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# Briefing Notes

Group 62 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

28 February 2022

## Afghanistan

### Security situation

Mullah Mohammad Shireen, a Taliban commander in Bamyan province, has warned of foreign-backed resistance activities in Bamyan. 1,500 soldiers have been deployed to the province.

Two people were killed and 13 others wounded in a clash that erupted between Afghan Taliban and Pakistani forces in the southern Afghan border town of Spin Boldak on 24.02.22.

The Ministry of the Interior has formed a new police unit for checkpoints in Kabul, saying 500 troops would be stationed there. On 25.02.22, the Taliban conducted several unannounced house searches in Kabul to track down alleged criminals and terrorists and provide more security in the capital. At the same time, a Taliban commission dismissed 4,500 members of the security forces, some of whom were accused of delinquency, others were minors. In addition, the Taliban have announced that they will be further expanding their army.

### Persecution events

On 11.02.22, ten women disappeared in Kabul. On 21.02.22, some of the women appeared in a video, naming four women who are allegedly abroad, urging them to participate in protests against the Taliban. Media reports suggest that the video and the accusations were coerced from the Taliban. The women have not been released. The Taliban have said their lives are not in danger.

On 22.02.22 and 23.02.22, according to media reports, a man in Uruzgan province and a young couple in Ghor province were publicly flogged by the Taliban as punishment for having extramarital sexual relations.

The brother of a former police commander claimed he had been detained and tortured by the Taliban for a week in Khost.

At least eight healthcare workers, including four women, were shot dead in separate attacks perpetrated by unknown gunmen in the northern provinces of Kunduz and Takhar while administering polio vaccinations.

On 21.02.22, three people were shot dead in Herat province and were subsequently publicly hanged. Local sources say this was possibly a punishment by the Taliban for a kidnapping. The Taliban have not confirmed the allegations.

### Government business

After the first state-run universities were reopened for male and female students on 02.02.22 (cf. BN of 07.02.22), 19 more state-run universities followed suit on 26.02.22. Women and men are being segregated, are attending lectures at different times and are being taught by lecturers of their respective gender. The Taliban are standing guard at university entrances, journalists are being turned away and only a trickle of women have reportedly responded to the call to return to lectures. On 22.02.22, the Taliban also announced that they had drafted a plan for primary school education (first to sixth grade). According to this plan, girls are to be taught by female teachers only and boys by male teachers only, and they are not to attend school at the same time. Pupils' clothing needs to comply with "Islamic laws", whereby the colour of their garments is not relevant.

The Taliban religious police ordered working women in Afghan government offices to wear the hijab on 22.02.22, warning that otherwise they could lose their jobs. In Herat, three women artists have opened an exhibition with the permission of the local Taliban. On display are mainly abstract paintings and pictures of animals.

Prime Minister Mohammad Hassan Akhund and several other senior Taliban officials met with the Deputy Prime Minister of Uzbekistan on 22.02.22 to discuss joint projects and humanitarian aid. On 28.02.22, the Taliban declared that no further evacuations would be allowed until the living situation of Afghan refugees abroad had improved.

According to media reports, the people of Bamyan province criticise the Taliban government for not taking care of the infrastructure and claim that the road connecting Bamyan and Kabul is regularly blocked by snow and avalanches.

### **Economic and humanitarian situation**

Deborah Lyons, the UN Secretary-General's Special Representative for Afghanistan, said on 23.02.22 that the organisation has provided US\$2 billion in aid to Afghanistan since the collapse of the previous government.

According to the International Red Cross, humanitarian needs in Afghanistan have increased by 30%, with 28 million Afghans needing humanitarian assistance. Four million children are at risk of malnutrition. Aid continues to arrive in Afghanistan, including from Turkey and India. Pakistan has assured UNICEF that humanitarian aid can be transported through the country.

According to reports, teachers in several provinces are having problems receiving the salaries which UNICEF is paying into their bank accounts, as not all banks have resumed operations.

Measles is spreading rapidly in Parwan province. In the last two weeks alone, 80 cases of measles have been registered. Rising numbers of measles have also been reported from other provinces. International observers also warn of increasing cases of COVID-19. At the same time, there are repeated protests by healthcare workers who have not received their salaries for months. The International Red Cross has pledged to cover 10,000 salaries. The staff of the Mohammad Ali Jinnah Hospital in Kabul said in a statement issued on 23.02.22 that they had not received salaries since August 2021.

## **Algeria**

### **Activists arrested**

In the context of the third anniversary of the Hirak movement, many people, such as human rights activists, were again arrested in the days around 22.02.22. There are now reportedly over 340 political prisoners in jail, some of whom have gone on hunger strike (cf. BN of 14.02.22). There are also reports of growing repression against participants in the demonstrations and organisations close to the Hirak.

## **Belarus**

### **Constitutional referendum held, protests and arrests**

Belarus held a referendum on amendments to the constitution on 27.02.22. Core aspects of the amendments concern, among other things, the President's competences and term of office, the upgrading of the All-Belarusian People's Assembly, which has existed since 1996, to a central constitutional body, and the abolition of a passage declaring Belarus a country free of nuclear weapons. According to a statement issued by the Belarusian Central Election Commission on 28.02.22, about 65% of the participants voted in favour of the amendments, turnout is said to have been about 79%. According to media reports, protests took place in Minsk and other cities in the country; according to the human rights organisation Vyazna, more than 500 people were arrested throughout the country on 27.02.22. It has been claimed in various media that the constitutional amendments will allow Alexander Lukashenko to remain as President until 2035 and will offer him protection from prosecution for actions carried out during his term in office. They say Russian troops could also be permanently stationed in Belarus. The OSCE criticised the holding of the referendum and did not send an observation mission in advance. According to media reports, the constitutional amendments are to enter into force just ten days after the results are announced.

## **Burkina Faso**

### **Draft charter for transition phase presented**

The Technical Commission for the elaboration of draft texts and the Transition Agenda (Commission technique d'élaboration de projet de textes et de l'agenda de la Transition) (cf. BN of 07.02.22 and 14.02.22) composed of 15 members, set up by the military junta Patriotic Movement for Safeguard and Restoration (Mouvement patriotique pour la sauvegarde et la restauration (MPSR)) presented junta leader Paul-Henri Sandaogo Damiba with a draft charter for the transition on 23.02.22. This also includes a roadmap and charter of values. The draft submitted by the chairperson of the commission, Mariamé Ouattara, has not been made public. It is first to be agreed with the military, as well as with political parties, trade unions and civil society organisations. Citizens were called upon to contribute to the draft in advance. The charter is supposed to have four priorities as a framework for the transition phase: the restoration of territorial integrity, the consolidation of peace for the return of internally displaced persons, good governance and a return to a new constitutional order. So far, it has been revealed that the proposal is to provide for a 30-month transition period under Damiba's leadership until elections are held and constitutional order is restored, as well as the establishment of a government and a restricted legislative body of up to 20 and 51 members respectively. The above-mentioned commission is not identical to the National Coordination for a successful transition (Coordination nationale pour une transition réussie (CNTR)) (cf. BN of 14.02.22), an association of civil society organisations led by Pascal Zaïda. The CNTR decided on 12.02.22 to critically monitor the military junta in the transition phase. It had already been active in a similar way in connection with the military coup of 2015.

### **Demand for Kaboré's release**

Allasane Bala Sakandé, President of the party of ousted President Roch Marc Christian Kaboré People's Movement for Progress (Mouvement du peuple pour le progrès (MPP)), announced on 22.02.22 that the party is demanding the immediate and unconditional release of Kaboré from the military rulers. Kaboré has been under house arrest since the military coup of January 2022. The Parliamentary Assembly of the Francophonie (APF), the EU Parliament, the UN, the African Union (AU) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) have also called for Kaboré's release.

### **People killed in IED explosion and fighting**

A woman and two children were killed when an improvised explosive device detonated near the village of Dougouri (North Region) on 26.02.22. Seven members of the Volontaires pour la défense de la patrie (VDP) vigilante group died in fighting with extremists between Sollé and Piwogdo (North Region) the same day.

## **Central African Republic**

### **Obstacles to UN investigations into human rights violations**

On 18.02.22, an independent UN expert on human rights, concluding his visit to the country, lamented obstacles to UN investigations into alleged human rights violations by Russian bilateral forces and by the army. This is reported in the media, who also make reference to the UN Secretary-General's recent report to the Security Council. The report criticises the lack of progress in the security and human rights situation in the country, stating that at least 229 civilians were killed during the four-month period covered by the report. Four mass executions, mostly around mining sites, were recorded. The report calls on the country's authorities to better control the state and "other" security forces, which it says are responsible for about half of the serious human rights violations recorded. Such violations originate from all sides of the conflict. The actions taken against the Peulh ethnic group and the Muslim community, as well as the recruitment of anti-balaka militias by the army and its Russian allies, were also a cause for concern. The report further states that pro-government forces are currently conducting an offensive against rebel groups around key mining sites in the north-east of the country.

### **MINUSCA troops temporarily arrested**

Relations between the government and the UN were strained by the temporary arrest of four troops (probably of different nationalities) of the French Foreign Legion. According to media reports, the troops, who were escorting

the chief of staff of the UN blue helmet mission MINUSCA to the airport on 21.02.22, were arrested because they were not travelling in a UN vehicle at the time President Touadéra was returning from a trip abroad. A video of the arrest had been circulated on social media across Africa, with news of an attempted assassination of the Central African president. France and MINUSCA had complained of a disinformation campaign. On 24.01.22, the troops were released and investigations were suspended. UN Secretary-General Guterres condemned the arrest, saying that the procedure for suspected criminal offences by MINUSCA soldiers under the Status of Forces Agreement, which gives them a degree of immunity, had not been followed.

## **Chad**

### **Demonstration against political situation – elections called for**

On 26.02.22, around 500 people demonstrated against the military government following an appeal by the opposition. The demonstrators also shouted slogans against France, which is accused of supporting the current government, as well as calling for democratic elections to be held.

After the dissolution of parliament and the suspension of the constitution, an inclusive national dialogue between the government, the opposition and rebel groups was supposed to take place. After several postponements, it has been scheduled for 10.05.22.

## **Colombia**

### **Political violence in the run-up to the parliamentary and presidential elections**

According to a survey conducted by the Peace and Reconciliation Foundation (Paz y Reconciliación (Pares)), a total of 124 acts of political violence were recorded in the run-up to the elections between 13.03.21 and 13.02.22, impacting a total of 163 people. While 144 people have reportedly been threatened, the Foundation has said 19 people involved in political life were killed, including in particular local councillors and mayors across the party spectrum as well as independents or people with no official party affiliation. The parties most affected by acts of political violence were Colombia Humana, Alianza Verde and Partido Conservador. The most recent acts were concentrated in the regions of Valle del Cauca (14), Magdalena (11), Antioquia (10), Cauca (10), Bogotá (8), La Guajira (7) and Norte de Santander (7). There has reportedly been an escalation of violence in the past five months of the period under review. Overall, however, Pares registered a decline in the numbers of acts of violence and people impacted than in the run-up to the last regional elections in 2019.

### **Arauca: FARC dissidents killed in military offensive, fighting between ELN and FARC dissidents**

On 23.02.22, according to government reports, the armed forces killed 23 FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) dissidents of Frente 10 (10<sup>th</sup> Front), including its leader Jorge Eliecer Jimenez, alias Arturo, and its political head Ernesto Devia Mejía, alias Ernesto, as part of a joint offensive carried out by various military units and the police in Puerto Rondón in the Arauca region. Five other members have been arrested. Fighting between the Ejército de Liberación Nacional (ELN) and the FARC dissident group Frente 10 has escalated in the region in recent weeks. According to media reports, four members of Frente 10 were killed by ELN members in Arauca during armed clashes that erupted between these groups in the week between 05.02.22 and 11.02.22. Earlier ceasefire agreements as well as the division of illegal sectors had been called into question by Frente 10 on 07.01.22 with the announcement of a public declaration of war in a video that circulated against the ELN in Arauca; territorial disputes have also increased considerably since then for this reason. The conflict also extends across the border into the Venezuelan state of Apure where there have been repeated reports of armed clashes, particularly between Frente 10 and the FARC dissident group Segunda Marquetalia, and in some cases with the involvement of Venezuelan armed forces or the ELN which is allegedly allied with the Segunda Marquetalia.

### **Constitutional Court decriminalises abortions**

On 21.02.22, the Constitutional Court legalised abortion up to the 24th week of pregnancy by amending the relevant section of the Penal Code. According to the Prosecutor General's Office, about 400 proceedings have been initiated annually so far, and at least 350 people have been convicted of abortion since 2006. In addition, it is

estimated that more than 350,000 illegal abortions are performed every year, which repeatedly result in the death of women, especially in rural regions.

### **Armed strike by the National Liberation Army ELN**

From 23.02.22 to 26.02.22, the ELN announced and implemented a nationwide armed strike. During this period, according to the NGO Indepaz, the organisation carried out at least 56 armed activities, particularly in the regions of Norte de Santander, Cauca, Valle del Cauca, Chocó, Nariño, Casanare and Huila. According to government sources, major actions have also taken place in the departments of Santander and Cesar. There have been reports of road closures and blockades, the installation of explosive devices in several locations, vehicle explosions and fires, and a bridge blast near Pailitas in the Cesar region. Seven employees of the Instituto Nacional de Vías (Invias) were injured in an explosion in San Gil con El Socorro in Santander. The ELN mainly attacked strategic infrastructure targets, numerous bus lines have temporarily suspended their service in particularly affected areas, and the border crossing on the river route to Venezuela has also been closed since 23.02.22. With this strike, the ELN demonstrated, among other things, against the government of the incumbent President Ivan Duque.

### **Death of a signatory of the FARC peace agreement**

On 24.02.22, former FARC fighter and signatory of the peace agreement Jorge Santofimio was killed in the new reintegration zone (NAR) of La Granja in Puerto Guzmán, Putumayo. This makes him the sixth former FARC fighter to be killed in 2022, the 305th since the agreement was signed in 2016. Four other people were injured. He was shot at a meeting of the cooperative he founded, Comucon (Cooperativa Multiactiva Comunitaria del Común), which is part of the Comprehensive National Plan for the Substitution of Illicit Crops (Plan Nacional Integral de Sustitución de Cultivos Ilícitos, PNIS), such as coca, and had been working to keep the peace in Putumayo.

## **Democratic Republic of the Congo**

### **Prisoner status, conditions of detention**

Referring to the NGO Bill Clinton Foundation for Peace (Fondation Bill Clinton Pour La Paix (FBCP)), media report that of the 40,000 prisoners known to be held in the DRC nationwide, only 6,000 are criminals and the rest are either persons being held in pre-trial detention or prisoners who are being held without charges or trial. FBCP recommends that the government reduce the number of pre-trial detention cases while respecting defendants' rights, relieve overcrowded prisons and detention centres, and improve detention conditions for criminal prisoners and persons being held in pre-trial detention. According to Emmanuel Adu Cole, President of the FBCP, this is all the more important because the Congolese government does not have the funds to adequately care for detainees in prisons and detention centres.

### **North Kivu and Ituri provinces: security and human rights situation, LUCHA assessment**

The civil society protest movement Lutte Pour Le Changement (LUCHA) said on 24.02.22 that the number of civilian casualties in the two provinces of North Kivu and Ituri has increased significantly since the state of siege entered into force in May 2021. Jean-Pierre Lacroix, UN Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, assessed on 25.02.22 that the security situation in the eastern conflict-ridden provinces remains very worrying, especially in Ituri and North Kivu provinces.

According to LUCHA, the state of siege has led to increases in human rights violations. It said the military justice system is overwhelmed and overworked, and that access to justice is ineffective and limited. LUCHA which has repeatedly called for the lifting of the state of siege suggested, among other things, the full restoration of civilian administration and justice, an end to impunity for members of the security forces, and effective implementation of the programme of "disarmament, demobilisation, reintegration into society and stabilisation" (P-DDRCS) aimed at non-state actors in the conflict. LUCHA also criticised the very poor prison conditions in the central prison of Kangbayi in Beni (North Kivu), where several LUCHA activists, some of whom are in poor health, are being held in pre-trial detention.

## Guinea-Bissau

### **Opposition leader banned from leaving the country**

Domingos Simões Pereira, former Prime Minister and leader of the former ruling party African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde (PAIGC), has been banned from leaving the country since 22.02.22. According to media reports, he is being investigated for having approved the disbursement of US\$ 5 million to support private banks during his time as Prime Minister without having consulted the National Assembly (Parliament), but also for an alleged coup attempt on 12.04.21. A motion to lift his immunity as a member of parliament had previously failed due to the lack of a quorum. Perreira had expressed doubts about the government's narrative in the context of the alleged coup attempt of 01.02.22 (cf. BN of 14.02.22).

## Haiti

### **Journalist killed by police during protest in Port-au-Prince**

One journalist was killed and two journalists were hospitalised suffering with gunshot wounds during a demonstration held in Port-au-Prince on 23.02.22, according to eyewitness reports. It is unclear why the police opened fire on the demonstrators. The protest was linked to weeks of demonstrations by textile workers calling for a higher minimum wage. Although the government had already raised the minimum wage for the relevant group of workers to US\$ 7.50 on 21.02.22, the union leaders are demanding at least double that amount and have therefore announced that the protests will continue.

## Honduras

### **Request for extradition of former President Hernández**

On 14.02.22, the U.S. requested the extradition of former President Juan Orlando Hernández (Partido Nacional) for involvement in drug trafficking and corruption. He was subsequently arrested by the Honduran police on 15.02.22 and brought before a judge for the first time on 16.02.22. Pending a decision on possible extradition, Hernández is being held in pre-trial detention at the National Directorate of Special Police Units in Tegucigalpa; a request for house arrest has been rejected by the Supreme Court. Back in March 2021, his brother Juan Antonio Hernández had been sentenced to life imprisonment in New York for smuggling cocaine into the U.S. At his trial, a witness also accused the former president of being involved and of receiving funds for his election campaign from the Mexican drug lord Joaquín Guzmán (El Chapo).

## India

### **Uttarakhand: Supreme Court speaks out after call to kill people of Muslim faith**

The Supreme Court of India announced it would launch investigations against the northern Indian state of Uttarakhand following calls for the murder of people of the country's Muslim faith at a three-day conference of the Hindu radical movement Hindu Mahasabha in the city of Haridwar in December 2021. The Supreme Court has said that Hindu religious leaders' speeches not only pose a serious threat to India's unity and integrity, but are also endangering the lives of millions of Muslim believers in the country.

The ruling Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has done nothing about the matter. It emanates from the same camp and also adheres to the Hindutva ideology, which wants to make India a purely Hindu country. In recent years, the BJP has pursued a policy of consistent discrimination against minorities such as members of the Muslim and Christian faiths and people from the lowest castes. At a hearing held before the U.S. Congress, genocide researcher Gregory Stanton has said there are early warning signs and processes of genocide, notably in Assam and Kashmir.

Muslim followers make up 14% of India's population. According to a Pew Research study conducted in September 2021, India's religious composition has hardly changed since 1951. The president of Jamiat Ulama-Hind, the largest Islamic organisation in the country, accuses the government of failing to do anything about hate speech. The approximately 200 million Muslims living in India are also marginalised in politics and society.

## **Iran**

### **Arrests and reprisals against civil activists**

According to reports from foreign media and human rights organisations, a civil activist was arrested by security forces in Shahriyar near Tehran and taken to an unknown location on 21.02.22. A house search was conducted and items were seized in the process. No information was available about the exact reasons for the arrest. The activist was a former fire brigade officer who had already been arrested and summoned several times in the past because of his commitment. He was also one of the signatories of a public letter dated 11.06.19 demanding the abdication of the Supreme Revolutionary Leader.

There have also been reports of reprisals against relatives of one of the victims of the mass protests held in November 2019. Shortly after the deceased man's father and brother were arrested in Behbahan (Khuzestan province) on 18.02.22, the sister of the deceased was also threatened and beaten after she had inquired about her two detained relatives at the public prosecutor's office on 21.02.22. On the same day, the mother of the deceased man's home was also searched. Since 2019, the family has repeatedly called for an investigation into the circumstances of the death of their family member who died during the November protests.

### **Media activist goes on hunger strike after alleged abduction by security forces**

According to media reports issued on 23.02.22, a well-known internet activist and blogger has been abducted and arrested by security forces. Human rights organisations reported his disappearance after he took to social media on 22.02.22 to criticise a new law restricting and controlling use of the internet. The man had already served a prison sentence of several years in the past because of his activities for freedom of expression. His brother claims he has gone on hunger strike.

### **Prison conditions**

Foreign media, citing a human rights organisation, report that a women's rights activist imprisoned in Karaj prison (west of Tehran) has been assaulted by several fellow prisoners. The reason given for the assaults was the activist's protest against the restriction of her prison privileges, such as the right to access the prison library and to participate in cultural activities. In this context, human rights organisations have criticised the authorities' approach, which in some cases tolerated political prisoners being kept alongside criminal prisoners.

### **Lawyer summoned after prison sentence confirmed**

According to media reports issued on 27.02.22, a Tehran lawyer was summoned to serve a prison sentence of three months and five days. They say an appeals court had upheld the original prison sentence handed down by Tehran Revolutionary Court. The lawyer had been convicted of spreading propaganda against the regime on the basis of interviews he had given to local media and Persian-language media abroad following the death of a client in detention. In the past, the lawyer had represented several political prisoners as well as members of the Baha'i religion. The exact date of his arrest was not reported.

## **Iraq**

### **Violence against women**

On 20.02.22, the Iraqi Supreme Court rejected the Iraqi Women's League's complaint to classify Article 41 of the Iraqi Criminal Code as incompatible with the Iraqi Constitution. Article 41 gives husbands the right to physically punish their wives. The court based its decision on the fact that Article 41 does not promote domestic violence, but only allows punishments within certain limits prescribed by law.

On 23.02.22, a 21-year-old woman died of her injuries in Sulaymaniyah in the Kurdistan Autonomous Region (KR-I) after her husband doused her with petrol and set her on fire following an argument a few days earlier. High-ranking politicians from KR-I had condemned the murder, the husband was arrested. Since the beginning of the year, nine women have died as a result of so-called "honour crimes" in KR-I alone. A law against domestic violence was adopted in 2011, but violence against women is still widespread.

## **Lebanon**

### **Low wheat stocks**

The Minister of Economics Amin Salam announced on 25.02.22 that Lebanon's wheat reserves would be sufficient for one month at most. The country imports around 60% of its wheat from Ukraine, and negotiations with other countries on alternative wheat supplies have begun. No large stocks of grain can be stored since the explosion at a warehouse in the port of Beirut in August 2020.

### **Attacks foiled**

The Ministry of the Interior announced at a press conference held on 23.02.22 that security forces had managed to prevent attacks on the southern suburbs of Beirut. According to the Ministry of the Interior, three separate attacks were to be carried out. An ISIS cell in the Palestinian refugee camp "Ain al-Hilweh" near the southern Lebanese city of Sidon was responsible for planning the attacks. Security forces reportedly arrested suspects and seized ammunition and weapons. The southern suburbs of Beirut are Shiite and a stronghold of Hezbollah.

## **Libya**

### **Demonstration against caretaker government plans**

On 25.02.22, several hundred Libyans took to the streets in Tripoli calling for elections, ending the transitional phase in the country and overthrowing the House of Representatives and the High Council of State. Civil society institutions and activists had campaigned for this on social media.

The High Council of State on 24.02.22 rejected the constitutional amendment and change in executive powers approved by the House of Representatives in Tobruk. Furthermore, the parliament had announced on 24.02.22 that it would hold a session next week in which it would probably vote on the confirmation of a new transitional government, although the incumbent government refuses to hand over power.

Prime Minister Abdul Hamid Dbeibeh had announced a multi-stage plan leading to the holding of parliamentary elections in June 2022 in a televised speech broadcast on 21.02.22. Notwithstanding this, Libyan institutions have not yet managed to agree on a date for the elections.

## **Morocco**

### **Renewed attacks by the Sahrawi army/Polisario Front**

The Sahrawi press agency SPS has again reported that attacks have been carried out by the Sahrawi army/Polisario Front against Moroccan forces in the Mahbas sector in the border areas of Western Sahara on 26.02.22, apparently incurring high losses of personnel and material among the Moroccan army (cf. BN of 14.02.22).

## **Myanmar**

### **Attacks and hostilities**

At least 16 civilians, 17 PDF members and ten junta forces were killed in attacks carried out by anti-regime forces and in fighting that erupted between the Myanmar military (Tatmadaw) and various resistance groups (People's Defence Forces, (PDF)) in Yangon, Sagaing, Mandalay, Magway and Kayah between 19.02.22 and 24.02.22. Junta forces burnt the furniture and medical equipment of a hospital in Mindat (Chin) on 18.02.22 where wounded PDF members were undergoing treatment.

### **Arrests and convictions**

Around 50 people were arrested in Chauk (Magway) and Monywa (Sagaing) on 21.02.22 and 22.02.22 in the course of protests against the military regime, and some of them, including at least 20 minors, were tortured. Some people who took part in protests in Monywa were injured. In Natogyi (Mandalay), where PDF members had carried out attacks on a gas pipeline on 14.02.22 (cf. BN of 21.02.22), junta forces arrested another 20 people.

On 16.02.22 and 17.02.22, three female students were sentenced to prison terms ranging from three to seven years for donating money to displaced persons and allegedly passing information to foreign journalists. On 22.02.22, two well-known writers who had been arrested on 01.02.21 were sentenced to two and three years imprisonment respectively under section 505a of the Penal Code for making statements critical of the regime.

### **Situation in prisons**

According to reports issued by the All Burma Federation of Student Unions (ABFSU) on 19.02.22, junta forces raped two men and a woman at an interrogation centre in Mandalay. A two-year-old child died in a prison in Thandwe (Rakhine) on 24.02.22. She had been detained with her mother who had been arrested for allegedly supporting the PDF.

## **Nicaragua**

### **Additional private universities and NGOs lose legal status**

On 23.02.22, the Sandinista-dominated National Assembly (AN) revoked the legal status of two more private universities, the Tecnológica Nicaragüense (UTN) and the Santo Tomás de Oriente y Mediodía (USTON). Together with the Universidad Hispanoamericana which closed in December 2021 and the five private universities on 02.02.22, including the Universidad Politécnica de Nicaragua (Upoli) which was an important institution during the socio-political protests in 2018 (cf. BN of 20.12.21 and 07.02.22), this means that the legal status of eight private universities has already been withdrawn. According to professors from the above-mentioned institutions, the Sandinista government's aim in taking these steps is to abolish free teaching that is independent of political indoctrination. Also on 23.02.22, the AN revoked the legal status of six NGOs, including PEN International Nicaragua. This means that since the beginning of 2022, 40 associations, foundations and non-profit organisations, including 22 educational institutions, have lost their legal status and registration.

### **Trials and convictions of political prisoners, state of health of detainees**

The trials of political prisoners at the Directorate of Legal Assistance (DAJ, known as El Chipote) continue (cf. BN of 14.02.22). Lawyers have reported strict access controls, sometimes including the seizure of court documents, laptops or confiscation of evidence. In some cases, they were also prevented from communicating with their clients during the hearings, and access to the court files of the accused beforehand was made considerably more difficult or denied altogether. A constitutionally adequate defence was therefore not possible, nor was the presumption of innocence. On 23.02.22, seven other defendants (Juan Sebastián Chamorro, Arturo Cruz, Tamara Dávila, Violeta Granera, José Pallais, Félix Maradiaga and José Adán Aguerri) were found guilty of conspiracy to undermine national integrity in a collective trial that lasted several days. The prosecution had demanded prison sentences of between eight and 13 years. According to eyewitnesses, the defendants are in a poor state of health. Since the beginning of February 2022, twenty seven political prisoners have already been found guilty, 19 of whom have already been sentenced to prison terms of between eight and 13 years as of 24.02.22. The trial against former presidential candidate Cristiana Chamorro and others is scheduled to begin on 03.03.22.

## **Niger**

### **At least 18 civilians killed in attack**

According to media reports, at least 18 civilians were killed and eight others injured in a vehicle attack carried out in the south-western region of Tillabéri on 20.02.22. The Nigerien Minister of the Interior, Alkassoum Indatou, had stated on 22.02.22 that the attack had been perpetrated by as yet unidentified "bandits" on several motorbikes. The victims were from the villages of Foney Ganda and Tizegorou. According to government sources, five Nigerien soldiers had already been killed when an IED detonated in Tillabéri on 16.02.22. Attacks are being carried out repeatedly in the south-western border region with Mali and Burkina Faso, with numerous fatalities (cf. BN of 06.12.21). According to media reports, President Mohamed Bazoum declared on 18.02.22 his agreement for the deployment of French and other European troops in Niger to strengthen security on the borders with neighbouring countries. The declaration came a day after French President Emmanuel Macron, together with allies, announced the withdrawal of troops from Mali.

### **President releases several terrorists from prison**

According to media reports, President Mohamed Bazoum declared on 25.02.22 that he had released seven to eight terrorist leaders from Kollo and Koutoukalé prisons and subsequently received them at his seat of government. They say Bazoum wants to achieve reconciliation and peace. The released terrorists include members of Boko Haram.

## **Nigeria**

### **North-East: deadly air strike on ISWAP-Lager**

On 13.02.22, 26 members of the Islamist group Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), including the senior and influential ISWAP commander (Amir) Mallam Buba Danfulani, were killed in attacks carried out by the Nigerian Air Force in Borno State. Danfulani, was allegedly responsible for recruitment, indoctrination, the use of spies and the collection of levies. According to media reports, which also cite Nigerian military sources, ISWAP bases and training camps on the edge of Lake Chad and in the vicinity of the Sambisa Forest were among the targets of the air strike.

### **Niger State: security force members killed by land mine**

Four members of the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC) were killed when they hit a landmine on 21.02.22. According to media reports, the security forces' vehicle hit the landmine while on routine patrol in the Galadima Kogo area of north-central Niger State. According to reports to the contrary, this was not a routine check, but an operation in which the security forces wanted to come to the aid of the communities of Galadima Kogo and Galape, which were attacked by unknown individuals in the early hours of 21.02.22. According to information from the population, the mines were laid to prevent security forces from assisting communities under attack in the region. Dozens of people were killed and many abducted in an attack perpetrated by unknown individuals on Galadima Kogo and Galkogo at the end of January 2022 (cf. BN of 07.02.22).

### **Kidnapper sentenced to life imprisonment**

According to media reports, a Lagos court on 25.02.22 sentenced Chukwudimeme Onwuamadike and two co-defendants to life imprisonment as kidnappers in a sensational kidnapping case. Onwuamadike, who also became known nationally as Evans, and his accomplices were found responsible for the kidnapping of the CEO of a pharmaceutical company in 2017. The latter had been held for almost three months before he managed to escape. By then, the company had allegedly paid a ransom of US\$ 260,000, but this did not lead to his release.

In 2021, numerous abductions for ransom have been reported. In some cases, attempts by security forces to free the victims have been successful (cf. BN of 10.01.22).

## **Pakistan**

### **Man sentenced to death for murdering his wife**

On 24.02.22, a court in Islamabad sentenced the son of an industrialist family to death for the murder of his wife in July 2021. Due to public pressure, the trial was concluded relatively quickly. Usually, trials in Pakistan's judicial system drag on for years. The conviction rate in cases of violence against women is less than 3%. Human rights organisations complain about the inadequate protection of women's rights in the country and call for an end to gender-based violence. Human Rights Watch (HRW) stated in its annual report 2021 that domestic violence against women, ranging from sexual abuse, acid attacks right up to honour killings, as well as forced marriages continue to be a serious problem throughout Pakistan. In 2020, the independent Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) recorded at least 430 honour killings. According to data provided by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), at least 85% of Pakistani women have experienced physical and/or sexual violence by their life partners at some point in their lives.

## **Palestinian Autonomous Territories / Israel**

### **West Bank: minor killed following attack on the military**

According to Israeli military sources, a 14-year-old Palestinian youth was shot dead by troops near the village of Bethlehem on 22.02.22. According to the report, a military unit responded with live ammunition to three suspects who were allegedly hurling Molotov cocktails at passing traffic. One of the three was reportedly fatally injured. The military had been in the area following seven attacks with Molotov cocktails in the past month.

The family of the deceased rejects this account of events and testified that the teenager did not participate in throwing Molotov cocktails.

According to the human rights organisation B'Tselem, a total of 16 minors were killed in clashes with the Israeli military in 2021.

## **Republic of the Congo**

### **Precarious human rights situation in 2021**

Referring to the annual report published by the Action Centre for Development (Centre d'actions pour le développement (CAD)), media reported on 23.02.22 that human rights structures remained poor in the reporting year 2021. According to CAD, fundamental rights to freedom of assembly and expression were significantly curtailed. The COVID-19 crackdown was used as a pretext for further repression. It says the authorities prevented the few demonstrations in the reporting year 2021. Cases of arbitrary detention have continued to occur. The authorities have made no effort to improve the poor conditions in the overcrowded prisons. Prisoners had died because they had no access to medical care. Torture by security forces is the order of the day. Both CAD and the Congolese Observatory for Human Rights (OCDH) are calling for the introduction of torture as a separate criminal offence (prohibited by the constitution) in the Penal Code. An OCDH position paper published on 22.02.22, which criticises the increasing police violence, states that at least 80 cases of torture by state security forces have been documented in the past 15 months.

## **Republic of Moldova**

### **State of emergency put into effect, exodus from Ukraine**

The Moldovan parliament passed a 60-day state of emergency on 24.02.22 after Russia invaded Ukraine, which, among other things, prohibits public demonstrations. In addition, Moldovan airspace and Chişinău airport have been temporarily closed. According to the Moldovan Ministry of the Interior, as of 25.02.22 around 16,000 Ukrainian citizens had already fled to the Republic of Moldova due to the escalated military situation in Ukraine. President Maia Sandu declared on 24.02.22 that the Republic of Moldova was ready to receive Ukrainian refugees, but at the same time highlighted the need for external support. In the course of military hostilities in Ukraine, a Moldovan-flagged vessel was fired upon by Russian naval forces on 25.02.22, according to media reports, and the crew was evacuated by Ukrainian authorities. According to further media reports, Russian troops have meanwhile held military exercises in the separatist region of Transnistria. In the course of an armed conflict with the Moldovan central government, the Transnistrian region seceded from the Republic of Moldova in 1992 and has since built up its own quasi-state structures. According to current estimates, around 1,500 members of the Russian armed forces are on the territory of Transnistria to secure the status quo.

## **Russian Federation**

### **After the invasion of Ukraine: repression against opponents of war and expansion of censorship**

In response to the invasion of Ukraine by Russian troops, protests against the military intervention have been taking place in numerous cities around the country since 24.02.22, despite previous threats of punishment. According to media reports, the largest rallies to date have taken place in Moscow and St. Petersburg, each attracting several thousand participants. Police and the National Guard have reportedly used considerable force to break up rallies throughout the country and arrest protesters as well as journalists. The total number of people detained in this

context is reported by the independent NGO OWD-Info to be 5,928 so far (as of 28.02.22, 08:30 a.m.). In several cases charges have already been brought against protestors for participating in an unauthorised public event. In addition, even comparatively minor signs of protest, such as stickers bearing the slogan "No war", can currently lead to arrests, according to press reports.

Media censorship has also been tightened. On 24.02.22, the Russian media regulator Roskomnadzor ordered all Russian media outlets to use only information from Russian government sources when reporting on the situation in Ukraine, and on 26.02.22 also ordered the deletion of posts characterising the operations in Ukraine as an "invasion", "declaration of war" or "attack", in each case under threat of fines and even the closure of the respective media outlet.

## **Somalia**

### **Recapture of some villages by armed forces / US drone attack**

The US-trained Danab Special Forces, backed by US drone strikes, recaptured several al-Shabaab-controlled villages near the Middle Shabelle-Hiraan regional border in southern and central Somalia on 22.02.22. According to military sources, 60 al-Shabaab fighters, including five leaders, were killed in the operation. Media close to al-Shabaab claim that security forces requested the air strikes after al-Shabaab laid siege to army bases. This has been the first US drone strike confirmed by official sources since August 2021.

## **Sri Lanka**

### **New UN report on the human rights situation**

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCHR) published a new report for the UN Human Rights Council on 25.02.22 on developments in the island state. On the one hand, it welcomes recent steps towards reforms, but on the other hand, it expresses grave concern about a number of developments in the field of human rights. In particular, the report highlights the setbacks to accountability for past human rights violations and the ongoing precarious situation of the families of the disappeared. The pattern of surveillance and harassment by security forces of civil society organisations, human rights defenders, and journalists, highlighted in previous reports, has also continued. Furthermore, there are reports of continuing tendencies towards militarisation and ethno-religious nationalism, which undermine democratic institutions, impede reconciliation and increase the anxiety of minorities. The announced amendments to the Terrorism Act (PTA) (cf. BN of 14.02.22) are described as insufficient and the government is being called upon to impose a moratorium on the continued use of the PTA.

## **Sudan**

### **Demonstrations continue**

On 27.02.22, demonstrations involving especially older people, including mothers and fathers and relatives of those killed in demonstrations so far, took place in Khartoum. The theme of this demonstration, "We are all with you", is meant to express support for the protest movement that is mainly being led by young people. The demonstration marched through the capital to a central rally point, calling for, among other things, the overthrow of the military government and a return to a civilian-led democratic process. The demonstration reportedly involved thousands of people, including more than 77 professional, civil society and political groups.

### **Visit of UN human rights expert**

In the course of the visit of the UN expert on human rights Adama Dieng from 20.02.22 to 24.02.22, the military government progressively released 115 activists from detention from 20.02.22 onwards. They had previously been arrested during demonstrations or raids and detained without any official charge or legal process for sometimes several weeks. While Dieng welcomed the releases at the end of his visit, he went on to say that this was not enough. He also expressed concern about the extensive powers of the security forces under the continuing state of emergency and criticised attacks on hospitals, harassment of journalists, and arbitrary arrests and detention of activists. Dieng also called for the lifting of the state of emergency and the release of all detained activists. The

release of the 115 people by the military government had been criticised by opposition lawyers' associations as a cover-up. In addition, the human rights expert reiterated the demand that the use of live ammunition and tear gas against demonstrators be stopped.

### **Economic impact**

According to reports from different regions of the country, the economic situation has been deteriorating since the military coup. Constantly rising prices, especially for basic foodstuffs, are causing great hardship for the people. The economic situation which was already very difficult continues to decline and is heightening the danger of a nationwide famine that could spread to urban centres such as Khartoum. The still very high inflation, as well as a lack of central control, are causing uncontrolled price increases in all sectors. Due to insufficient rainfall, a poor harvest is expected this season, which will further aggravate the economic situation and poor food security.

## **Syria**

### **UN: number of people in need of assistance in Syria higher than ever before**

The UN Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs presented the humanitarian needs facing Syria in 2022 at a UN Security Council meeting held on 25.02.22. These were published in an annual report (Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic) released on 22.02.22. According to the report, 14.6 million Syrians are in need of assistance, an increase of 9% from the previous year and 32% from 2020. It states that Syria is now among the top ten countries in the world most at risk of food shortages, and the economy continues to be in a slump. Families spend on average 50% more than they earn. As a result of the debt, children, especially girls, are increasingly being taken out of school, and child marriage is on the rise.

Meanwhile, the Syrian government announced on 24.02.22 that it would further cut government spending as the current international conflict with Russia was expected to lead to a significant increase in oil and wheat prices. According to the state news agency SANA, the government cabinet had decided to build up additional reserves of staple foodstuffs and to ration their distribution for a period of two months initially.

### **Three soldiers killed in Israeli airstrikes**

According to Syrian state media reports, the Israeli military carried out several air strikes against military targets in Syria over two days. Near the town of Quneitra on 23.02.22, only material damage was reportedly caused, whereas on 24.02.22 near the capital Damascus, it is said that three soldiers were also killed.

## **Turkey**

### **Introduction of quotas for the foreign population in urban districts**

On 22.02.22, Turkish media reported that the government was implementing a plan to restrict the foreign population in urban districts nationwide to a maximum of 25%, the primary target reportedly being Syrian refugees and migrants. Interior Minister Süleyman Soylu announced that the government had so far closed areas in 16 provinces – including districts in major cities such as Ankara, Istanbul and Izmir – to the registration of new foreign residents. The government wants to prevent the "ghettoisation" of neighbourhoods by limiting the number of migrants living there. Deputy Interior Minister Ismail Çatakli said that the provinces of Ankara, Antalya, Aydın, Bursa, Çanakkale, Düzce, Edirne, Hatay, Istanbul, Izmir, Kırklareli, Kocaeli, Muğla, Sakarya, Tekirdağ and Yalova have already been closed to further registration of people seeking temporary and international protection.

### **LGBTIQ report 2021**

On 23.02.22, the Kaos Gay and Lesbian Cultural Research and Solidarity Association (Kaos GL) published its 2021 report based on rights violations reported in the media. The association stated that it was able to confirm a total of eight murders of LGBTIQ persons in 2021, with the number of unreported cases being higher. About 30% of all violations against LGBTIQ persons were related to freedom of expression. According to the report, the police also violated the prohibition of torture and ill-treatment during several demonstrations in 2021. Twelve people in seven cases were victims of these violations. LGBTIQ persons were forcibly arrested during several events. The authorities did not provide information on whether the violations of the prohibition of torture were investigated.

## **Uganda**

### **Government critic currently in Germany**

Kakwenza Rukirabashaija, who has made serious allegations of torture against the Ugandan government after a period of detention, is currently in Germany to receive medical treatment. His entry was facilitated by UNHCR as his passport is being withheld (cf. BN of 14.02.22).

## **Ukraine / Russian Federation**

### **Military invasion of Ukraine, fighting in parts of the country**

The military invasion of Ukraine by Russian Federation forces launched on 24.02.22 has led to fighting in parts of the country and triggered large-scale flight movements of civilians. President Volodymyr Zelenskyy imposed martial law shortly after the fighting began and declared a general mobilisation; men between the ages of 18 and 60 are currently not allowed to leave the country. In another immediate reaction, Ukraine severed diplomatic relations with the Russian Federation. Shortly before the military invasion began, on 21.02.22, Russian President Vladimir Putin officially recognised the independence of the Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics, which are under the control of pro-Russian separatists, and described the agreements reached in Minsk in 2015 to settle the conflict in eastern Ukraine as de facto no longer feasible. On 24.02.22, Putin named the demilitarisation of Ukraine as one of the goals of the military intervention. According to media reports, as of 27/28.02.22, fighting is taking place between Ukrainian and Russian forces in several regions of Ukraine, especially in and around Kyiv, Kharkiv, Kherson, Sumy, Zaporizhzhya, Berdyansk and Mariupol. Due to the rapidly changing military situation, a more precise assessment of the situation is currently not possible. According to media reports, Russian troops have advanced far into Ukrainian territory, especially in the south from the annexed Crimean peninsula and in the north from their own or Belarusian territory. Advances by armed units of the pro-Russian separatists in eastern Ukraine into previously Ukrainian-controlled areas were also reported. The Chernobyl restricted area on the border with Belarus was captured by Russian military units on 24.02.22. In addition, media reports from the morning of 28.02.22 indicate that Belarus is also planning to intervene militarily in the conflict. Objects of military infrastructure, in particular, have so far been reported as targets of military attacks by the Russian Federation. However, the media and human rights organisations also document destruction and damage to civilian residential buildings and facilities by missile attacks. Internationally, the Russian military invasion has been condemned by numerous countries. The EU, the U.S. and other Western countries have announced economic and financial sanctions against the Russian Federation and high-ranking representatives of the Russian government as well as deliveries of military equipment to Ukraine in response to the Russian actions. When the armed conflict will end and the further consequences and modalities of a possible conflict resolution cannot yet be predicted. On the afternoon of 27.02.22, President Zelenskyy declared that he was ready for diplomatic negotiations without preconditions with a Russian delegation at the Belarusian border on 28.02.22, after a previous diplomatic attempt on 25.02.22 had failed.

### **Humanitarian situation, refugee movements**

The military escalation of the conflict has led to a nationwide humanitarian emergency. According to UNHCR figures released on 27.02.22, around 422,000 people have already left Ukraine, mainly for the neighbouring countries to the west, Poland, Hungary, Slovakia and Romania. Some of these countries had already declared their willingness to accept Ukrainian protection seekers during the severe political tensions between Ukraine and the Russian Federation in recent weeks. The media report traffic jams and lengthy waiting times at the border crossings to leave Ukraine. According to media reports, the supply of food and daily necessities is limited in some regions. The supply of water, electricity, medicines and medical services has also been interrupted in some places due to the partial destruction of critical infrastructure. The Ukrainian authorities have called on the population to seek shelter in cellars and underground stations, for example. Due to the volatile situation, there is uncertainty about the extent of civilian and military casualties and wounded so far. Based on information provided by the UN on 27.02.22, at least 64 civilians have died in the course of the events, while Ukrainian sources on the same day speak of at least 352 civilians killed and around 1,700 injured. According to EU Commission estimates reported on 27.02.22, more than seven million displaced persons are expected inside and outside Ukraine; in the event of a prolonged war, up to 18 million Ukrainians could also be dependent on humanitarian aid.

## Venezuela

### **Report on correlation between smear campaigns and arbitrary arrests**

A statistical analysis published by Amnesty International (ai), Criminal Forum and the Centre for Defenders and Justice (Foro Penal and the Centro para los Defensores y la Justicia) on 10.02.22 shows patterns and a correlation between stigmatisation campaigns in pro-government and pro-party or state-funded media and subsequent arbitrary, politically motivated arrests, up to and including criminalisation of relevant individuals in military courts. During the period under evaluation between January 2019 and June 2021, arrests were particularly frequent following smear campaigns by the media Con el Mazo Dando, Misión Verdad and Luchuguinos. The publishing organisations criticise this systematic repression of opposition voices and call for an independent investigation into the events.

### **Extrajudicial killings by state security forces and military personnel in January 2022**

According to information provided by the NGO Citizen Control (Control Ciudadano) on 17.02.22, more than 100 people were killed extrajudicially by state security forces and members of the Bolivarian National Armed Forces (FANB) in January 2022. The organisation criticised this practice, which allegedly favours killings of suspected criminals over due process, as undermining the right to life and physical integrity. According to the NGO, most of these cases occurred in the states of Zulia and Aragua (18 each), Yaracuy (13), Miranda (10) and Carabobo (9), with a total of 17 states affected.

### **Final Report of the EU Election Observation Mission**

On 22.02.22, the EU EOM presented its final report on the regional elections held in November 2021. The report, which explicitly does not cover the election rerun in the state of Barinas, lists a total of 23 recommendations for future electoral processes in Venezuela, including the increased separation of powers and strengthening of an independent judiciary for more autonomy of the National Electoral Council. The report also proposes measures such as balanced campaign coverage, guaranteeing the right to stand for election by preventing the arbitrary exclusion of candidates through administrative procedures, and the introduction of a system of controls and sanctions regarding the use of state resources in the electoral context.

## Yemen

### **Air strikes in Hajjah**

Between 22.02.22 and 23.02.22, the anti-Houthi coalition led by Saudi Arabia carried out 28 airstrikes against targets in the north-western governorate of Hajjah, the number of casualties and injuries is unclear. In recent weeks, fighting in Hajjah has increased (cf. BN of 07.02.22), coalition forces are interested in securing the "al-Tewal" border crossing between Yemen and Saudi Arabia.

### **IOM: 20,000 IDPs since the beginning of the year**

In its report released on 22.02.22, IOM estimated that around 20,000 people have been displaced from around 3,300 households since the beginning of the year. Most people have fled from the governorates of Marib, Hodeida and Taizz, in the vast majority of cases due to fighting.

### **Another local US embassy staff member arrested by Houthis**

On 24.02.22, word leaked that Houthi authorities had arrested the Yemeni press spokesperson of the U.S. embassy in Sanaa, which has been closed since 2015. So far it is unclear what the man is accused of. The Houthis have already detained Yemeni employees of the US embassy in recent months; eleven former local staff members of the embassy are currently in Houthi custody.