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Briefing Notes

Group 62 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

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Afghanistan

Security situation

The Afghanistan Freedom Front, the National Resistance Front and the Islamic State province of Khorasan attacked the Taliban in the provinces of Badghis, Kabul and Nangarhar on 22.08. and 23.08.24, according to their own statements.¹

Governance

The Taliban have declared 18 August, the day of independence from British rule, a public holiday. At the same time, last month Taliban fighters destroyed the statue of King Amanullah Khan, under whose rule independence was achieved. They accused him of "Western immorality".

On 21.08.24, the Taliban issued a detailed "virtue law". It includes dress codes for men and women and other rules. Women are prohibited from singing, reciting poetry and speaking loudly in public. Homosexual relationships and missing prayers are also punishable by law. The media are not allowed to criticise the Taliban or show pictures or videos of living creatures. Most of the regulations had already been applied before and have now been put into writing. The Ministry of Virtue has extensive powers to punish offences.

The UN-appointed Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in Afghanistan, Richard Bennett, declared on 21.08.24 that the Taliban had banned him from entering the country. The Taliban accuse him of spreading "false information and propaganda". Bennett called for dialogue and saw the entry ban as a "worrying signal" for the Taliban's relations to the international community.

On 25.08.24, the Taliban-appointed Minister of Education, Nedamohammad Nadim, banned questions about girls' and women's education.²

Persecution situation

On 21.08.24, the Taliban reportedly arrested a man in Baghlan province on charges of supporting armed resistance. On the same day, the Taliban reportedly shot a former soldier on his doorstep in Paktika province. It was also reported that two weeks earlier, the Taliban arrested a social media activist at Kabul airport as he was returning from Dubai. He is said to have supported education for girls and the tricolour flag of the republic. On 24.08.24, they reportedly arrested a social media activist in Nangarhar province after he criticised the Taliban. On 25.08.24, the Taliban arrested a former soldier after he responded to a Taliban call to return from Iran.³

Humanitarian situation

Several provinces, including Kabul, Kapisa, Nangarhar and Panjshir, suffered floods in which a child died and infrastructure was destroyed.⁴

Bangladesh

Number of people killed and injured during the student protests

The human rights organisation Human Rights Support Society reports that at least 819 people were killed across the country in connection with the student protests from 16.07. to 18.08.24. 311 fatalities in the period from 16.07. to 03.08.24 and 508 in the period from 04.08. to 18.08.24. At least 25,000 people were injured, mainly by rubber and shotgun bullets and tear gas. The unrest led to the fall of the long-time head of government Sheikh Hasina of the Awami League (AL), who resigned on 05.08.24. The Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) declared at a press conference on 21.08.24 that at least 198 of its members had been killed in the protests.

According to media reports of 21.08.2014, at least 1,581 AL members, including five former members of parliament, were accused of murder in four districts within a few days. Since the fall of the AL-led government, there has been a flood of charges against its members.⁵

No fixed time schedule for new parliamentary elections; interim government; UN delegation in Dhaka

In a meeting on 19.08.2014, the BNP decided not to determine a fixed schedule for the next parliamentary elections in order to give the interim government the opportunity to complete fundamental reforms of government structures. All members of the BNP's highest political decision-making body agreed to allow the interim government a reasonable amount of time to implement the necessary reforms. The UN has pledged its full support. Numerous municipal office holders have already been dismissed and the bank accounts of high-ranking AL members have been frozen.

On 22.08.24, a UN delegation arrived in Dhaka for an eight-day visit to discuss how to investigate human rights violations following the recent outbreaks of violence and unrest.

As of 23.08.24, former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina is under investigation for seven more murders, bringing the number of murders she is accused of to 51.⁶

Floods in eastern parts of the country

The flood situation in the eastern parts of the country remained tense until 24.08.24. Around five million people are affected in eleven districts. A total of 18 flood-related deaths occurred in the following districts: four in Comilla, one in Feni, five in Chittagong, three in Noakhali, one in Brahmanbaria, one in Lakshmipur and three in Cox's Bazar. Feni suffered the heaviest damage. The neighbouring districts of Comilla and Noakhali were also affected by severe flooding. As of 23.08.24, at least 1,510 mobile phone masts were damaged, rail and road connections were disrupted in many places.⁷

Burkina Faso

Centre-Nord: Fatal attack

Members of an armed group killed around 200 people in an attack on a village near the town of Kaya in the Centre-Nord region on 24.08.24. Among those killed were civilians, Burkinabe military members and members of the paramilitary group Volontaires pour la défense de la patrie (VDP). Over 100 people more were injured. The attackers struck when the villagers were helping the security forces to dig protective trenches against armed groups. They are said to have refused to take part in the work previously for fear of reprisals from armed groups. According to media reports, no armed jihadist group active in the region has yet claimed responsibility for the attack.⁸

Colombia

Former FARC members expelled from reintegration camp

On 20.08.24, around 80 people left the Miravalle reintegration camp set up for former FARC fighters in the southern department of Caquetá and moved to the municipality of El Doncello, 200 kilometres away. The move was accompanied by the Ministry of the Interior, the UN Verification Mission, the MAP-OAS and the Ombudsman's Office and other local authorities. The move came after the camp's inhabitants received death threats from the Iván Díaz Front rebel group. The rebel group, which claims control of agricultural land and drug trafficking in the region, accused the former FARC members of supporting a rival rebel group. The territories for former FARC combatants,

known as Espacio Territorial de Capacitación y Reincorporación (ETCR), were established by the Colombian government following the 2016 peace agreement pursuant to which more than 14,000 FARC rebels had put down their arms. However, the population of these villages has diminished considerably because of security problems and a lack of job prospects. Five of the 24 ETCRs, including Miravalle, have already been completely abandoned. A UN report published in April 2024 also highlights the ongoing security problems. According to the report, 416 former FARC combatants have been killed since the peace agreement was signed.⁹

Côte d'Ivoire

Human rights organisations criticise forced evictions

The National Human Rights Council (CNDH) and Amnesty International (AI) have criticised the actions of the government and various authorities in several recent forced evictions in the metropolis of Abidjan. According to an agency report, the forced evictions in the GESCO, Banco 1, Boribana and Abattoir neighbourhoods have affected tens of thousands of people. In addition to homes, shops and at least two schools were also destroyed. Disproportionate violence was used. During a forced eviction in Adjamé Village at the end of July 2024, two people were killed in clashes between security forces and residents. Those affected were neither consulted in advance nor informed of the eviction date. They were also not systematically recorded, which makes the promised compensation of XOF 250,000 (around EUR 381, fixed exchange rate) per household impossible.

The forced evictions were defended by the ruling party Rassemblement des houphouëtistes pour la démocratie et la paix (RHDP) and President Alassane Ouattara. One of the reasons cited was the avoidance of the consequences of flooding and landslides, which allegedly claim dozens of lives in Abidjan every year. According to a media report, Abidjan, like most of the increasingly densely populated West African coast, is affected by flooding as a result of heavy rainfall, coastal erosion and rising sea levels.¹⁰

Cuba

Stronger regulation of the private sector

On 18.08.24, the government published comprehensive new regulations for the private sector, which are due to come into force on 19.09.24. These measures affect the self-employed as well as small and medium-sized enterprises (MIPYMES - Micro, Pequeñas y Medianas Empresas) and non-agricultural co-operatives. Accordingly, private companies must sell their goods and services in the local currency, the Cuban peso, and use a Cuban current account for all business transactions. In addition, Decree 107/2024 expanded the list of prohibited activities for private actors to a total of 125. The activities that are now prohibited include services such as the production and maintenance of medical equipment, the manufacture of pharmaceutical products, sugar production and the generation of electrical energy. In addition, private actors are excluded from the development and implementation of cultural programmes and the establishment of artists' groups, orchestras and other cultural institutions. At the same time, the concept of 'residentes efectivos' is introduced, which allows Cubans living abroad as well as foreigners to participate in MIPYMES as long as they fulfil the requirements for residency in Cuba. If they lose this status, they also lose the right to participate.¹¹

Ecuador

Situation in prisons since militarisation as part of the state of emergency

The state of emergency imposed in January 2024 included the militarisation of the prisons. Between 07.02. and 09.03.24, the National Ombudsman's Office recorded 24 deaths of detainees. Several of these were violent, some bodies showed signs of torture, others of severe malnutrition. In addition, the Permanent Committee for the Defence of Human Rights (CDH) documented more than a hundred human rights violations and handed over individual cases to the public prosecutor's office for further investigation. The military denies human rights violations by its members. There had also been bans on visits and telephone calls. It was only on 11.08.24 that family visits were permitted again for the first time since the beginning of the state of emergency.¹²

El Salvador

Collective trial against suspected gang members

On 12.08.24, the Attorney General's Office filed three motions with the courts in Santa Ana to jointly indict 2,074 alleged members of the Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13). The accused include ringleaders and group leaders, but also low-ranking members and collaborators who are alleged to have been active in the departments of Ahachapán, Sonsonate and Santa Ana in the west of the country. Specifically, they are accused of membership of illegal groups, as well as damage to property, money laundering, threatening, illegal possession and trafficking of arms and other crimes. One such collective trial was held in February 2024. More than 500 leaders of the group were jointly charged with a total of over 37,000 criminal offences, including murder, illegal arms trafficking and enforced disappearances. Since March 2022, El Salvador's exceptional regulations apply in the fight against gang crime. This means that arrests can be made without an arrest warrant. Since July 2023, up to 900 people can be charged at the same time and without a case-by-case examination provided they belong to the same group. More than 81,000 suspected gang members have already been detained under these emergency regulations. Human rights organisations repeatedly warned of arbitrary arrests. They also maintain that the right to a fair trial, hearing and defence is violated.¹³

Ethiopia

Attack by gunmen in southern Ethiopia

Between 17.08. and 20.08.24, 14 people, including at least five civilians, were reportedly killed in an armed attack in Segen District (Konso Zone, South Ethiopia Regional State). The unknown assailants reportedly attacked government employees and civilians, looted and partially destroyed the police station, the municipal administration, the local hospital and the tax office. After the Ethiopian defence forces arrived, the attackers withdrew. The region already experienced several clashes in the past.¹⁴

Aid organisation staff member killed

Reportedly, UN OCHA confirmed the death of Yared Melese, who worked for the Action for Social Development and Environmental Protection Organisation and was kidnapped on 22.07.24. Melese was initially abducted by unknown persons in North Wello Zone, Amhara, after which a ransom was demanded. Most recently, the number of kidnappings increased significantly in Amhara and Oromia (cf. BN of 22.07.24). By now eight employees of aid organisations have been killed and another 14 were kidnapped in 2024, according to OCHA.¹⁵

Ghana

Court bans planned protests by Ghanaian youth

On 30.07.24, the High Court in Accra issued an injunction prohibiting several civil society organisations from holding their planned protests. According to media reports, the organisations concerned had planned several events and rallies from 31.07. to 06.08.24, expecting more than 2 million young people to take to the streets of Accra. With the planned protests, Ghana's young generation wanted to air its grievances about the country's problems, such as the high cost of living or corruption, which they feel particularly affected by. They also wanted to demand government transparency.

On 25.07.24, the Ghanaian police filed the application to ban the protests due to security concerns, which the Supreme Court subsequently granted. The police maintained that they lacked the necessary staff to provide security, as officers had been deployed to political rallies as part of the election campaign. The organising organisations expressed their disappointment at the court's decision. The demonstration was to be a peaceful and constructive platform for dialogue and representation of interests, they said. They now intent to exhaust all legal possibilities to take action against the order.¹⁶

Iran

Death penalty: execution of at least eight imprisoned criminals

According to reports by the human rights organisation Iran Human Rights (IHR) on 15.08. and 19.08.24, at least eight prisoners were executed on drug-related offences (drug trafficking) or murder charges. These included four prisoners in the city of Yazd (province of the same name), three prisoners in Shiraz (Fars province) and one prisoner in Sanandaj (Kordestan province).

According to IHR, the number of death sentences executed on charges relating to drug offences and murder has risen steadily since 2021. On 20.08.24, HRW pointed to a persistently high number of executed death sentences following the election of the new President Massud Pezeshkian in July 2024.¹⁷

Parliament confirms proposal of the presidential cabinet

According to media reports, President Massud Pezeshkian's proposal for his future cabinet, consisting of 18 male and one female minister, was confirmed by parliament on 21.08.2014. The nominated candidates were voted on between 17.08. and 21.08.24. The appointment of architect Farzaneh Sadegh as Minister of Road Construction and Urban Planning is the second appointment of an Iranian woman to a ministerial post since the Islamic Republic was founded.

Pezeshkian, who is considered to be a reformist, emphasised that his selection intended to achieve a consensus between the political camps. In line with the balance of power in the conservative-dominated parliament, he had also nominated candidates who are considered strictly conservative, including three ministers from the cabinet of his predecessor Ebrahim Raisi (cf. BN of 12.08.24). The concessions gave rise to growing criticism from the reformist camp.¹⁸

Assassination of local intelligence chief of Sistan and Balochistan province

According to media reports, a senior member of the intelligence branch of the police force in the city of Khash (Sistan and Balochistan province) was fatally wounded by gunfire at his home on 23.08.24. The Sunni Baloch separatist group Jaish al-Adl (Army of Justice) claimed responsibility for the attack on social media. The group had already claimed responsibility in several cases of attacks on law enforcement facilities, such as police stations (cf. BN of 15.01.24).¹⁹

Iraq

One death after suspected tribal conflict

On 21.08.24, one person was killed and several were injured in a suspected tribal conflict in the city of Najaf (Najaf province). A total of 70 people were arrested and numerous weapons and ammunition were confiscated. The reason for the escalation of violence is still unclear.

Tribal conflicts are frequent in Iraq, they regularly cause fatalities.²⁰

Security incident between Iraqi army and Shiite militia

On 22.08.24, a security incident occurred between the Iraqi army and members of the Shiite militia "Jund al-Imam" in the city of Karbala (Karbala province) in the run-up to the Shiite pilgrimage Arbaeen. The militia reportedly pushed for access to a cordoned-off area without first consulting the Iraqi army, which was responsible for security checks. Both sides then fired warning shots. No injuries were reported.

Jund al-Imam is part of the Popular Mobilisation Forces (PMF) (Arabic: Hashd al-Shaabi). These formally belong to the Iraqi armed forces, but in fact pursue their own agenda and are hardly controlled by the Iraqi government.²¹

PKK-Türkiye conflict

Armed clashes between the PKK and the Turkish military in the province of Dohuk caused a wildfire on 25.08.24. Initially, it was impossible to control the fire which is endangering several neighbouring villages.

Türkiye has been conducting an air and ground offensive against PKK positions in northern Iraq for years, regularly causing fires and occasionally civilian casualties.²²

Israel / Lebanon

Mutual shelling of military positions of Hezbollah and Israel's military

On 25.08.24, Hezbollah in Lebanon and the Israeli military engaged in an intense exchange of fire. According to Israeli reports, 100 fighter jets flew preventive air strikes on Lebanon in a "self-defence operation" after the extensive preparations of rockets and missiles for an attack on Israeli territory had been observed overnight. It is said that thousands of rocket launchers have been destroyed. According to the report, Hezbollah fired 20 drones and 210 rockets from Lebanon, the majority of which were intercepted by air defence. One member of the Israeli navy is said to have been killed by an interceptor, shelling or shrapnel and two others wounded. Hezbollah confirmed that two of its own members and a fighter from an allied militia had been killed. Hezbollah leader Nasrallah stated in an address that the attacks were in retaliation for the killing of a high-ranking member a few weeks ago (cf. BN of 05.08.24). The attacks had only focussed on military targets, he said.²³

Kenya

Announcement of new taxes despite recent protest movements

According to recent media reports, the Ministry of Finance has announced the introduction of a tax reform law after all. According to Finance Minister John Mbadi, the country is struggling to generate revenue to pay its debts to international lenders. Recent press reports say that this announcement of 18.08.24 has already drawn criticism from numerous citizens. Displeasure over the rising cost of living prompted protesters to storm parliament in June 2024 and put pressure on President William Ruto to drop the controversial tax law and sack most members of his cabinet. The youth-led protest movement is said to have already responded to the Finance Minister's remarks by declaring that protests will continue across Kenya. According to the Kenya National Commission on Human Rights, more than 50 people have died as a result of police violence since the protests began in mid-June 2024.²⁴

Lebanon

Further attacks on Lebanon

According to Al-Jazeera, at least eight people, presumably Hezbollah members, were killed in an Israeli air strike in southern Lebanon on 23.08.24. One child was also killed. In a separate Israeli attack, a suspected Hezbollah fighter and another child were killed. The incidents occurred prior to the large-scale mutual shelling by Israel and Hezbollah.²⁵

Attack on high-ranking member of Al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigade

According to media reports, an Israeli drone attacked a car in the city of Sidon on 21.08.24, killing Khalil al-Maqdah, a high-ranking officer of the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades. According to the Israeli military, al-Maqdah was acting on behalf of the terrorist organisation Hezbollah and Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards.²⁶

Libya

Political and military tensions increase

According to media reports, the UN and the EU expressed concern about the mounting political and military tensions in the North African country.

Politically, the confrontation between the two competing governments intensified further after the House of Representatives (HoR), based in Tobruk in eastern Libya, voted on 13.08.24 to end the term of office of the Tripoli-based Government of National Unity (GNU) led by Prime Minister Abdul Hamid Dbeibah and declared the rival Government of National Stability (GNS) led by Osama Hammad as the country's only legitimate government. Furthermore, there is disagreement regarding the appointment of the head of the Libyan Central Bank. According to media reports, the HoR speaker threatened on 22.08.24 to stop oil production if the central bank's current head, al-Siddiq al-Kabir, was removed from office. In the past two weeks, the central bank had shortly interrupted its

work after one of its employees had been kidnapped, and its headquarters had been briefly besieged by an armed group some days earlier in order to force al-Kabir's resignation (cf. BN of 19.08.24).

Militarily, the Libyan Arab Armed Forces (LAAF) mobilised some of their units to the south-west in early August 2024 which put the military forces supporting the GNU on alert. Forces associated with the GNU had already advanced westwards at the end of July 2024, which in turn led to the mobilisation of LAAF units.²⁷

Morocco

Royal pardons

According to a statement issued by the Ministry of Justice on 19.08.24, Morocco's King Mohammed VI has pardoned more than 4,800 people who were convicted, prosecuted or charged in connection with the illegal cultivation of cannabis. In 2021, the North African country passed a law legalising the cultivation of cannabis for medicinal and industrial purposes in rural provinces of the north-eastern Rif region in order to stop the illegal drug trade and thus support the farmers who have been growing cannabis in the region for centuries.

As recently as at the end of July 2024 that the king pardoned more than 2,470 people to mark his 25th anniversary on the throne. The pardon included three journalists who had been imprisoned for several years. They were known as critics of public policy and corruption in the country and were sentenced to long prison terms for sexual assault in 2018 and 2021 respectively. Human rights organisations criticised that their convictions had been politically motivated.²⁸

Nicaragua

Current situation and repression against NGOs, the church, indigenous people and political dissidents

State repression against civil society and, in particular, against the Catholic Church continues in the sixth year after the socio-political protests of 2018.

The indigenous party Yapti Tasba Masraka Nanih Asla Takanka (YATAMA) had already been stripped of its legal status and party leaders had been arrested before the March 2024 regional elections in the two autonomous Caribbean regions which are largely inhabited by indigenous peoples. According to the NGO Urnas Abiertas, the ruling party Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional (FSLN) won the non-democratic vote, which was characterised by political violence, irregularities and partisan influence, low voter turnout and a lack of party pluralism.

Some more arrests were made around the anniversary of the protests on 18.04.24. Those affected included previously released prisoners or relatives of former victims. According to the Mechanism for the Recognition of Political Prisoners, a total of 151 people were imprisoned on political grounds as of 31.07.24. The organisation repeatedly criticises their inhumane treatment and punishment in prison and bemoans the lack of public awareness of the situation of the currently less prominent political prisoners. In addition, the repression against media professionals was stepped up again in July 2024, as was the practice of enforced disappearances used by the state. In connection with the discovery of the body of former political prisoner Carlos Alberto García Suárez in Jinotepe, the organisation Grupo de Reflexión de Excarcelados Políticos (GREX) had pointed out already on 15.04.24 that two other former political prisoners had been violently killed after their release since 2021. In neither case had there been any comprehensive investigations, but inconsistencies.

In an interview on 19.05.24, the brother of President Ortega, the retired general Humberto described his family's rule as dictatorial, among other things. His house was subsequently surrounded, his mobile phone confiscated and a de facto house arrest with medical care was imposed.

NGOs have continued to be closed down over the course of the year. Most recently, on 19.08.24, the legal status of 1,500 organisations was withdrawn by means of an announcement in the official gazette due to alleged breaches of disclosure obligations. Their assets are to go to the state treasury after dissolution. This brings the number of NGOs closed by the state since 2018 to over 5,200, including numerous organisations linked to the Catholic and now also Evangelical churches. According to announcements by Vice President Murillo, NGOs that are still authorised must now implement their projects together with state institutions in so-called partnership models.

The repressive measures against the Catholic Church continue. The US State Department's annual report on religious freedom rates the situation as particularly worrying. A report published in July 2024 by the UN Group of Experts on Human Rights in Nicaragua (GHREN) speaks of crimes against humanity with regard to the restrictions on religious freedom and the crackdown on the Catholic Church. Most recently, in August 2024, several priests were arrested in the dioceses of Estelí and Matagalpa, which are particularly affected by repression, and some were later expelled to the Vatican. Processions, such as around Easter, were also banned in 2024, even some of the faithful were arrested.²⁹

Nigeria

Benue State: Students kidnapped

Armed actors attacked and abducted at least 20 students of the Universities of Maiduguri and Jos in Otukpo Local Government Area (LGA) in the northern state of Benue on 15.08.24. According to media reports, the students were travelling in two buses on a road between Makurdi and Enugu on their way to the south-eastern state of Enugu. Members of the Nigerian police reportedly freed the students on 23.08.24. A ransom of USD 31,400 (approx. EUR 28,190) was demanded for their release but was not paid.³⁰

Enugu State: Military strike against suspected IPOB members

According to media reports, forces from several security agencies have killed around 30 members of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) group, which advocates the secession of south-east Nigeria, in various towns in Enugu State since 08.08.24. Nigerian government agencies and other authorities regularly blame the IPOB group and its armed wing, the Eastern Security Network (ESN), for acts of violence in the country's south-east. However, IPOB also regularly denies such accusations.³¹

Niger State: Deadly attack

Armed actors attacked the village of Anguwan Mai-Giro in Shiroro and Rafi LGAs in Niger State on 21.08.24, killing at least 13 people. According to media reports, those killed were sedentary farmers. Attacks on farmers in the northern region of Nigeria are said to have exacerbated food insecurity in the country. Niger State, Nigeria's largest federal state in terms of territory, is located in the west of the Middle Belt zone and borders the north-east of neighbouring Benin. Attacks on villages and kidnappings are a major security problem in the region (cf. BN of 28.03.22, 21.08.23, 29.04.24 and 17.06.24). The violence can be triggered by conflicts over land, grazing and water rights, but also the desire for retribution for earlier acts of violence or - or at the same time - smouldering ethnic rivalries.³²

Pakistan

Punjab/Sindh: Members of criminal gang attack security forces

On 22.08.24, members of a criminal gang armed with bazookas and rifles attacked two police vehicles in the border area between the provinces of Punjab and Sindh. Eleven law enforcement officers were killed and ten others injured. The region is considered a restricted area for civilians and is hardly controlled by the law enforcement authorities. In a report for 2022, the independent NGO Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, identified at least 300 cases of kidnappings for ransom. Influential local politicians and landowners are suspected to be behind the gangs.³³

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa: Security situation

According to the military, five armed fighters were killed and four others injured in a firefight in the tribal district of Bajaur on 19.08.24. Three soldiers involved were also killed.³⁴

Nationwide slowdown of internet connections

Millions of internet users have been complaining about slow internet connections and problems accessing social media for weeks. They have also been unable to send emails or use mobile messaging services. The Pakistani government has rejected accusations that it is building a Chinese-style national internet firewall to better control

online activities and delete dissenting opinions. Faulty submarine cables are blamed for the nationwide internet slowdown. Internet speed has dropped by 30-40%, which not only negatively impacts private users, but also has adverse economic consequences.³⁵

Floods in southern and northern parts of the country

As a result of heavy rainfall, especially in southern and northern parts of the country, more than 200 people lost their lives since July 2024 as of 19.08.24.³⁶

Palestinian Territories / Israel

Gaza Strip: Current developments; humanitarian situation

The Hamas-led Ministry of Health stated on 25.08.24 that more than 40,405 Palestinians had been killed and 93,468 others wounded in the Gaza Strip since the start of the war. The ministry does not officially distinguish between combatants and civilians.

According to information provided by the Israeli military on 23.08.24, a total of 332 military personnel have been killed and 2,232 others wounded since the start of the ground offensives. Some 109 hostages or their mortal remains are still believed to be held by Hamas in the Gaza Strip. On 20.08.24, the military announced that it had recovered the bodies of six hostages during a night-time military operation in Khan Younis.

Fighting in the Gaza Strip continues. Last week's calls for evacuation were followed by ground operations in eastern parts of Khan Younis and Deir al-Balah. At least ten Palestinians were killed in an air strike on a school in Deir al-Balah. The Israeli military maintains that a Hamas military base was located in the school, although Hamas denies using civilian facilities for military purposes.

Between 21.08. and 22.08.24, the Israeli military issued three further evacuation orders for people who stayed in certain areas around Deir al-Balah and Khan Younis. According to the UN, an estimated 90% of the 2.1 million inhabitants of the Gaza Strip have fled as a result of the evacuations. The designated safe zone along the coast is already overpopulated and aid organisations are struggling to provide for the growing number of refugees, as the difficult security situation poses major challenges for the import and distribution of relief supplies.³⁷

West Bank: Dead and wounded in armed clashes and attacks

On 18.08.24, an Israeli security guard was killed near the settlement of Kedumim when a worker attacked him with a hammer. The attacker stole the guard's weapon and fled.

According to the Palestinian Ministry of Health, three Palestinians were killed by an Israeli military drone attack on targets in the city of Tulkarem in the northern West Bank. The Israeli military stated that the attack had targeted armed militia members.

According to UN figures from 21.08.24, an average of one Palestinian person a day was killed by an air strike in the current month of August 2024. It is not specified whether these were militia members or civilians. A total of more than 600 Palestinians are said to have been killed in the West Bank and East Jerusalem since 07.10.23.³⁸

Israel: Attempted bomb attack in Tel Aviv

The suspected attacker died in an attempted bomb attack in Tel Aviv on the night of 19.08.24. One civilian was wounded. Hamas and the so-called Islamic Jihad in Palestine claimed responsibility for the attempted attack. According to Palestinian media reports, the attacker was a Palestinian from Nablus.³⁹

Russian Federation

Deployment of conscripts in Kursk in response to the Ukrainian offensive

International media reports state that Russia is deploying not only professional soldiers but also conscripts to repel the ongoing Ukrainian offensive in the south-western Russian region of Kursk (cf. BN of 12.08.24). The reports say that conscripts were directly involved in battles as border troops in the absence of the regular forces at the beginning of the Ukrainian advance on 06.08.24 and only some of them were evacuated from the combat zone in later phases. Related thereto, there are indications that in some cases attempts were made to persuade evacuated recruits to return to the front by means of financial incentives and threats, including of criminal proceedings, if they

refused. In addition, according to relatives and human rights activists, (further) conscripts from other, sometimes distant parts of the country, including Murmansk and Irkutsk, are currently being transferred to the Kursk region. It is estimated that at least 250 Russian recruits have been captured, are missing or have died as a result of the current advance of the Ukrainian armed forces into Russian territory. Three deaths have been confirmed so far, although it is assumed that a significant number of cases go unreported.

The deployment of conscripts in armed conflicts is legally permitted in Russia, provided that at least four of the planned twelve months of military service have been completed at the start of the deployment. However, in view of the high rate of casualties among recruits in previous wars and the traditionally influential position of soldiers' mothers in Russian society, the issue is considered an exceptionally sensitive one for the political leadership.⁴⁰

South Sudan

Controversial security law

The parliamentary speaker told media representatives on 15.08.24 that a security law discussed and approved by parliament on 12.07.24 had entered into force, allowing the National Security Service (NSS) to legally arrest people without a warrant. The law came into force despite the lack of presidential approval, which is automatic after 30 days in accordance with the Constitution. The law is a major obstacle in the discussions between the transitional government and the opposition regarding the elections planned for December 2024 and has been heavily criticised both nationally and internationally.⁴¹

Syria

Israeli air strikes

According to the Syrian state news agency SANA, seven civilians were reportedly wounded in Israeli air strikes on central Syria on 23.08.24. According to the pro-opposition Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR) the targets are said to have been Hezbollah weapons and fuel depots in the governorates of Hama and Homs.⁴²

North-west: Internal Syrian border crossing closed again after protests; high-ranking militia member killed

Following the reopening of the Abu al-Zandeen crossing between areas controlled by the government and areas under opposition rule on 18.08.24, opposition groups protested and unknown gunmen fired artillery on the crossing. Thus, the crossing, which had not been used since 2020, was closed again on 20.08.24. As early as June 2024, parts of the opposition-controlled population had protested against the reopening plans, as they were considered a step towards normalisation with Syria's President Assad.

The US military claimed to have killed a high-ranking Saudi member of the al-Qaeda-affiliated group Hurras al-Din, in the Idlib governorate in a drone strike on 23.08.24.⁴³

South: Armed clashes

According to North Press Agency, five members of the Syrian military were wounded in armed clashes between government troops and local groups from the town of Dael in the Dar'a governorate on 25.08.24. According to the report, government troops had made an advance into the town of Dael in order to establish new military bases there. The pro-opposition media platform Horan Free League, on the other hand, reported that government troops had attempted to seize well drilling rigs.

In the village of Mahja in Dar'a governorate, reports from the opposition-affiliated platform Enab Baladi claim that the military exerted pressure on the population to force local groups to give up their arms. According to these reports, the village was once again threatened with a siege and a military intervention. Earlier, on 19.08.24, fighting is said to have broken out between local fighters and the so-called People's Committees associated with the government, with the former being present in eastern and the latter in western parts of the city. According to the Horan Free League, at least one person is said to have been killed. In the past, the government-backed so-called People's Committees have been accused of involvement in criminal activities, including killings, drug trafficking and exploitation. A few days earlier, local armed groups from Mahja had forced the release of a young Syrian by government troops by attacking a checkpoint and threatening to storm it. These tactics are increasingly used by local factions to extort the release of unlawfully detained persons (cf. BN of 17.06.24).⁴⁴

Togo

Prime Minister and new government appointed

Following the transition period after the parliamentary elections in April 2024, the Office of the President re-elected Victoire Tomégah Dogbé as Prime Minister on 01.08.2020. A new government was formed on 20.08.24. Tomégah Dogbé, Togo's first female prime minister has been in office since 2020. She is a member of the ruling Union for the Republic party, which won a clear majority in the parliamentary elections. The government was formed in accordance with the new controversial constitution, which was adopted in March 2024. According to the authorities, the main task of the government of 35 cabinet members will be to oversee the transition to the new constitution over several months in order to get all of the republic's institutions up and running.⁴⁵

Türkiye

Three people arrested for listening to Kurdish music

According to media reports, three Kurdish construction workers were arrested in the city of Balıkesir on 21.08.24 for allegedly listening to Kurdish music in a park. The three men were approached by police officers in Atatürk Park who demanded to see their ID cards. The workers said that when they refused to hand over their ID cards, they were beaten by the police officers and taken into custody. Bystanders also joined in the attack on the Kurdish men. Furthermore, according to press reports, the detainees were denied the opportunity to receive medical reports documenting the injuries they had sustained. After being held overnight, the three men were taken to the Balıkesir courthouse on 22.08.24.

They are accused of "propaganda for a terrorist organisation" and "resisting the police" and have been ordered to be remanded in custody. On 23.08.24, a member of parliament from the DEM party submitted a parliamentary question about the incident in which she asked whether listening to music in Kurdish was prohibited.⁴⁶

Tunisia

Presidential election campaign: Three candidates approved and 14 others rejected so far

A report by HRW criticises the Tunisian authorities for their actions against potential presidential candidates. At least eight potential candidates have been prosecuted, convicted and/or imprisoned in recent weeks. The charges against them include buying signatures of support, making donations to influence voters or spreading false news. The presidential election in the North African country is due to take place on 06.10.24. So far, the central electoral commission has authorised three candidates, including incumbent president Kaïs Saïed. 14 other candidates have been rejected by the electoral commission due to a lack of the required supporting signatures or financial guarantees, or because they did not fulfil the nationality criteria. Several candidates appealed the electoral commission's decision to the administrative court.⁴⁷

Ukraine

Civilian victims

According to media reports from 21.08.24, one person died after a Russian attack in the Zaporizhia region. According to the Ukrainian Prosecutor General's Office on 22.08.2014, one person was killed in a Russian air strike in the Kharkiv region. According to the prosecutor's office, another four people were killed by two Russian air strikes in the Sumy region on 23.08.24. During a visit to the Sumy region on 22.08.24, President Zelensky had previously stated that the number of attacks and civilian fatalities there had decreased overall since the Kursk offensive was underway. According to the governor, the bodies of three civilians were recovered in the Kharkiv region on 23.08.24. The authorities also reported three further fatalities in the Kherson and Donetsk regions. According to media reports from 25.08.24, five people were killed in a Russian attack in Kostyantynivka (Donetsk region) the day before. According to Ukrainian military information, a total of four people were killed following Russian attacks on the border regions of Chernihiv, Sumy, Kharkiv and Donetsk on 25.08.24.⁴⁸

War effort

The Ukrainian military informed that their armed forces are still on the defensive in the Donetsk region. President Zelensky described the situation in the Pokrovsk and Torezk sectors as "difficult". 53,000 inhabitants had still been living in Pokrovsk at last count. Many of them have already complied with the evacuation orders and left the city, which is important for supplying the Ukrainian troops. The capture of the important railway junction of Nju Jork in the Torezk sector reported by the Russian side has so far only been indirectly confirmed by the Ukrainian military leadership, as the General Staff's situation report no longer classifies the location as contested. Both warring parties have declared their intention to reinforce their troops in the Pokrovsk region, the main focus of the Russian offensive. Meanwhile, the Ukrainian armed forces group Tavria reported that Russian ground attacks in the southern Ukrainian front section in the Kherson and Zaporizhia regions have decreased, but that Russian air strikes are still being flown there. According to an assessment by the Institute for the Study of War (ISW), Moscow has withdrawn troops from Ukraine for the first time in order to boost its defence in the Kursk region. The report says that the Russian military leadership has redeployed troops from the southern Ukrainian region of Zaporizhia but is trying not to weaken the main front in the eastern Ukrainian region of Donetsk. For the first time since the Ukrainian Kursk offensive, both warring parties have exchanged 115 prisoners of war each, including Russian soldiers captured in the Kursk region, following mediation by the UAE.

After Belarus had previously announced a build-up of troops in the border area with Ukraine in response to an alleged deployment of 120,000 soldiers on the Ukrainian side, Ukraine called on Belarus to withdraw them on 25.08.24 and warned that it would make "tragic mistakes" under pressure from Moscow.⁴⁹

Energy infrastructure

Ukrainian Energy Minister Herman Halushchenko is forecasting a difficult winter as the damage to the energy infrastructure resulting from the Russian air strikes has accumulated. Despite power plant repairs and energy imports, a supply shortfall is expected. The extent of power cuts and heating failures will depend on how cold the winter is. The Ukrainian government is currently working on contracts for electricity imports. The air defence of the power plants that are still operational is to be strengthened as well.⁵⁰

New law with implications for the Ukrainian Orthodox Church

On 20.08.24, the Ukrainian parliament passed a law paving the way for a ban of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UPC), which is considered to be loyal to Moscow. The law bans the Russian Orthodox Church (RPC) on Ukrainian territory. The law also provides for a ban, still to be confirmed by a court, on religious organisations associated with the RPC, which supported the Russian war of aggression. After being signed by the President on 24.08.24, the law is to come into force 30 days after publication. According to member of parliament Yaroslav Shelesnyak the individual parishes will have nine months to break away from Moscow.⁵¹

Ratification of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court

On 21.08.24, the Ukrainian parliament ratified the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC), thereby fulfilling a prerequisite for the country's aspired EU accession. According to presidential advisor Iryna Mudra, the ratification will increase the effectiveness of the ICC in prosecuting crimes committed by Russian nationals on Ukrainian territory. According to media reports, the law contains a clause according to which Ukraine will not recognise the jurisdiction of the ICC for seven years in cases in which the crimes prosecuted by the ICC may have been committed by Ukrainian nationals.⁵²

Venezuela

Supreme Court confirms Maduro's election

The Supreme Court of Justice (TSJ) confirmed the election victory of incumbent Nicolás Maduro on 22.08.24. In a press conference, the court's president, Caryslia Rodríguez, stated that the TSJ's investigation had verified the result announced by the Supreme Electoral Council (CNE). The latter had declared Maduro the winner of the election on 02.07.24 with 52% of the vote, but without providing detailed figures on the count. According to Rodríguez, a massive cyber-attack was the reason for the failure to provide the documents. Following protests, Maduro had asked the TSJ to check the results on 31.07.24 (cf. BN of 29.07.24 and 05.08.24). Opposition politicians Edmundo

González and María Corina Machado accused the TSJ of assuming the role of the Supreme Electoral Council and thus violating the separation of powers. They also warned of the court's partiality and that the judgement would exacerbate the crisis. In a joint statement, the US and ten Latin American governments, including Chile, Uruguay, Peru and Argentina, joined the criticism of the ruling. According to Rodríguez, no appeal against the ruling is possible. In addition, the Public Prosecutor General's Office will examine a complaint against González for usurpation of authority and other issues, as he did not appear for the summons in the investigation process (cf. BN of 05.08.24).⁵³

Dismissals of dissenting or critical government employees

Most recently, the Communist Party (PCV) publicly denounced dismissals for political reasons and forced redundancies of employees in state-owned companies who had criticised or expressed doubts about Maduro's supposed victory in the presidential elections or refused to support the government. Employees of the state oil company PDVSA, the state electricity utility Corpoelec and public health facilities were among those affected. An article by Reuters mentions hundreds of redundancies at PDVSA as well as dismissals at the Ministry of Petroleum. The refusal to participate in pro-government events in the wake of the elections may also have led to dismissals. The national press union SNTP also reported dismissals at the state television station VTV and the radio station RNV, for reasons such as likes of opposition posts on social media or critical WhatsApp statuses. Employees in the education sector also reported intimidation and threats.⁵⁴

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