVID-19 pandemic as an excuse to suppress the protest.

Gunfight in Baalbek

A shoot-out occurred in Maqneh in the Baalbek region on 29.03.20 when an army unit attempted to arrest a runaway member of an influential Shiite family with ties to Hezbollah. During the operation, the fugitive was injured and subsequently arrested together with an alleged accomplice.

Libya

Ministry of Justice decides to release prisoners

The Government of National Accord (GNA) published a decision on 28.03.20 to release 466 inmates from GNA-controlled prisons in Tripoli in order to reduce overcrowding in prisons during the COVID-19 pandemic. The prisoners eligible for release were in pre-trial detention or had qualified for conditional release.

International organisations as well as human rights organisations warn that the Libyan healthcare system is not prepared for an outbreak of the pandemic, as many hospitals have been damaged in the conflict and that there is a lack of qualified medical professionals and equipment as well as medicines. According to various media reports, the official number of people infected is between one and eight.

Meanwhile, the GNA as well as the troops of the Libyan National Army (LNA) are said to have violated the ceasefire agreed on 22.03.20. In response to the threat of the coronavirus, both sides had agreed on a ceasefire under the auspices of the United Nations on 22.03.20.

Mali

Parliamentary election

The first round of the parliamentary elections were held on 29.03.20. The government had decided not to postpone the election despite security concerns and the first COVID-19 cases. Preliminary results are expected within the next few days. A second round of voting is planned for 19.04.20. The parliamentary elections were originally scheduled to take place in 2018 but were then postponed twice due to security concerns.

In the run-up to the elections, it was announced on 26.03.20 that the opposition leader Soumaila Cisse (l'Union pour la république et la démocratie (URD)) had disappeared in the Niafunké electoral district in the Timbuktu region on 25.03.20. He is said to have been travelling there with a delegation to conduct an election campaign. Cisse and six other members of his delegation were allegedly abducted and his bodyguard was killed. So far nothing is known about the assailants.

Montenegro

Concerns about government action in relation to COVID-19

Various human rights and opposition groups have expressed serious concerns about the government's actions. Among other things, the government had published the names of persons who had contracted the disease and were to be placed in self-isolation. This was part of a long history of similar violations of basic data protection rules. It is also feared that the freedom of the press and freedom of opinion will be further curtailed, under the pretext of combating false reports. Montenegro currently ranks 104th in Reporters Without Borders' Press Freedom Index.

Mozambique

Coastal town of Mocimboa de Praia briefly captured by Islamists

On 23.03.20, about one hundred armed Islamists attacked the coastal town of Mocimboa de Praia (30,000 inhabitants) by land and sea in Mozambique's northernmost province of Cabo Delgado and occupied the town. They attacked the barracks of the defence forces, where they had hoisted their black ISIS flag. They also released the prisoners from the police station and set it on fire. Several public buildings were damaged, including the administrative building of the Mocimboa de Praia district and the town hall. In the evening, the insurgents left the city, with some of the local population applauding the insurgents. While the General Commander of the Police, Bernardino Rafael, stated that dozens of people had been injured in the attack, the online journal Moz24 reported that a child, a woman and a man had been killed. ISIS claimed responsibility for the attack on 24.03.20 through the Amaq news agency and stated that dozens of soldiers and police officers had been killed. The government did not provide any information about the number of casualties. It was the first time that Mozambican jihadists had attacked a city as large as Mocimboa de Praia. It is a key city near which foreign companies are working on a gas project worth USD 60 billion.

Brief occupation of the coastal town of Quissanga

On 25.03.20, armed Islamists in the province of Cabo Delgado attacked the district capital Quissanga, located on the coast, and occupied it for a short time before withdrawing. They destroyed the district police station and set fire to cars. In front of the police station they waved the ISIS flag. Six security forces were reportedly killed in the attack.

Mozambique/Ethiopia

Migrants in a truck die of asphyxiation

When stopping to inspect a truck in the central province of Tete in Mozambique, the police discovered the bodies of 64 deceased refugees in the hold, 14 others were rescued. The security forces had heard noises, opened the container and discovered the bodies. They were presumably migrants and refugees from Ethiopia who were to be transported illegally to South Africa by human traffickers from Malawi. Mozambique is generally seen as a smuggling corridor for migrants from Ethiopia and other African countries on their way to South Africa.

Myanmar

Government: Arakan Army illegal

Myanmar's government declared the Arakan Army (AA) and its political wing United League of Arakan (ULA) illegal and terrorist organisations on 23.03.20. Since the beginning of 2019, fighting between the Arakan Army and the military in Rakhine State has increased. Dozens of people have been killed and up to 140,000 have fled within the state according to various sources. The organisation is calling for autonomy for the Arakan Buddhist ethnic group (Rakhine). Fighting between the military and the AA broke out again in Rakhine State after the declaration was made public.

Nigeria

Soldiers killed in Islamist attack

On 23.03.20, militant Islamists attacked a military convoy using rocket-propelled grenades and other heavy weaponry in the north-eastern state of Borno near the village of Gorgi. The petrol and ammunition on board exploded. According to official military sources, at least 47 soldiers were killed, while unofficial military sources say that at least 70 soldiers were killed. It is unclear whether the terrorist organisation Boko Haram or its spin-off Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) is responsible for the attack.

North Macedonia

North Macedonia joins NATO

North Macedonia became the 30th member of NATO on 27.03.20,. The flag-raising ceremony will take place in front of the NATO headquarters in Brussels on 30.03.20. In the run-up to the event, the information transfer system NICS was used by North Macedonia to coordinate the communication of the authorities in the fight against the coronavirus.

Accession negotiations with the EU

On 26.03.20, the European Council was the last European institution to decide to launch accession negotiations with Macedonia. This marks the beginning of the screening process for the chapters to be negotiated. This is considered to be a great success within the country.

Russian Federation

Referendum on constitutional amendments postponed

President Putin announced on 25.03.20 that the referendum on far-reaching constitutional amendments planned for 22.04.20 would be postponed. In order to avoid any coronavirus-related risk to voters, he said a new date would be set in consultation with health experts. If more than half of the voters agree to the constitutional amendments in the referendum, they are likely come into force. Putin could then run again as a candidate in 2024 and, if re-elected, remain in office until 2036.

Somalia

Governors killed by al-Shabaab

On 25.03.20, the governor of Ras Kamboni, his driver and three of his bodyguards were killed in a landmine explosion near Ras Kamboni in Lower Juba region. Al-Shabaab claimed responsibility for the attack and said they were targeting the Kenyan Defence Forces (KDF) who were travelling with the governor.

On 29.03.20, the governor of Nugaal region died after a suicide attack carried out by al-Shabaab. The attack took place at a police station.

Suicide bomber attacks business

On 25.03.20, a suicide bomber blew himself up in a tea shop near the parliament building in Mogadishu, killing and wounding several people, including civilians. Al-Shabaab claimed responsibility for the attack and said it had actually targeted the Somali National Army forces guarding the parliament.

District policeman killed

On 22.03.20, the Afgoye district police chief and three of his bodyguards were killed in a bomb explosion in Hawa Abdi on the outskirts of Afgoye town. No group had claimed responsibility in the immediate aftermath of the attack.

Syria

Northeast: Prisoners escape during prison riot

On 29.03.20, a spokesperson for the Kurdish-dominated Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) confirmed that an uprising had taken place at a detention centre for alleged ISIS fighters, in which individual detainees allegedly managed to escape from the security forces. Unconfirmed reports stated that foreign fighters were being detained at the facility in Hasakah province. The US-led anti-ISIS coalition (which is not involved in the maintenance of SDF prisons but has said that it will support its Kurdish partners with intelligence information) has announced that the prisoners are allegedly only ISIS supporters who, in the opinion of the US-led anti-ISIS coalition, did not hold high ranks in ISIS.

The SDF administration runs more than two dozen prisons holding about 10,000 alleged IS fighters, around 2,000 of whom are allegedly from abroad, including 800 from Europe. Separately from the fighters, an additional 100,000 or so relatives of ISIS fighters and other sympathisers with the jihadist militia are also being held.

COVID-19 pandemic

The government in Damascus has adopted further measures to contain the spread of the global pandemic. According to media reports, Iranian-backed militias continue to enter Syria regularly.

Turkey

Measures against the COVID-19 pandemic

The government tightened its protective measures last week. All overseas flights will be suspended as of 27.03.20 and domestic flights will be severely restricted. Intercity travel will be subject by permit obtained from governorates and will be permitted in exceptional cases only. For the time being, there will be no more trains on long-distance routes, and all recreational activities will be largely restricted. There is a curfew for the chronically ill and people over 65 years of age. Restaurants and pubs may offer a take-away service and food must be collected.

Refugee camp cleared

On 27.03.20, the authorities closed the refugee camp at the Turkish-Greek border, and the refugees were taken inland. According to Turkish online media reports, the camp was evacuated because of the risk posed by the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic as there were allegedly two confirmed cases of coronavirus among the refugees.

More HDP mayors ousted

According to media reports, on 24.03.20, eight more pro-Kurdish Halkların Demokratik Partisi (HDP) mayors in south-eastern provinces were removed from office and replaced by state-appointed administrators. The districts affected are in the provinces of Batman, Diyarbakir, Bitlis, Skirt and Igdir. The mayors are being investigated for membership of a terrorist organisation, among other things.

According to party sources, 32 HDP mayors have already been ousted for allegedly having close links with the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) since the local elections in late March 2019, in which numerous mayoral posts went to HDP politicians.

Uganda

POMA declared unconstitutional in parts

According to a ruling by the Constitutional Court on 26.03.20, the Public Order Management Act (POMA) of 2013 is unconstitutional in parts. This applies to Section 8 of the Act, which gives the police supernatural powers to take action against events in public places and those responsible for them. The police used the law to brutally disperse rallies organised by opposition politician Kizza Besigye in the lead-up to the 2016 elections, and more recently to block meetings and concerts by pop star turned politician Bobi Wine. In 2013, several Ugandan human rights organisations challenged the law.

Ukraine

Investigations against former prime minister

A criminal investigation has been launched into alleged negligence by former Prime Minister Oleksiy Honcharuk and his Cabinet for failing to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 coronavirus in Ukraine.

Direct talks in the Donbass region

In the shadow of the COVID-19 pandemic, it has emerged that President Volodymyr Zelensky, in the conflict with Eastern Ukraine, is possibly considering direct talks between representatives of Kiev and the breakaway People's Republics of Donetsk and Luhansk. This information comes from the Trilateral Contact Group (Ukraine, Russia, OSCE) in Minsk and was confirmed by Zelensky's Chief of Staff, Andriy Yermak. An advisory body is reportedly being planned, consisting of ten representatives each from the Kiev Government and the two People's Republics of Donetsk and Luhansk, as well as one representative each from the OSCE, France, Germany and Russia. Russia has for years been calling for direct talks between Ukraine and representatives of the two people's republics in order to resolve the conflict, whereas Ukraine and its Western supporters have focused on Moscow's proven role both in inciting the renegades and in the hostilities and administration of the separatist areas.

The Ukrainian leadership's plans immediately led to criticism in Ukrainian civil society, parts of the opposition, but also within the presidential party "Servants of the People", where one group announced it would resist the plans. A member of parliament who had publicly expressed fierce opposition was dismissed as Zelensky's advisor. Zelensky's critics see the behaviour of the government and the approval of Yermak, who is considered pro-Russia, as caving into Russia.

Venezuela

Fuel supply severely limited

Since 25.03.20, at least in the Caracas region, fuel is only being distributed to members of the military, medical professions and drivers in order to ensure basic supplies are maintained. The curfew and other restrictions are currently making everyday life considerably more difficult. Prices for certain products, such as eggs and citrus fruit, have risen dramatically. Due to a rumour that is mainly circulating in cities, many Venezuelans believe that vitamin C will help against the coronavirus, and for that reason, for lemons, passion fruit, etc. has soared.

Venezuela declared a state sponsor of terrorism

On 26.03.20, the U.S. Department of Justice designated Venezuela as a state sponsor of terrorism, or more precisely narco-terrorism. The background to this is the involvement of the state apparatus in drug trafficking, especially cocaine, and its links to the remnants of the FARC movement in Colombia. A reward of US\$15 million has been offered for information leading to the arrest of Nicolas Maduro.

Yemen

Saudi Arabian armed forces are accused of human rights violations

On 25.03.20, Human Rights Watch (HRW) published a report in which it accused the Saudi Arabian armed forces and their Yemeni allies of human rights violations in the East Yemeni governorate of al-Mahrah. According to HRW, civilians, some of whom have protested against Saudi Arabia's military presence in the government, have been arbitrarily detained, forcibly "disappeared" and tortured for months since June 2019. Some of the detainees had been transferred illegally to neighbouring Saudi Arabia. Many Yemenis are reportedly being held without charge in Saudi Arabian prisons.

Baha'i prisoners released

On 25.03.20, the President of the Supreme Political Council in Sana'a, Mahdi Al-Mashat, ordered the release of all Baha'i prisoners in the region of Yemen held by Houthi rebels as well as a pardon for Hamed bin Haydara, the leader of the movement. Haydara had originally been sentenced to death.

U.S. suspends humanitarian aid

The US Agency for International Development (USAID) announced on 26.03.20 that it would suspend humanitarian aid to parts of Yemen over restrictions by the Houthi rebels that predate the pandemic. The decision came after the Houthis spent months preventing U.N. agencies from delivering humanitarian aid flows to the civilian population.

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