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Briefing Notes

Group 62 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

16 January 2023

Afghanistan

Security situation: surge in ISKP attacks against the Taliban continues

According to media reports, a suicide attack was carried out in front of the Foreign Ministry in Kabul on 11.01.2023. At the time, a Chinese delegation was reportedly visiting the Foreign Ministry. About 20 persons were killed and about 40 were injured in the blast. The Islamic State of Khorasan Province (ISKP) has claimed responsibility for the attack. Just recently, the ISKP had carried out an attack on the military section of Kabul airport (cf. BN of 02.01.23 and 09.01.23) and on a hotel in Kabul that is frequented mainly by Chinese tourists (cf. BN of 19.12.22). According to a report by journalists of the Afghan press medium Hasht-e Subh living in exile, three Taliban fighters were killed and another was injured in a car bomb explosion in Kandahar city on 09.01.23. The National Resistance Front (NRF) has claimed responsibility for the attack.

Persecution events and women's rights

On 11.01.2023, a woman was shot dead by the Taliban in Baharak, the capital of Badakhshan province, for going to the market without being accompanied by a male relative (mahram). According to media reports issued on 10.01.23, the Taliban Ministry for the Propagation of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice of Afghanistan in Baghlan Province issued a ten-day ultimatum to owners of beauty salons and hair salons to close their businesses because they were allegedly violating Sharia law. At the same time, land and homeowners were warned not to lease any premises to women for these type of businesses in future. Previously, women reportedly closed hair salons in Kunduz, Takhar and Badakhshan provinces. On 11.01.2023, according to a report issued by journalists of the Afghan press medium Hasht-e Subh living in exile, the Taliban curtailed the order, saying that beauty salons and hair salons would now be allowed to remain open in Balkh and Baghlan provinces, but they would need to be moved to another location. According to a report issued on 10.01.23, the Ministry for the Propagation of Virtue in Daikundi province arrested three boys and four girls and sentenced them to jails terms and lashings for partying together in a house without supervision and for performing forbidden acts. One of the boys was sentenced to one year in prison and is to receive 35 lashes, the others received between one month and 10 days in prison and between 15 and 25 lashes. On 16.01.23, it was reported that former Member of Parliament Mursal Nabizada and her bodyguard were shot dead by unknown gunmen at her home in Kabul. The Taliban have said they want to clarify the circumstances of the crime.

Humanitarian situation

After many NGOs suspended their operations because Afghan female employees were forbidden to work (cf. BN of 02.01.23), it is being reported that urgently needed humanitarian aid is not being provided. In addition, villages or entire districts have been cut off from the outside world and thus from humanitarian aid due to heavy snowfall in several provinces. In Ghor province, for instance, it was reported that snowfall was hindering access for medical personnel and was preventing medicine from the provincial capital reaching the districts, putting human lives at risk.

Angola

Under-reported humanitarian crises in the south

According to media reports, Angola ranks first in the list of ten under-reported humanitarian crises published by the aid organisation Care each year. It says southern Angola is experiencing its worst drought in forty years, that 3.8 million people do not have enough food to eat and more than 100,000 children below the age of five are malnourished. These type of droughts are expected to become more frequent in the future due to climate change.

Armenia / Azerbaijan

Blockade of Nagorno-Karabakh continues

Access from Armenia to the exclave of Nagorno-Karabakh (called the Republic of Artsakh in Armenia) that is populated almost exclusively by Armenians and which belongs to Azerbaijan under international law, has been blocked since 12.12.22. On that day, alleged Azerbaijani environmentalists began blocking the Lachin corridor to protest what they saw as environmentally destructive exploitation of mineral resources by Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians. From the perspective of the Armenian government, these are in fact employees of the Azerbaijani intelligence service. The blockade is intended to ramp up the pressure on Armenia to sign a peace agreement with Azerbaijan that meets the demands of the Azerbaijani leadership. It cannot be ruled out that Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev is aiming for complete control and capture of Nagorno-Karabakh, at least in the medium term. Even the Russian peacekeepers who have been stationed as guarantors of the security of the Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians for about two years have not managed to or tried to prevent the blockade. It is not clear whether Russia is too preoccupied with the war in Ukraine or whether the situation is playing into its hands. After all, Aliyev remains in close contact with Russia's President Vladimir Putin. As a result of the blockade of the Lachin corridor, around 120,000 people in Nagorno-Karabakh have been cut off from Armenia and the supply of food, medicine and, in some cases, energy. At present, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in particular is providing humanitarian aid on the ground. Both the U.S. Embassy in Yerevan and representatives of the EU are calling for the immediate reopening of the land link from Armenia to Nagorno-Karabakh.

Bangladesh

Anti-government protests nationwide

On 11.01.2013, the opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) supported by more than two dozen smaller parties held rallies in the capital Dhaka and nine other cities to demand the resignation of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina (Awami League) and the formation of an interim government, calling for new parliamentary elections to be held. In the past few months, the number of anti-government protests has increased owing to the rising cost of living, the hike in fuel prices and the resulting power cuts. The government has cracked down harshly on protestors in some locations. Several persons were wounded once again at the protest held in Faridpur after they were beaten with sticks and pelted with Molotov cocktails by supporters of the ruling Awami League.

Brazil

Ministers for Indigenous People and Ethnic Equality sworn in

On 11.01.23, Sônia Guajajara, who is a member of the Guajajara, was sworn in as Brazil's first Minister of Indigenous People. The former coordinator of the indigenous umbrella organisation Articulação dos Povos Indígenas do Brasil (Abip) (Coalition of Indigenous Peoples of Brazil) will in future head the Ministry for Indigenous People that has been newly established by President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva. Among other things, the Ministry is to guarantee that the indigenous population has access to education and healthcare and is responsible for land demarcation. Brazil is home to some 900,000 from around 305 ethnic groups.

Anielle Franco, the sister of the councillor and human rights activist Marielle Franco, who was assassinated by paramilitaries, was also sworn in as Minister of Indigenous People and Racial Equality. The Minister is responsible

for developing and implementing measures aimed at racial equality and the fight against racism at national level. Around 55 percent of the Brazilian population belong to ethnic groups.

After attack on government quarters: former Minister of Justice arrested, governor suspended and around 1,200 arrested

Following the attacks on Congress, the seat of government and the Supreme Court in the capital Brasília on 08.01.23 (cf. BN of 09.01.23), the former Minister of Justice and head of security of the capital, Anderson Torres, was arrested at the airport upon his arrival from the USA. The Supreme Court issued an arrest warrant against Torres, who had been dismissed as head of security of the Federal District of Brasília following the riots, on suspicion of negligence and alleged collusion in the riots. Earlier, Governor Ibaneis Rocha of the Federal District around Brasília was suspended from office. Rocha was initially suspended for 90 days by the Supreme Court for failing to take action to safeguard public safety despite clear indications of violent actions. In addition, a camp of supporters of former President Jair Bolsonaro was evacuated in front of the armed forces headquarters in Brasília on 09.01.23, and around 1,200 people were detained. The Supreme Court also announced it would be instituting proceedings against Bolsonaro on 13.01.23.

Chad

Alleged destabilisation attempt foiled

On 05.01.22, the government announced that security forces had foiled a plot conspired by a group of 11 army officers to destabilise the country and undermine the constitutional order. The group was allegedly led by Baradine Berdei Targuio, president of the Chadian Human Rights Organisation (Organisation tchadienne des droits humaines - OTDH). Since 08.12.22, people connected to the conspiracy had reportedly been arrested, and military equipment had also been confiscated. Investigation proceedings were being initiated against those responsible for, among other things, violation of the constitutional order, illegal possession of a firearm and complicity.

Targuio had already been sentenced to three years in prison and a fine in February 2021 for the comments he posted on social media. In his posts, the human rights activist had commented on the allegedly poor state of health of former President Idriss Déby as well as alleged human rights violations in the northern Chadian province of Tibesti; according to the judiciary, Targuio had thereby violated the constitutional order. Targuio was conditionally released in June 2021 until he was granted amnesty in December 2021.

DR Congo

HRW - World Report 2023: deterioration in the human rights and security situation

According to the Human Rights Watch (HRW) Annual Report covering the period 2022 and published in 2023, the human rights and security situation in the country has continued to deteriorate, especially in the eastern conflict-ridden provinces. State repression against dissidents and those critical of the government, including journalists, activists and demonstrators, has continued in a climate of growing intolerance. The state of siege declared in May 2021 in North Kivu and Ituri, which has failed to end the widespread violence and atrocities committed by non-state armed groups against the civilian population, has been used by the state as an instrument of repression, severely restricting the freedom of expression and assembly, killing peaceful protestors and arbitrarily arresting and persecuting political dissidents, opposition activists and journalists. An estimated 120 non-state armed groups were active in the eastern provinces of Ituri, North Kivu, South Kivu and Tanganyika, including some involving foreign fighters from the neighbouring countries of Rwanda, Uganda and Burundi. According to the US monitoring group Kivu Security Tracker, state and non-state actors in the conflict killed at least 2,446 civilians in the period between January and the end of October 2022 in the two Kivu provinces and Ituri alone, of whom HRW claims at least 2,000 were killed in North Kivu and Ituri alone. Despite President Félix Tshisekedi's promises of reform, few far-reaching reforms have been implemented in key areas to break the climate of violence and impunity, among other things, HRW said, adding that efforts to ensure equity and accountability remain insufficient.

Ituri: more than 100 civilians killed since December 2022; armed groups are operating in four of the five territories

Citing a statement issued by Ituri civil society, UN information radio Okapi reported on 13.01.23 that since December 2022, more than 100 civilians have been killed and several hundred livestock stolen in attacks carried out by non-state armed groups in parts of Ituri. The attacks have reportedly triggered further waves of displacement. The statement also claimed that non-state armed groups were operating in four of the five territories of Ituri, including the Forces alliées démocratiques (ADF) (Allied Democratic Forces), Front patriotique et intégrationniste du Congo (FPIC) (Patriotic and Integrationist Force of Congo), Coopérative pour le développement du Congo (CODECO) (Cooperative for Development of the Congo) and Force de résistance patriotique de l'Ituri (FRPI) (Front for Patriotic Resistance in Ituri). Most recently, there have been reports of ongoing armed fighting between the ethnic Lendu militia CODECO and the ethnic Hema militia Zaïre in areas of Mahagi territory bordering Djugu territory, which have resulted in a significant number of civilian casualties, punitive and retaliatory measures against the local population, the burning of thousands of homes and significant internal displacement, among other things (cf. BN of 09.01.23). Several CODECO attacks have reportedly led to the displacement of tens of thousands of people, mainly ethnic Hema, recently. Refugees had sought refuge mainly in the Rhoe IDP camp (Djugu territory), about 45 km from the provincial capital Bunia. According to Médecins Sans Frontières, the number of IDPs living at this camp has more than doubled to over 70,000 people who are living there under catastrophic conditions.

Egypt

Military court sentences numerous persons to life imprisonment and several years in prison

On 15.01.23, according to state media reports, a military court sentenced 38 persons to life imprisonment; 23 of them were sentenced in absentia. Another 44 persons received jail terms ranging from five to 15 years. They were charged with inciting violence against security forces and state institutions in connection with the protests that took place in September 2019.

Among those convicted in absentia is Spain-based businessman and actor Mohamed Ali, whose videos released in 2019 accusing President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi and the military elite of corruption, sparked a brief wave of protests in Egypt in September 2019. Some 4,000 people were reportedly arrested by security authorities in the wake of the protests.

Ethiopia

Tigray forces hand over weapons to the Ethiopian army

The Tigray Defence Forces (TDF) have begun transferring heavy weapons to the Ethiopian army. The demobilisation, which took place in the town of Agula, about 30 km northeast of the regional capital Mekelle on 10.01.2023, is a key component of the November 2022 "permanent cessation of hostilities" agreement brokered by the African Union (AU) between the Ethiopian central government and the Tigray regional government. The AU confirmed that the tanks, rockets and mortars had been handed over.

On 12.01.22, a representative of the Ethiopian army stated that Amharic militias who had supported the government soldiers in the conflict in Tigray had partially withdrawn from the conflict-ridden areas in northern Tigray. This, too, had been stipulated in the agreement, even though the Amharan regional government was not directly involved in the negotiations. However, there has not yet been any official confirmation of the withdrawal. It has been reported that mainly Eritrean troops remain in the region.

Fighting continues in Oromia

Local sources report that the Ethiopian armed forces have moved large parts of their units from Tigray to Oromia in a bid to strengthen the military offensive against the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA-Shane). Heavy fighting has reportedly occurred time and again in the south (East Guji) and west (Horo Gudru Wollega and West Shewa) of the regional state (cf. BN of 09.01.23).

Guinea

Former FNDC coordinator acquitted

The former coordinator of the Front national pour la défense de la Constitution (FNDC) (National Front for the Defence of the Constitution), a coalition of Guinean civil society groups and opposition parties, Abdourahmane Sano, was acquitted of the charge of criminal participation in public assemblies by a court in Conakry on 11.01.23. The public prosecutor had demanded a suspended prison sentence of 18 months. Sano, who had been involved in the FNDC protest against a third term in office for then President Alpha Condé, distanced himself from the FNDC in February 2022, referring to the continued detention of FNDC leaders Oumar Sylla and Ibrahima Diallo at a press conference held on 13.01.23 (cf. BN of 01.08.22 and 09.08.22) as well as the coercion of fellow campaigners to go into hiding or into exile. His acquittal was an isolated case. Sano has founded his own political platform, Plateforme des citoyens unis pour le développement (Platform of Citizens United for Development (PCUD)).

Honduras

LGBTIQ persons: homicides in 2022

According to the NGO Red Lésbica Cattrachas, a total of 41 persons from the LGBTIQ community were violently killed in 2022, including 26 gay men, nine lesbians and six transgender persons. In addition, two persons have been victims of enforced disappearances; their whereabouts remain unknown, and it is not known whether they are dead or alive. This brings the total number of homicides since 2017 to 194 persons. Only 44 of these cases have been dealt with by the courts, and only 13 persons have been sentenced. According to NGOs, impunity for such hate crimes has not decreased under President Xiomara Castro, and promised improvements, such as a transgender law, have not yet been implemented.

Official review of the 30-day state of emergency, decision to extend and prolong it

According to the State Security Secretariat, a total of 652 members of gangs (maras and pandillas) and other criminal groups have been arrested and more than 400 weapons confiscated in 162 municipalities and neighbourhoods of Tegucigalpa and San Pedro Sula during operations carried out under the state of emergency that has been in force since 06.12.22. In total, more than 700 arrest warrants have been issued. The Director General of the police, Gustavo Sánchez, stressed that the measures were related to an increase in extortion offences, especially by gangs in the country, and were intended to improve security. According to official statements, human rights are being respected, but representatives of NGOs, such as CIPRODEH (Centre for Research and Promotion of Human Rights), warn of the risk of human rights violations in the course of such operations and criticise the increasing militarisation of internal security and the lack of sustainability of such measures. They say a long-term reduction of violence and crime can only be achieved by way of prevention if they go hand in hand with social developments, such as the creation of jobs, especially in poorer parts of the country. The state of emergency has been extended by 45 days until 20.02.23 and had been expanded to additional parts of the country.

Two human rights defenders murdered

On 07.01.23, two environmental rights defenders who were campaigning for the preservation of the Montaña de Botaderos Carlos Escaleras National Park, were killed in the municipality of Tocoa, in the department of Colón in the north of Honduras. According to media reports, together with 30 other environmental activists, they had already reported threats by the mining company Inversiones Los Pinares of Emco Holding prior to the attack. According to the NGO Global Witness, Latin America is the deadliest region in the world for environmental rights defenders. The NGOs Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International say the high level of impunity in Honduras, the fact that the authorities are sometimes motivated by economic interests, and the inadequate protection measures for human and environmental rights defenders are partly to blame. The public prosecutor's office has launched investigations.

India

Chhattisgarh: attacks on Christians; anti-conversion laws

In Chhattisgarh, an anti-conversion law regularly forces converts to Christianity to convert back to Hinduism. Almost any activity by religious minorities can be interpreted as an unfair attempt at forced conversion based on these laws which exist in several states. This can apply to a public prayer or charitable offers of assistance.

On 18.12.22, the situation escalated into an organised attack. Christians from more than 15 villages in Narayanpur and Kondagaon districts were attacked and displaced, many of their houses and churches destroyed. On 02.01.23, the situation escalated once again. Members of the Hindu faith went door to door, damaging churches, Christian institutions and homes. People of the Christian faith were threatened and told to leave their homes and the village community. Security forces that had been called in were also attacked. According to an observer close to the organisation Open Doors, attacks like these are not spur-of-the-moment acts of violence, but were armed gangs who had planned the attacks in advance. Many were carrying swords and stones. Christians in Chhattisgarh were accused of adhering to a foreign religion and of endangering the traditional way of life of the tribespeople. The authorities took no steps to address the issue or ensure security of the Christians. They did not take any steps to curb or restrain the rallies and meetings of the anti-Christian elements, which are openly mobilising and instigating locals against Christians and church leaders.

Iran

Three protestors receive the death penalty on charges of murder

According to press releases dated 09.01.23, provisional death sentences have been issued against three men accused of being responsible for the killing of three security officers during protests that took place in Isfahan in November 2022. The first-instance sentences can be appealed. Human rights organisations accuse the Iranian judiciary of issuing death sentences following unfair trials and of executing them partly based on forced confessions. So far, four men have been sentenced to death and executed for allegedly attacking or killing security officers during protests since nationwide protests began in September 2022 (cf. BN of 12.12.22 and 09.01.23). In his recent speech, the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ali Khamenei called for continued firm action against protestors.

Freedom of the press: arrests and prison sentences

According to media reports issued on 10.01.23, a sports journalist has been sentenced to 18 years in prison. He had been arrested in October 2022 for his coverage of protests. In addition, a journalist and former student activist was arrested at the airport while she was trying to leave the country. According to the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), more than 80 journalists have been arrested, some temporarily, since the protests began. In contrast to existing restrictions on reporting, the budget for the state broadcaster IRIB is to be increased hugely according to the budget plan. In the World Press Freedom Index compiled by Reporters Without Borders (RSF) for 2022, Iran ranks 178th out of 180 countries.

Three years prison sentence for lawyer

According to media reports, a lawyer in Tehran has been given a three-year prison sentence on charges of assembly and conspiracy against national security and propaganda against the system. The accused was arrested on 12.10.22 at a rally held in front of the Iranian Bar Association in Tehran. Several lawyers had gathered there to protest against violations of the rights of protestors during the nationwide protests that have been taking place since September 2022 (cf. BN of 17.10.22).

Prison sentences for trade union activists

Foreign media reported on 08.01.23 that four persons had been sentenced to between one and 10 years in prison after organising strikes. There is no information available yet on the identity of the accused. The sentences are subject to appeal. In addition, two known activists of the Tehran Bus Drivers' Union arrested in May 2022 (cf. BN of 16.05.22) were sentenced to six years' imprisonment after appeal proceedings.

Iraq

Fight against ISIS

On 09.01.23, a policeman was shot dead in Muqdadhiyya district in Diyala province, presumably by an ISIS sniper. The insurgents were driven back in a subsequent firefight.

On 15.01.23, Prime Minister Mohammad Shia al-Sudani commented on the presence of foreign troops on Iraqi soil. He said he saw no alternative at the moment, as the fight against ISIS was not over and the troops were needed. He said it is possible to maintain good relations with the USA and Iran at the same time. This statement must be seen in the context of political demands by pro-Iranian groups calling for an end to the presence of foreign troops - which, however, means coalition forces, not groups controlled by Iran. Both currently play crucial roles in Iraq's security.

Kenya

Five suspects detained for the murder of Kenyan LGBTIQ activist

According to press reports issued on 09.01.23, a court in Kenya declared that five suspects are being held in connection with the murder of prominent LGBTIQ activist Edwin Chiloba, whose body was found in the Rift Valley in the west of the country on 04.01.23. According to the Kenyan authorities, he died from asphyxia caused by suffocation. Homosexuality is taboo in Kenya, as it is in much of Africa. Same-sex acts can be punished with prison sentences of up to 14 years in Kenya, where most people are conservative Christians. Verbal and physical violence against members of the LGBTIQ community is common in the country.

Lebanon

Economic situation

Desperate investors continue to carry out bank robberies. On 10.01.23, investors stormed two banks, each demanding portions of money they had invested – one was the father of a family wanting to cover the costs of treatment for his two children who are suffering from diabetes, the other an 18-year-old wanting to claim money from his father for debts he had run up.

The EU launched two initiatives on 10.01.23 to support vulnerable groups in Lebanon. The aid, totalling around €25 million, is primarily aimed at reducing food insecurity for around 40,000 people in the coming year and seeks above all to mitigate the impact of the Ukraine war on Lebanon.

The Lebanese pound fell below the exchange rate of 1:49,000 to the dollar on 13.01.2023. In 2019, it had stood at 1:1,500.

Protests over inquiry into the explosion disaster in Beirut in 2020

Major protests continue due to the slowness of the investigations into the explosion in the port of Beirut on 04.08.20. These escalated on 10.01.23 when relatives of the victims stormed the Palace of Justice; several people were injured. As a result, prominent activist William Noon was arrested for threatening to blow up the Palace of Justice with dynamite at a protest. His detention sparked nationwide protests across party and ethnic lines as it was understood to be purely politically motivated. He was released on 14.01.23.

Libya

Home of MP attacked

According to local media, the residence of a member of the House of Representatives, Sarah Al-Suwaih, located in Janzour, was attacked by unknown persons throwing hand grenades and rocket-propelled grenades. The House of Representatives condemned the attack and demanded an investigation. There is no information available on the reasons for the attack or the affiliation of the armed persons to a certain group. In the past, persons involved in politics have repeatedly been the victims of intimidation and even kidnapping by local militias who have tried to influence the political process.

Mali

Heavy fighting between security forces and jihadists

On 10.01.23, fourteen soldiers were killed and 11 were injured in violent clashes that erupted between the towns of Mopti and Ségou in the centre of the country. This has been indicated in media reports, which also quoted army sources. Thirty-one terrorists were killed in the fighting. The jihadists are also said to have used improvised explosive devices against the security forces. The group Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin (Support Group for Islam and Muslims (GSIM, JNIM in Arabic) claimed a "double ambush" against soldiers and mercenaries of the Wagner Group in the Mopti region. One attack with a mine had killed an unspecified number of soldiers and mercenaries, the other five mercenaries and seven soldiers. JNIM itself reportedly lost five "martyrs".

Media reported on further suspected jihadist attacks on security forces. On 09.01.23, one gendarmerie officer was killed and three injured at a gendarmerie post in Sébékoro (Kita region, approx. 130 km west of Bamako). On 15.01.23, four gendarmerie officers were killed and three injured in an ambush in Koula (Koulikoro region, around 95 km northeast of Bamako).

According to media reports, the ruling junta claims to have put jihadist forces on the defensive. On the other hand, when presenting a UN report on the situation in the period between 23.06.22 and 30.12.22 to the UN Security Council on 10.01.23, the Deputy Special Envoy for the West Africa and the Sahel said that the security situation in the region had continued to deteriorate, especially in the centre of the Sahel and here again particularly in Burkina Faso and Mali.

Controversial projects for a new constitution

The introduction of a new constitution, with a referendum planned for March 2023, is controversial. This is evident from various media reports. Opposition parties united in the "Cadre des partis et regroupements politiques pour le retour à l'ordre constitutionnel" (Framework of political parties and groupings for the return to constitutional order) oppose the introduction of a new constitution. Some of them boycotted a meeting to exchange views on the planned constitution at the invitation of the Ministry of Territorial Administration on 12.01.23. When the influential imam Mahmoud Dicko, who is also opposed to a new constitution, returned from a visit to Saudi Arabia on 14.01.23, security forces allegedly used tear gas to disperse a procession of supporters who had come to welcome Dicko back.

A first draft of the constitution had been handed over to the junta leader and interim president Assimi Goïta on 11.10.22. A decision was taken on 19.12.22 to set up a commission to finalise the new constitution. However, its members have not yet been appointed.

Myanmar

Airstrike by the military junta in Chin State

On 13.01.23, the military junta carried out an airstrike in Chin State, which borders the Indian state of Mizoram. Five Chin National Front (CNF) fighters were killed. The CNF is one of the many armed groups of different ethnic groups in the border areas of Myanmar resisting the military junta. The attack was allegedly aimed at a training camp of the People's Defence Forces. This armed wing of the National Unity Government (NUG), Myanmar's legitimate government-in-exile also recognised by the European Parliament was formed from mostly pro-democracy youth in May 2021 in response to the coup d'état in February 2021. The junta considers the People's Defence Forces to be terrorist groups. As previously in Thailand and Bangladesh, two bombs also hit Indian territory during the airstrike.

Nigeria

Katsina State: abduction of devout Christian women

According to consistent media reports, at least five women who wanted to attend a Christian service were abducted in the Kankara region on 15.01.23. In addition, a priest was injured during the attack. No official statement has been issued yet by the police.

Niger State: attack on Christian priests

According to media reports, the local priest was fatally injured in an arson attack on his house in Kafin Koro village, Paikoro district in the early hours of 16.01.23. Another clergyman was shot while trying to escape/flee. The attackers managed to flee before the police arrived.

Ekiti State: 80 % of Nigerian women are victims of FGM

In an informative measure to raise awareness and end female genital mutilation (FGM), a health educator stated that no less than 80 % of women and girls living in Nigeria are victims of FGM. The data, according to the statement, was gleaned from a survey conducted in 20 states in 2018. According to the HACEY Health Initiative, which supports the above-mentioned sensitisation campaign, the victims are mostly between 15 and 49-years-old.

Palestinian Autonomous Territories / Israel

West Bank: several persons killed in attacks, clashes with the military

At least eight Palestinians were killed by Israeli forces between 11.01.23 and 15.01.23. The incidents occurred during arrests or raids at refugee camps, an altercation at a checkpoint and a knife attack on a settler. Some of those killed are believed to be members of the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades, the Cave of Lions group or Islamic Jihad.

Peru

Violent clashes in ongoing protests: 18 dead in Juliaca, one dead in Cusco

According to the National Ombudsman's Office, 17 civilians were killed in violent clashes that erupted between protestors and state security forces in Juliaca in the Puno region on 09.01.23. According to the Attorney General's Office, many bodies had gunshot wounds. In addition, the death of a police officer, whose car had been set on fire by persons as yet unidentified, was reported; the Ombudsman's Office condemned this act of extreme violence as well as alleged preceding acts of torture. On 11.01.23, a civilian was also killed during protests in Cusco. This means that a total of 48 people have been killed in connection with the protests that have been taking place since December 2022 (cf. BN of 19.12.22 and 09.01.23). On 14.01.23, President Dina Boluarte extended the state of emergency for 30 days in various provinces and regions of the country, including Lima, Cusco and Puno. The protestors continue to demand Boluarte's immediate resignation, the closure of parliament and a new constitution. A delegation of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, conducting an on-site visit to the country, has asked for a quick review and a national dialogue to end the demonstrations peacefully, due to indications of disproportionate use of force during the protests. The Peruvian Attorney General's Office has also already opened investigations into responsibility for the numerous civilian deaths.

Senegal

Anti-government journalist released again conditionally

The anti-government journalist Pape Ale Niang, who had been accused of endangering state security and other offences, was arrested and remanded in custody again on 19.12.22 (cf. BN of 02.01.23). He was placed under judicial supervision on 10.01.23, following another request for provisional release, according to unanimous media reports. Niang was reportedly not allowed to comment on the content of the pending criminal case, a condition he had violated after his first provisional release on 14.12.22 and which had led to the renewed order of pre-trial detention. Other measures of judicial supervision reportedly include a ban on leaving the country, the surrender of his passport as well as the obligations to present himself to the authorities at regular intervals. The government critic, whose health has been severely affected by another hunger strike, is still in hospital, according to his lawyer. The state's action against Niang has sparked national and international criticism.

Somalia

At least 15 killed in al-Shabaab bombings

At least 15 persons were killed and more than 50 were injured in three bomb attacks that were carried out in central Hirshabelle state on 14.01.23, according to official sources. In the town of Bulobarde, a suicide bomber killed at least 11 people when he detonated a car bomb near a police station and the African Union peacekeepers' base. In the town of Jalalaqsi, two bombings occurred almost simultaneously. One car bomb exploded near a Somali military checkpoint, another near a school. At least four people are reported to have been killed.

South Sudan

Fatal attacks on humanitarian workers

On 11.01.23, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) issued a press release condemning the killing of three humanitarian workers. According to the press release, two humanitarian workers and several civilians were killed in an attack carried out on a village in the Abyei Administrative Area on 02.01.23. In another attack which occurred on 07.01.23, a humanitarian worker was killed while guarding humanitarian commodities in Duk County in Jonglei State. According to the OCHA report, nine humanitarian workers were killed in South Sudan last year and five in 2021. Since 2013, 141 humanitarian workers have reportedly lost their lives while providing assistance.

Tanzania

Strengthening freedom of assembly and the press

At the beginning of the year, the government lifted a six-year ban that prohibited political gatherings outside election periods. The ban, imposed by former President John Magufuli, allowed elected politicians to hold rallies in their constituencies but prohibited other political rallies and protests. The freedom of the press has also improved recently, with the number of journalists censored for their work falling slightly, along with press freedom violations, which reportedly dropped from 41 (2020) to 17 (2022).

Ukraine

War and humanitarian situation

According to Russian reports, the heavily contested town of Soledar in the Donetsk region has been captured by Russian forces. According to media reports, the neighbouring city of Bakhmut remains the focus of heavy fighting, as is the area further north around the towns of Svatove and Kreminna. On 14.01.23, there were again reports of numerous Russian missile attacks on various targets in Ukraine, especially energy infrastructure, which has been under targeted attack for months. According to media reports, the capital Kyiv and the regions of Odessa, Ivano-Frankivsk, Lviv and Kharkiv were among the regions affected. In the city of Dnipro, a multi-storey apartment building was hit by a missile on 14.01.23. According to Ukrainian reports issued on the morning of 16.01.23, at least 35 persons were killed and at least 75 were injured, and the search for missing persons under the rubble continues. Local authorities reported on 16.01.23 that a missile had also landed near a residential building in the city of Zaporizhzhia, injuring five people.

The media say that some progress was made in discussing humanitarian issues during several rounds of talks held between the human rights commissioners of the Russian Federation and Ukraine in Ankara. On 11.01.23, for instance, a further exchange of prisoners of war was reportedly agreed upon, and there was also consensus in principle on the search for missing persons and the return of children to their families. On 14.01.23, however, Ukrainian sources say the planned prisoner exchange was cancelled by the Russian side at short notice. The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights has indicated that up to and including 10.01.23, at least 6,952 civilians had been recorded as killed and 11,144 injured during the war. According to the latest data from the Ukrainian Prosecutor General's Office, at least 454 children have been killed and at least 894 injured since the beginning of the war.

Criminal prosecution for collaboration

The charges reportedly include making pro-Russian statements on social media, justifying the war or accepting positions in the Russian occupation authorities. As a result of the war, various forms of cooperation with the Russian Federation, which Ukraine classifies as the aggressor, are punishable by law and in some cases can be punished with long prison sentences (cf. BN of 19.09.22).

Venezuela

Peaceful social protests are on the rise again

Since the beginning of the year, peaceful demonstrations by teaching, university and healthcare workers, supported by their unions and other state employees, for fairer pay and social benefits have been on the rise again in various parts of the country, but especially in the capital Caracas. Many are demanding a salary that allows them to cover the basic food basket, others the dollarisation of their wages. They are also criticising the large differences between wages in the private and public sectors. In addition, the official exchange rate of the national currency, the bolívar, has deteriorated considerably against the dollar in recent weeks, which is accompanied by a further loss of purchasing power of sections of the population paid in this currency.

On 12.01.23, according to media reports, employees of the largest state-owned steel company, Siderúrgica del Orinoco (Sidor), continued to demonstrate for better pay and working conditions. Union representatives reported dismissals and the media reported two arrests of three workers on 12.01.23. Neither report could be independently verified.

Yemen

YouTubers tried

On 10.01.23, it was announced that three YouTubers who had been arrested at the end of December will be tried at the Specialised Criminal Court in Sanaa. The YouTubers had accused the Houthi authorities of corruption and exploitation of the Yemeni population in their videos and were subsequently arrested. Reports say they were charged with "spreading misinformation" "inciting the masses to commit acts of chaos" and "harming public interest". The UN as well as NGOs regularly accuse the Specialised Criminal Court in Sanaa of disregarding the principles of the rule of law and of handing down politically motivated sentences.

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