



# Briefing Notes

## Group 62 - Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

01 July 2024

### Afghanistan

#### Security situation

According to their own statements, the Afghanistan Freedom Front and the National Resistance Front (NRF) made several attacks on the Taliban in Kabul on 24.06.24. According to the NRF, three of the group's fighters died in a clash with the Taliban at an undisclosed location on 28.06.24.<sup>1</sup>

#### Prosecution situation

According to the U.S. State Department's latest human trafficking report, the Taliban are recruiting child soldiers and practising bacha bazi (sexual exploitation of minors). The report also emphasises the violation of women's rights and the Taliban's restrictions of the work of NGOs.

In the provinces of Ghazni, Paktika, Parwan, and Herat, the Taliban publicly flogged eight people between 24.06. and 30.06.24, accusing them of adultery, "absconding from home" or theft.

After the Afghan team reached the semi-finals of the Cricket World Cup on 25.06.24, the Taliban announced in several provinces, including Kandahar, that people celebrating this success would be arrested. The Taliban did not offer any justification for this announcement. On 25.06.24, the Taliban used water cannons against people celebrating in the streets after the cricket victory in Khost province.

In a village in Badakhshan province, the Taliban and local residents clashed violently on 26.06.24, several people were injured. The villagers claimed that the Taliban had entered their homes without any reason.<sup>2</sup>

#### Government business

A UN-organised meeting of delegations from 25 countries, five international organisations and the Taliban will be held in Doha on 30.06. and 01.07.24. The exclusion of Afghan civil society and women's rights activists gave rise to much criticism already in the run-up to the meeting. The Taliban delegation in Doha stressed that restrictions on women were an internal matter. The delegation also called for the lifting of international sanctions in order to stabilise the Afghan economy.

On 24.06.24, the Taliban reportedly summoned owners of photo studios to prohibit them to photograph and film at wedding ceremonies in Ghazni province.<sup>3</sup>

#### Humanitarian situation

In the province of Bamiyan, at least 19 people died in floods on 26.06.24. Villages in other provinces are still cut off from the outside world after numerous heavy rainfalls in recent weeks. A total of nine people died in landslides in the provinces of Paktia and Badakhshan on 24.06. and 29.06.24.

According to IOM figures of 28.06.24, 34,000 Afghan nationals from Iran and Pakistan entered Afghanistan within a week.<sup>4</sup>

## **Belarus**

### **Personnel reshuffle in key positions**

On 27 June, President Aleksandr Lukashenko made new appointments to key positions in the government and the presidential administration to increase efficiency and reduce bureaucracy, according to his own statements. The former ambassador to Moscow, Dmitry Krutoi, is the new head of the presidential administration. The first deputy head of the presidential administration, the foreign minister, the deputy prime minister, the ministers for agriculture and industry have also been replaced. International sanctions have been imposed on all of these individuals.<sup>5</sup>

### **Catholic priest in custody and prison sentence against family**

According to media reports of 24.06.24, the Catholic priest Andrzej Yuhnevich was not released after serving a 45-day prison sentence for "violating the regulations for picketing", rather, his detention was extended until 02.07.24 for unspecified reasons. Yuhnevich was charged because he posted a photo on Facebook showing him with a Ukrainian flag and the historic white-red-white flag of Belarus.

On 28.06.24, the Homel Regional Court sentenced three members of a family to long prison terms for treason, incitement to hatred, extremism and failure to report a crime. An unnamed source told RFE/RL that the charges relate to photographs taken at various locations in the country.<sup>6</sup>

### **Belarusian-Ukrainian border**

Belarus intends to further reinforce its border with Ukraine following an incident involving a Ukrainian surveillance drone. According to the Minsk Ministry of Defence, the armed forces along the border with Ukraine were strengthened. Multiple rocket launchers are said to have been deployed at an unspecified border section. According to the Belarusian military, also additional air defence forces have been deployed to the area to protect the critical infrastructure in the border region in view of the increase of Ukrainian drone flights.<sup>7</sup>

## **Bolivia**

### **Coup attempt failed; ex-generals facing long prison sentences; political polarisation in the country continues**

On 26.06.24, under the leadership of the General Commander of the Army, Juan José Zúñiga, several members of the military occupied Murillo Square in front of the seat of government in La Paz with armoured military vehicles and forcibly gained access to the building. The attempted coup was successfully thwarted a few hours later. President Arce then appointed a new army command, whose leaders immediately called on the soldiers to demobilise. Zúñiga and 20 other members of the military, including the head of the navy, Juan Arnez Salvador, were arrested. Zúñiga, Salvador and another ex-general have been remanded in custody for six months at the request of the Attorney General's Office; they are facing long prison sentences for armed rebellion and terrorism. Speculation about the motive for the attempted coup still continues. When he was arrested, Zúñiga claimed that the attempted coup was merely staged on the instructions of current President Arce to increase his popularity, which the current government vehemently denies. Zúñiga had been deposed already the day before the attempted coup in connection with the political demand to ban ex-President Morales from participating in the 2025 presidential elections. Political tensions between Arce and Morales have persisted already for months, including over the leadership of the socialist MAS party, to which both belong. The economic situation in the country also remains difficult.<sup>8</sup>

## **Colombia**

### **Increase in reported cases of domestic violence in 2024**

According to the Ministry of Defence, more than 63,500 cases of domestic violence were reported in Colombia between January and May 2024, which is the highest figure since surveys began and an increase of around 35% against the same period last year.<sup>9</sup>

### **Paz Total: Peace talks with Segunda Marquetalia in Caracas, unilateral ceasefire by guerrillas**

Peace talks between the Colombian government and the FARC dissident group Segunda Marquetalia took place in Caracas between 24.06. and 29.06.24. The outcomes of this first round of talks included a unilateral ceasefire on

the part of the guerrillas and the promise to release persons held by them. An agreement has been reached on "early measures for the comprehensive and gradual de-escalation of the conflict in the territories", which comprises nine points. The next cycle of talks is scheduled to take place in Cuba in the second week of August 2024. The Segunda Marquetalia currently operates primarily in the south-western departments of Cauca, Nariño and Putumayo as well as at some points along the Colombian-Venezuelan border, including in the form of alliances with other criminal actors.<sup>10</sup>

## **Ecuador**

### **Situation of media professionals**

According to the organisation Fundamedios, the deterioration of the security situation and the surge in violence by criminal gangs in the country went along with an increase in threats against media professionals. As a result, self-censorship is exercised among other things. At least 16 journalists are said to have left Ecuador since 2023 for these reasons. Although a semi-governmental protection mechanism for media professionals was established last year, it lacks the financial resources to implement measures, Fundamedios says.<sup>11</sup>

## **Ethiopia**

### **Journalists released from prison**

Reporters Without Borders reported the release of three journalists who had been arrested in Amhara during the state of emergency and detained for between seven and ten months. Other media professionals who reported on incidents during the conflict in Amhara continue to remain in custody. During the state of emergency that lasted from August 2023 to June 2024, also numerous civilians were arrested without any charges being brought.<sup>12</sup>

## **Ethiopia / Somalia**

### **Short-term redeployment of Ethiopian troops to Somalia**

According to reports, the Ethiopian government sent troops from the Ethiopian National Defence Forces to the Somali region of Hiraan on 22.06.24 to fend off attacks by the terrorist group al-Shabaab. The troops were withdrawn a few days later. Ethiopia has already deployed up to 10,000 soldiers in Somalia under the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS) and bilateral agreements. Somali government representatives categorised the current troop deployment as an illegal border crossing that caused confrontations with local security forces. Since the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between Ethiopia and the autonomous region of Somaliland, which is intended to give Ethiopia access to the Red Sea in return for the recognition of Somaliland's independence, relations between Ethiopia and Somalia have been tense. The Somalia central government classified the memorandum as a threat to its own sovereignty and adopted a law voiding the MoU. At the end of May 2024, the Somali government stated that it expected the total withdrawal of Ethiopian troops by the end of 2024. The withdrawal of ATMIS troops and the handover of security tasks to national Somali security forces is currently taking place in several phases. The mission is due to be completed by the end of 2024, however, there are indications of a delay. The African Union Security Council has also announced plans for a follow-up mission.<sup>13</sup>

## **India**

### **Three new criminal laws enter into force**

According to media reports from 01.07.24, three new criminal laws passed by the parliament in December 2023, will enter into force on 01.07.24. These are (Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), Bharatiya Nagrik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS), Bharatiya Sakshya Adhinyam (BSA)). These laws replace the Indian Penal Code (IPC) of 1860, the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC) of 1973 and the India Evidence Act of 1872, which, according to Home Minister Amit Shah, will erase "150-year-old" laws created by the British colonisers. Critics, however, say that the colonial mentality is certainly being continued with the new laws, for example by expanding police powers. A total of 20 new offences

were added to the Sanhita and prison sentences for 33 offences were increased. The critics also cite as an example that lynchings by angry mobs will now be punished with life imprisonment or even death.<sup>14</sup>

## **Iran**

### **Early presidential election: Run-off required after first vote**

The election of the President of the Islamic Republic took place on 28.06.24. According to media reports, the electoral authority stated that turnout was historically low at around 40% (approx. 24 million votes cast by an electorate of around 61 million). As a result, the candidate Massud Pezeshkian, who is regarded as moderate to reform-oriented, received around 42.5% of the vote and Saeed Jalili, who is categorised as loyal to the party and strictly conservative, received around 38.7%, thus no absolute majority has been achieved. According to Iranian law, a run-off election is required, which is to take place on 05.07.24, preceded by a short campaign phase.

The early presidential election became necessary following the fatal helicopter crash of incumbent President Ebrahim Raisi on 19.05.24. On election day, there also was a choice of five more of the six candidates pre-approved by the so-called Guardian Council (cf. BN of 10.06.24). Activists at home and abroad had called for an election boycott via social media.<sup>15</sup>

### **Prison sentence for a participant in 2019 protests**

According to media reports from 26.06.24, a participant in the 2019 protests was sentenced to two years and seven months in prison by a criminal court. Referring to a Kurdish human rights organisation, it was reported that charges against the man from Bukan (Kordestan province) included endangering national security by incitement and provocation as well as propaganda against the Islamic Republic. The convicted man had been detained in Bukan Central Prison from January to the end of February 2024 and was subsequently released on bail until the judgement was handed down. He had first been arrested by security forces in 2019.<sup>16</sup>

### **Convictions after fire in Tehran's Evin prison in 2022**

According to media reports of 24.06.24, forty prison inmates were sentenced to several years in prison and fines, in some cases to lashes and additional sentences, in connection with an arson incidence in Tehran's Evin Prison in 2022. Two of those involved will also be deported from Iran, the reports said. With reference to a human rights organisation, it was reported that the convicts had been accused of, among other things, damaging property, disruption of prison rules and disobedience to prison officers, but in some cases also intentional homicide.

On 15.10.22, fire had broken out in Tehran's Evin prison following a conflict between inmates and prison staff. According to media reports, several people died and others were injured (cf. BN of 17.10.22).<sup>17</sup>

## **Iraq**

### **Closure of internally displaced persons camps in Kurdistan**

The implementation of the government's decision to close the IDP camps still in operation in the Kurdistan Region is progressing with the return of several thousand IDPs to Shingal.

There is widespread reluctance to return to Shingal among the predominantly Yazidi inhabitants of the remaining camps, as reconstruction is still stalling and the security situation is difficult. Basic services have still not been restored in many of the villages that were destroyed during the IS war. The Iraqi government has promised initial aid of IQD 4 million (approx. EUR 2,800, as at 01.07.24) for voluntary return before 30.07.24 and intends to stop all aid for internally displaced persons in the Kurdistan Region after this date.<sup>18</sup>

### **President signs law on the criminalisation of LGBTIQ people**

On 27.06.24, Iraqi President Rashid signed the law passed by parliament in April 2024, which significantly expands the 1988 anti-prostitution law. Once the law comes into force, consensual homosexual acts will be punishable by a minimum of ten and a maximum of 15 years in prison. Gender reassignment surgery is punishable by up to three years in prison for both the performer and the person undergoing the surgery. The "propagation" of homosexuality can be punished with up to seven years in prison.<sup>19</sup>

## **Mali**

### **Opposition politician arrested and charged**

According to media reports, the Malian military government arrested several leaders of an alliance of political parties and civil society groups at a private meeting in the house of a former minister in Bamako on 20.06.24. A representative of one of the parties stated that eleven people were arrested. Most of them are leaders of political parties that are opposed to the military government. They include the heads of political parties and movements who had signed a statement published on 31.03.24 calling on the junta to return power to the civilian population. In a statement, the alliance demands the immediate release of those arrested. Almost all of Mali's political parties are represented in this opposition alliance, known as the Opposition Platform of the Declaration of 31 March (French: Plateforme d'opposition de la Déclaration du 31 mars). In April 2024, the military junta had issued a decree calling for the suspension of all political party activities on the grounds of maintaining public order.

According to a judicial source, the detainees were at the Brigade d'Investigation Judiciaire (BIJ) in Bamako and were brought before the public prosecutor on 21.06.24.

On 21.06.24, one of the detainees, Mohamed Ali Bathily, a lawyer and former minister, was released. The remaining ten were brought before a judge on 24.06.24 and charged with "conspiracy against the government" and "undermining public order", among other things, and subsequently remanded in custody.

Following the incident, human rights organisations called for the release of the detainees and expressed their concern. It is becoming increasingly dangerous to express dissatisfaction with the Malian authorities and it shows that those who speak out risk arrest, they said.<sup>20</sup>

## **Mauritania**

### **Incumbent wins presidential election**

President Mohamed Ould Ghazouani, the frontrunner from the start, won the presidential election on 29.06.24 with around 56% of the vote. As this is the absolute majority, no run-off election will be required, as was also expected. Ghazouani thus faces a second five-year term in office (cf. BN of 08.07.19). Human rights activist Biram Ould Dah Ould Abeid came in second with around 22% of the vote, followed by Hamadi Ould Sid'El Moutar, the Tewassoul party's candidate, who garnered around 13%. The press reports are based on information provided by the electoral commission after the votes had been counted in almost all polling stations. Voter turnout was around 55% of around 2 million registered voters.

The African Union (AU) had sent a short-term election observation mission; no statement is known yet. According to reports, Abeid, who had already come in second in 2019 (cf. BN of 27.05.24), announced that he would not recognise the election result, citing doubts about the independence of the electoral commission. During the election campaign, he had made the human rights situation under Ghazouani and the marginalisation of the black population an issue. A UN report from 2023 found that forms of exploitation similar to slavery still exist. According to the Global Slavery Index (GSI), around 3% of the population are considered to be affected.

Within the Sahel region, Mauritania is considered stable with regard to jihadist terror. It is rich in natural resources, including gold, uranium and iron ore, and also has offshore natural gas reserves, the exploitation of some of which is due to start at the end of 2024. However, poverty remains widespread.<sup>21</sup>

## **Myanmar**

### **Security situation**

Six civilians were injured and another one was killed in Waingmaw (Kachin State) on 10.06.24 in fighting between the Myanmar military and the Kachin Independence Army.

On 19.06.24, security forces at a police checkpoint near Mandalay shot dead the prominent monk Sayadaw Bhaddanta Munindabhivamsa, who had publicly condemned the military coup of February 2021.

Following armed clashes with the Chinland Defence Force, troops of the military junta set fire to the village of Taingen in the north of Chin State on 20.06.24, thereby completely destroying it. Information on deaths and injuries could not be independently verified.

On 22.06.24, the military killed 17 civilians, including a child, in a night air raid on a monastery in Indaw municipality (Sagaing region).

Between 25.06. and 27.06.24, fighting between the military and the Ta'ang National Liberation Army in Madaya and Mogoke (Mandalay region) displaced thousands of civilians from a total of ten villages. Seven civilians are reported killed and ten others injured.

In Rakhine state, around 10,000 people in the embattled community of Maungdaw are cut off from food and medical supplies. The local WFP warehouse burnt down on 22.06.24; the military has also closed roads and hospitals in the region. On 27.06.24, the aid organisation Doctors Without Borders announced the suspension of its work in the communities of Rathedaung, Buthidaung and Maungdaw due to the violence. Eight civilians, including one child, were killed and 14 others injured in airstrikes in Ann, Taungup and Myebon townships between 17.06. and 20.06.24.<sup>22</sup>

### **Extension of compulsory military service to include retired and former soldiers**

According to local media reports, the military began recalling retired or former military personnel at the beginning of June 2024. A corresponding announcement had already been made in May 2024. Men up to the age of 67 are affected by the measure. Those who are called up must serve for at least three years, with returnees under the age of 55 being deployed at the front. Refusal to do so could result in the cancellation of their pension or up to three years in prison. According to UN figures and investigations by human rights organisations, the Myanmar military regularly commits war crimes and crimes against humanity in the fight against armed opposition and ethnic groups.<sup>23</sup>

## **Niger**

### **Deadly attack on army**

On 25.06.24, armed actors killed around 20 members of the Nigerien military and one civilian near the village of Tassia in the western region of Tillabéri. According to media reports, around ten people were injured. The Ministry of Defence has announced three days of national mourning from 26.06.24. The department of Téra in the Tillabéri region in the so-called border triangle between Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso is considered a retreat for jihadist groups with links to al-Qaeda and the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS).<sup>24</sup>

## **Nigeria**

### **North-west: Deadly attack on rural community**

According to media reports, unknown persons attacked the village of Maidabino in the Danmusa Local Government Area (LGA) in the north-western state of Katsina on the night of 23.06.24, killing at least seven people and kidnapping around 100. The attackers arrived at the scene on motorbikes. Recently, several similar attacks have occurred in Katsina State (cf. BN of 26.02.24 and 17.06.24).<sup>25</sup>

### **Several priests kidnapped**

Three Catholic priests have been kidnapped in different federal states within a few days. On 24.06.24 the media reported the release of the kidnap victim who was abducted on 09.06.24 in the northern state of Kaduna already on the following day. A priest kidnapped on 16.06.24 in the south-eastern state of Anambra is still in the hands of his kidnappers. The same is true for a priest abducted on 22.06.24 in the north-western state of Zamfara, the report said. Furthermore, at least two other priests were kidnapped in Nigeria in May 2024, however, they were released after a few days. Media reports indicated on 28.06.24 that a ransom is demanded for the release of the priest kidnapped on 22.06.24. Catholic priests have also been kidnapped in the past (cf. BN of 02.01.23). Whenever the victims are released, it may possibly remain unknown whether a ransom was paid.<sup>26</sup>

## **Nigeria / Senegal**

### **Human trafficking: Nigerian girls freed in Senegal**

Members of the Senegalese NGO La Lumière, in cooperation with the Nigerian embassy in Dakar, freed around 25 trafficked Nigerian girls in Senegal on 23.06.24 and returned them to Nigeria. According to media reports, the girls and young women aged between 11 and 24 were trafficked to Senegal via the city of Cotonou in Benin and across the Malian-Senegalese border, they were then forced into prostitution in the regions of Tamaccounda and Kedougou. According to a media report, the girls are from the Nigerian states of Edo, Delta, Abia and Plateau. The rescue of the girls is a result of increased cooperation between Senegal and Nigeria to combat human trafficking. The Trafficking in Persons Report published by the U.S. Department of State in June 2024 shows that Nigeria does not fully meet minimum standards to combat human trafficking but continues to make considerable efforts to achieve them. Success stories from the Nigerian National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP) regularly mention the number of victims of human trafficking freed during rescue operations and the number of people convicted of human trafficking (cf. BN of 04.10.21, 25.04. and 25.07.22, 07.08. and 09.10.23).<sup>27</sup>

## **Pakistan**

### **Pakistani government launches second phase of repatriation of Afghan nationals**

According to media reports, the Pakistani government launched the second phase of the "Illegal Foreigners Repatriation Plan" on 30.06.24. This phase is said to affect around 800,000 Afghans who held Afghan Citizenship Cards (ACC) issued by Pakistan. Already at the beginning of April 2024, the local interior minister of Sindh province had announced that all ACCs had been cancelled and 67,000 Afghan nationals would be deported. On 30.06.24, also the so-called Proof of Registration Cards (PoR) expired nationwide for approx. 1.3 million Afghan nationals. This group is to be repatriated in the plan's third phase. So far, around 500,000 Afghan nationals have left the country during the first phase.<sup>28</sup>

## **Palestinian Territories / Israel**

### **Gaza Strip: current developments; humanitarian situation**

On 27.06.24, the Hamas-led Ministry of Health stated that more than 37,765 Palestinians had been killed and 86,429 others wounded in the Gaza Strip since the start of the war. The ministry does not officially distinguish between combatants and civilians.

According to information provided by the Israeli military on 28.06.24, a total of 314 Israeli military personnel lost their lives and 2,005 others have been wounded since the start of the ground offensive.

The fighting in the Gaza Strip, including airstrikes by the Israeli military, is continuing. Most recently, al-Shuja'iyya in Gaza City and al-Mawasi in Rafah were particularly affected. According to estimates, another 60,000 to 80,000 people fled to the south from areas in and around Gaza City following recent evacuation orders by the Israeli army. On 24.06.24, the children's rights organisation Save the Children published estimates according to which up to 21,000 children are missing or have disappeared, been arrested or buried under rubble or in mass graves in the Gaza Strip. This figure includes around 17,000 children who have been separated from their families.

In its latest report, the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) assumes that there is still a high risk of famine in the Gaza Strip as long as the fighting continues and access for humanitarian aid remains limited. According to the Hamas-led authorities, the 31st child died of malnutrition on 26.06.24.

Despite the Israeli military's announcement that fighting along an important road within the Gaza Strip would be halted during daytime to allow the distribution of aid, lawlessness along the route is making aid delivery difficult. Criminal gangs are blocking the route, looting aid supplies and thus thwarting their distribution.

Meanwhile, on 29.06.24, the WFP resumed a one-off distribution of relief supplies that had reached the Gaza Strip via the US-built pier. The UN had suspended distribution since 09.06.24 for security concerns (cf. BN of 10.06.24). The current one-off operation intends to prevent the food from spoiling. At the same time, the pier had to be detached from the coast again due to bad weather conditions to protect it against damage. In view of the sluggish

distribution of the transported goods, the US military is now examining whether the pier is to be used in the future or whether operations should be stopped altogether.

On 27.06.24, for the first time in two months, 21 children were evacuated from the Gaza Strip to Egypt via the Israeli Kerem Shalom border crossing for medical treatment of cancer and other chronic illnesses. Acute shortages of fuel, medicines and medical equipment have led to partial cancellation of medical services inside the Gaza Strip. Due to the inadequate supply of fuel, hygiene facilities are not sufficiently accessible to the population. According to the UN initiative WASH (Water, Sanitation and Hygiene) Cluster, between 15.06. and 23.06.24, an average of around 5% of the estimated 70,000 litres of water required were available every day.<sup>29</sup>

#### **West Bank: Several dead and injured**

On 30.05.24, a high-ranking member of the so-called Islamic Jihad in Palestine was killed by an Israeli drone attack on targets in the Nur Shams refugee camp. Five other unidentified individuals were wounded.

On 20.06.24, a 15-year-old Palestinian was killed by the Israeli military when a group of Palestinians threw stones at the army during a military operation in Qalqiliya.

Two days later, according to Israeli media reports, an Israeli was shot dead, allegedly by a Palestinian, in Qalqiliya. During a military operation in Jenin on 22.06.24, four Palestinians were wounded and three people were arrested. During the operation, a wounded Palestinian was reportedly tied to the bonnet of an Israeli military jeep before being interrogated and released. According to his own account, the man had previously been shot twice as he left a relative's house near an Israeli military operation. The Israeli military announced an investigation into the incident. The total number of Palestinians killed in the occupied West Bank between 07.10.23 and 24.06.24 rises to 536. More than 5,370 other people are said to have been wounded. During the same period, twelve Israelis, including seven military personnel, were killed and 105 others wounded in the West Bank.<sup>30</sup>

### **Republic of Moldova**

#### **Start of EU accession talks and stance of the pro-Russian opposition**

The Republic of Moldova officially started accession talks with the EU on 25.06.24 after the EU Council approved the negotiating framework for the country on 21.06.24. Experts warn that Moscow will intensify its hybrid war to disrupt Moldova's EU accession aspirations. In an interview before that date, Igor Dodon, pro-Russian leader of Moldova's largest opposition party and former president, accused the incumbent pro-European President Maia Sandu and the Moldovan government of violating the country's neutral status. Dodon refused to retract the threat he voiced during his Moscow visit, to deny acceptance of the results of the presidential elections in October 2024 if Sandu emerged victorious.<sup>31</sup>

#### **Temporary detention of a Russian journalist in Transnistria**

The Russian journalist Timofey Ilyushin, who was arrested by the separatist authorities in Transnistria on 24.06.24, was released on 26.06.24. Ilyushin reports for the Russian online publication Sotavision (Sota), which is considered independent, and was on assignment for an article in Transnistria, where he had been declared an "undesirable" alien already in March 2024.<sup>32</sup>

### **Senegal**

#### **Draft law intensifying criminalisation of homosexuality**

On 24.06.24, MP Cheikh Abdou Bara Dolly Mbacké submitted a bill to the Senegalese parliament to further criminalise homosexuality. According to media reports, the bill stipulates that same-sex sexual acts, which are described as "acts against nature", are punishable by ten to 15 years in prison without parole and a fine of 1,000,000 to 5,000,000 CFA francs (from around EUR 1,500 - around EUR 7,600, as at 01.07.24). Persons who defend homosexual acts are to be punished with a prison sentence of three to five years and a fine of 500,000 to 5,000,000 CFA francs (from around EUR 760 - EUR 1,500, as at 01.07.24), according to the bill. Mbacké maintains that the bill aims to counter the "immoral cultural values" introduced from the West. Parliament's adoption of the bill could have international repercussions and destabilise Senegal's diplomatic relations. Until now, same-sex sexual acts of any kind have been punishable by up to five years in prison and a fine of between 100,000 and 1,500,000 CFA francs

(from around EUR 150 - around EUR 2,300, as at 01.07.24) under Article 319 of the Senegalese Penal Code of 1965. The bill adopts the provisions of an earlier proposal to further criminalise same-sex sexual acts of January 2022 under former President Macky Sall, which parliament rejected at the time. The reason given for rejecting the bill at the time was that the existing legislation was already sufficiently precise stipulating penalties that were severe enough. In addition to homosexuality, Mbacké's bill also covers "lesbianism, bisexuality, transsexuality, intersexuality, zoophilia, necrophilia and further similar practices".<sup>33</sup>

## **Sierra Leone**

### **Law banning child marriage passed**

In June 2024, the Sierra Leonean parliament passed a law banning child marriage. The Prohibition of Child Marriage Bill 2024 criminalises the marriage of persons under the age of 18, prohibits all forms of child marriage and cohabitation with a child as well as aiding and abetting the marriage of a child. The law also provides for prison sentences of up to 15 years for offenders. Activists see the law as a great success for children's rights. According to UNICEF, child marriage is a serious problem in Sierra Leone. 30% of girls and 4% of boys are married under the age of 18. Currently, around 800,000 girls under 18 are already married in Sierra Leone, including around 400,000 before the age of 15. The rates are higher in rural areas than in the cities, UNICEF says.<sup>34</sup>

## **Syria**

### **South: Two dead in Israeli airstrikes**

According to Syrian state media, two people were killed and one soldier wounded in alleged Israeli airstrikes on 26.06.24. It is not known whether the casualties were civilians or militiamen. The report says that the airstrikes were carried out from the Golan Heights in southern Syria.<sup>35</sup>

### **South: Armed clashes in Suweida**

In the governorate of Suweida, which is nominally under the control of the Syrian government, armed clashes erupted on 23.06.24 between government troops and local armed groups after various pro-government troops and militias set up a checkpoint at the northern access to Suweida city.

Tensions only eased two days later, after an agreement had been reached between government representatives and local civilian (religious) authorities, in consultation with the armed factions involved. The agreement provides that the checkpoint is to be converted into a regular military post that will not affect the freedom of movement of the civilian population. The establishment of the checkpoint had caused unrest among the population, because a report had recently circulated saying that the government had issued numerous arrest warrants and travel bans for participants in the anti-government protests that have been ongoing since August 2023 (cf. BN of 10.06.24).<sup>36</sup>

### **South: Armed clashes in Dar'a**

In the village of Inkhil in the Dar'a governorate, local armed groups and government troops clashed violently on 30.06.24 after the armed factions besieged and attacked buildings used by the Syrian government's security services. According to media reports, the siege was triggered by the detention of a former opposition figure who had been arrested several weeks ago despite entering into a so-called reconciliation agreement with the government and has been held in Damascus ever since. Similar clashes are said to have erupted in Jassim shortly afterwards, where the release of three detainees was demanded.<sup>37</sup>

### **Ministry of Health significantly increases costs for medical examinations and hospitalisation**

According to media reports of 27.06.24, the Syrian Ministry of Health announced significant price increases as part of a new medical fee schedule.

Accordingly, costs for visits to the doctor and hospitalisation will increase by up to 600%. Hospitals, medical centres and private clinics are bound by the new fees. Due to the poor economic situation in the country, medical treatment is reportedly becoming increasingly unaffordable for the population.<sup>38</sup>

## **Türkiye**

### **Allegations of abuse against Istanbul police**

According to media reports, on 27.06.24 a group of ten plainclothes police officers abused a male and a female lawyer in the organised crime department of Istanbul's main police station when the lawyers tried to provide legal assistance to their clients, who are said to have previously experienced violence at the station as well.

The two lawyers suffered injuries and filed a complaint against the officers at Istanbul's Çağlayan Court. In addition to the claim for assault, the male lawyer also filed a claim for theft, as money had been stolen from his colleague's wallet. According to their statements, neither lawyer had been given access to their two clients. One client has since been released. The fate of the other client is not known.

Human rights groups regularly accuse the Turkish judiciary of granting impunity to law enforcement officials accused of involvement in incidents of disproportionate use of force, misconduct, ill-treatment and torture, despite sometimes extensive evidence.<sup>39</sup>

### **Arrest warrant for YouTuber**

After two people discussed Sharia law on the video portal YouTube on 14.06.24, the Istanbul Public Prosecutor's Office issued an arrest warrant against Diamond Tema, a Turkish YouTuber with Albanian roots, on 16.06.24. According to the Presidential Office and the Minister of Justice, Yılmaz Tunç, Tema is being investigated for incitement to hatred and insulting religious values. Tema had offended the religious feelings of the population with his statements about the Prophet Mohammed, they said.

Tema, who describes himself as agnostic, had a discussion with the national-conservative influencer Asrin Tok on 14.06.24. During the discussion, Tok stated that he considered Sharia law to be a better system than democracy. The marriage of the Prophet Muhammad to his wife Aisha was also discussed in the conversation. According to some Islamic sources, Aisha was six years old when she was engaged to Muhammad and nine years old when the marriage was consummated. According to media reports, the treatment of the topic triggered death threats against Tema and his family. In response, Tema uploaded further videos to YouTube to explain that he had not committed any offence, had not used any insults and had merely quoted hadiths from recognised hadith collections.

Tema is currently in Albania and only wants to return to Turkey when the situation has calmed down, the reports said.<sup>40</sup>

## **Ukraine**

### **Civilian casualties; prisoner exchange; state of emergency in Sevastopol and property transfer in Luhansk**

According to the governor, at least five civilians died in Russian missile attacks in Pokrovsk (Donetsk region) on 24.06.24. According to media reports of 24.06.24, one person died in a Russian attack in the city of Kurakhove (Donetsk region). According to further media reports, at least one person was killed by Russian shelling of the city of Torezk (Donetsk region) on 27.06.24. From the Kherson region, the responsible regional governor reported that a civilian was killed by Russian shelling on 26.06.24. According to the Ministry of the Interior, a Russian missile strike in Dnipro on 28.06.24 claimed at least one life. The General Prosecutor's Office stated that seven people were killed by Russian rocket fire in the city of Vilnyansk (Zaporizhzhya region) on 29.06.24. According to information from the regional governor of 29.06.24, four people were killed by Russian attacks on villages near the front line in the Donetsk region. On 30.06.24, the mayor of Kharkiv reported one person killed in a Russian airstrike.

During the latest prisoner exchange between the Russian Federation and Ukraine on 25.06.24, representatives of the Russian human rights commissioner Tatyana Moskalkova met with the Ukrainian human rights commissioner Dmytro Lubinez for direct talks for the first time. According to Moskalkova, both sides discussed "options for the return of civilians currently in detention centres". The two countries exchanged 90 people each; mainly captured soldiers, but also some civilians, including Nariman Dzhelyal, a representative of the Crimean Tatars, and two priests from the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church.

One day after the Ukrainian missile attack on Sevastopol, which killed at least four people (cf. BN of 24.06.24), the Moscow-appointed governor, Mikhail Razvozshayev, declared a state of emergency for the territory of the city of Sevastopol on 24.06.24 until further notice. This may restrict constitutional rights, such as the freedom of movement of the city's population.

According to the Centre of National Resistance in Kyiv, the local leadership in the Russian-annexed Luhansk region is preparing the transfer of residential property to military personnel and immigrants from Central Asia. The centre recommends that Ukrainian refugees from the region keep original documents or certified copies of documents relating to residential property.<sup>41</sup>

### War effort and recruitment

Without offering any explanations, President Volodymyr Zelensky replaced the commander of the Joint Forces Command of the Ukrainian Armed Forces, Lieutenant General Yuri Sodol, with Brigadier General Andriy Hnatov. Previously, the leader of Ukraine's prestigious Azov regiment, Bohdan Krotevych, had accused Sodol of causing significant military setbacks and major personnel losses. According to media reports, similar accusations were raised by the Ukrainian parliament.

On 21.06.24, Ukrainian security forces in the Odessa region prevented 100 men from leaving the country illegally. They were to be driven to a border, bypassing checkpoints, and to cross the border on foot. According to the state investigation office, all those over the age of 25 who could be called up for military service were transferred to the local recruitment centres on 25.06.24. On 27.06.24 media reported that Ukrainian border guards prevented around 20 conscripted men from fleeing across the border to the Republic of Moldova. The escape helpers are said to have received EUR 12,000 per person.<sup>42</sup>

### EU-Ukraine; ECtHR and ICC

The EU officially opened accession negotiations with Ukraine on 25.06.24. The EU has also decided to extend the protection status for Ukrainian refugees until March 2026. Furthermore, the EU and Ukraine signed a security agreement on 27.06.24, which guarantees Ukraine long-term, comprehensive support.

The European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) has condemned the Russian Federation for "systematic violations" of human rights in Crimea, which was annexed in 2014. "The incidents were so numerous and interconnected that they constitute systematic violations," the court ruled on 25.06.24.

The International Criminal Court (ICC) has issued arrest warrants for former Russian Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu and Russian Chief of General Staff Valery Gerasimov on charges of war crimes and crimes against humanity. The court based its decision on the assumption that both are responsible for missile attacks by the Russian armed forces against Ukrainian energy infrastructure between 10.10.22 and 09.03.23.<sup>43</sup>

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# Imprint

**Published by**

Federal Office for Migration and Refugees,  
90461 Nuremberg

**ISSN**

2943-0690

**Valid as of**

CW 27/24

**Printed by**

Federal Office for Migration and Refugees

**Design**

Federal Office for Migration and Refugees

**Reference source**

Publication centre Federal Office for Migration and Refugees  
[www.bamf.de/publikationen](http://www.bamf.de/publikationen)

You can also download this publication as an accessible PDF document.

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