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Briefing Notes

Group 62 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

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Afghanistan

Security situation

According to their own statements, the Afghanistan Freedom Front and the National Resistance Front attacked the Taliban between 17.07. and 21.07.24 in the provinces of Badghis, Baghlan, Herat, Kabul and Parwan.¹

Persecution situation

The Taliban allegedly arbitrarily arrested several people in Kabul on 15.07.24 - a man from Panjshir province and his son and the former director of Panjshir province prison; in Badakhshan province on 16.07.24 - a former soldier; in Kabul on 17.07.24 - a former officer who retired several years ago, a freelance journalist in Kandahar province. Furthermore, the owner of a travel agency from Panjshir province on 21.07.24 in Kabul and the brother of the former head of security in Takhar province. On 20.07.24 it was also reported that the Taliban in Herat province had handed over the body of a man to his family who had been arrested a week earlier for no publicly stated reason. The body was said to show clear signs of torture.

In Sar-e Pol province, at least seven people were injured on 19.07.24 when an unknown person threw a hand grenade at a procession marking Ashura, the Shiite commemoration of the Battle of Karbala and the death of Imam Hussein.

The Taliban are said to have shot dead a ten-year-old in Nangarhar province on 19.07. 24 because, contrary to their instructions, he did not stop collecting fallen branches as firewood after storms.

On 21.07.24, the Taliban in Badakhshan province burnt musical instruments they had confiscated over the past months.²

Humanitarian situation

Storms, heavy rain and flooding in the province of Nangarhar on 15.07. and 16.07.24 are said to have killed 130 people. Storm-related deaths and injuries were also reported in neighbouring provinces. Important infrastructure such as sanitary facilities for people deported from Pakistan at the Torkham border crossing were allegedly destroyed.

At the same time, numerous wells in Kabul have dried up resulting in an acute water shortage. People have to queue for hours to buy canisters of water. The price of water has risen sharply: a canister containing 16 litres of water currently costs about as much as two loaves of bread. Many people must save on food in order to be able to afford water.³

Bangladesh

Over 100 dead during student protests

After weeks of peaceful student protests against a quota system for the allocation of jobs in the public sector, violent clashes erupted between the protesters, security forces and pro-government student activists on 15.07.24. According to media reports, at least 114 people had lost their lives across the country by 21.07.24, most of them by police gunfire. Hundreds more were injured on both sides. Protesters attacked government buildings and police checkpoints as well as the metro system and a prison in Dhaka. The government imposed curfews, closed schools and universities and switched off the internet and mobile data traffic. Dozens of protesters, including at least 70 members of the opposition Bangladesh National Party, were arrested. On 21.07.24, the Supreme Court overturned the rule to allocate 56 % of civil service jobs on the basis of quotas, including 30 % to families of people who fought for Bangladesh's independence in 1971. The latter are now reserved 5 % of the posts, with a further 2 % reserved for people with disabilities and members of ethnic minorities. The quota system had already been abolished in 2018 but was reinstated at the end of June 2024. The organisation behind the protests, "Students Against Discrimination", has announced that it will continue its actions until all of the arrested are released and those responsible for the violence against the protesters resigned. The students are supported by other groups in the population as well. Every year, around 400,000 people apply for around 3,000 jobs in the public sector. It is estimated that 18 million young Bangladeshis are currently looking for work.⁴

Cameroon

Extension of mandate for national and local members of parliament

With a view to potential effects on the presidential election in 2025, it is reported that the National Assembly (lower house of parliament) has agreed to extend its own legislative term and the terms of office of local councillors by one year. This means that the next parliamentary and local elections will be held in March 2026. It is said that the government initiated this citing the logistical and financial necessity of coordinating the election calendar. Otherwise, there would have been four ballots in 2025.

According to the report, the electoral law might impact the presidential election, as it provides that any presidential candidate must be nominated by a party that is represented in the National Assembly, the Senate, regional or local councils. This does not apply to Maurice Kamto, runner-up in Biya's last re-election in 2018 and still a leading opposition politician, as his party, Mouvement pour la renaissance du Cameroun (MRC), boycotted the last local and national elections. Alternatively, the electoral law requires the submission of recommendations (French "parrainages") from at least 300 personalities in certain offices or social functions for a candidacy, which is considered "almost impossible" under the current political circumstances.⁵

Coming out of the president's daughter: reactions and criminal charges

Brenda Biya, daughter of President Paul Biya who lives in Switzerland and is active as King Nasty rapper, confessed her love for a Brazilian woman in a widely spread Instagram post at the end of June 2024. Media reports describe some of the reactions with reference to the criminalisation of homosexual acts in Cameroon. In some cases, Biya was accused of staging a PR activity. Two activists, one at home and the other abroad, welcomed Brenda Biya's public coming out as a source of courage and a challenge to prevailing legal and social norms. However, it was criticised that the current laws are disproportionately enforced against persons affected belonging to the poor sections of the population. Wealth and relationships, on the other hand, could provide a protective shield.

Further reports say that the anti-LGBTIQ group Against the Decriminalisation of Homosexuality in Our Country has filed criminal charges against Biya for promoting and inciting homosexual practices. Biya had withdrawn her original post after receiving numerous negative comments, including insults. However, support had mostly come from LGBTIQ persons and organisations. The 26-year-old told a French newspaper that she believed that attitudes in Cameroon were changing (towards more openness), especially in her generation. However, her parents had stopped contacting her.⁶

Chad

Humanitarian crisis

The Minister of Public Health, Abdelmadjid Abderahim, has called on international partners to provide emergency aid in view of the current humanitarian situation, according to reports. More than two million lives are at risk due to the combination of several factors. The months of June to August are the lean season anyway. This is exacerbated by the influx of numerous refugees from neighbouring countries, specifically roughly 600,000 people Sudanese refugees, armed conflicts between different communities and poor agricultural yields. Harvests are poor because of climate change, droughts and floods, as well as plagues caused by migratory birds and crickets. International actors, including the WFP, have announced a programme to support the most affected provinces - Ennedi Est, Wadi Fira, Ouaddaï, Sila, Logone Oriental, Lac, Kanem, and Barh El Gazel. Chad has a population of around 18 million people and is considered one of the world's poorest countries.⁷

Chad / Cameroon / Central African Republic

Tri-border region: Surge in kidnappings for ransom

The surge in kidnappings for ransom in the bordering regions of the three countries is the subject of a media report published on 16.07.24. It says that in 2023, ransom payments in Cameroon's North region reached XAF 86 million (around EUR 131,000, fixed exchange rate) and XAF 52.4 million (around EUR 80,000) in the affected area of Chad, against XAF 43 million (around EUR 65,500) in the previous year. Terrorist groups such as Boko Haram and associated criminal groups, gangs of bandits and local mercenaries known as Zaraguinas as well as by now also members of the Fulani ethnic group, who are considered rich because of their livestock and are therefore victims of kidnappings, have resorted to this source of income. The report goes on to say that economic interests are behind the kidnapping business for all of these groups in a region where small arms and drug smuggling is also widespread. The example of Chad is cited for the formation of local vigilante groups in response to the absence of a state presence. Fear also led to uncultivated fields and restrictions of the freedom of movement, resulting in economic damage. As landlocked countries, Chad and the Central African Republic are dependent on the trade routes via Cameroon for their imports and exports, the report concludes.⁸

Colombia

Government ends ceasefire with EMC units

On 16.07.24, the Ministry of Defence announced the termination of the ceasefire with units of the guerrilla group Estado Mayor Central (EMC), led by commander Iván Mordisco. Allegedly, Mordisco continues to decline to enter into peace talks with the government. According to Defence Minister Iván Velásquez, this means the resumption of offensives against 24 EMC units. The government had already suspended a ceasefire with EMC factions in the south-western departments of Cauca, Valle del Cauca and Nariño on 20.03.24 due to ongoing violence. The EMC, which has around 3,800 members, was founded by renegade former FARC fighters who rejected the 2016 peace agreement with the government. According to the ministry, the ceasefire is to be continued for a further three months with the Gentil Duarte bloc, the Jorge Suarez Briceño bloc and the Raul Reyes Front in the provinces of Norte de Santander, Antioquia, Meta and Caqueta.⁹

Legal status for legal guardians of Venezuelan migrant minors

On 19.07.24, the Colombian government announced that it would issue special residence permits for the legal guardians of over 270,000 underage Venezuelan migrants. According to the director of the Colombian migration authority, Fernando García, this measure is intended to improve the legal status of these adults and thus facilitate their integration into Colombian society, employment and access to state services, particularly health and education services for minors and adults.

According to the Colombian migration authority, an estimated 2.5 million Venezuelans were living in Colombia in 2023.¹⁰

Ecuador

Convictions for murder of Mr Villavicencio during 2023 election campaign

On 12.07.24, five people were sentenced for the murder of the presidential candidate Villavicencio in August 2023 (cf. BN of 14.08.23). Three defendants received prison sentences of twelve years for complicity, two people over 34 years on the same charges. The latter allegedly belong to the criminal gang Los Lobos. One of these two persons was found guilty of planning the murder from prison, the other for the logistical coordination and financing. However, it remains unclear who ordered the murder and what their motives were.¹¹

Egypt

More than 100 people arrested for calling for peaceful protests

According to a report by the human rights organisation Amnesty International, the authorities have detained a total of 119 people in several provinces of the country since the beginning of July 2024. The people concerned were arrested in connection with calls on social media for protests on 12.07.24 and for the removal of President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi due to the rise in prices and regular power cuts. The charges against the arrested include spreading false news, misuse of social media and membership in a terrorist organisation.¹²

Ethiopia

Increase in kidnappings

The number of kidnappings for ransom has increased in Ethiopia. The Oromia region is most affected. At the beginning of July 24, dozens of bus travellers, most of them students, were kidnapped by unknown persons near Garba Guracha (Oromia). Subsequently, a total of Birr 700,000 (approx. EUR 11,230; as at 22.07.24) in ransom was demanded from relatives. Witnesses testified that more than a hundred people are still missing. Members of the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA) which is active in the region, are suspected to be behind the abductions. Mass abductions of this kind have occurred repeatedly in recent years.¹³

Restriction of freedom of expression and assembly

According to reports, the Ethiopian government has dissolved at least 1,504 civil society organisations in recent weeks because they had not submitted their legally required annual reports. Human rights organisations see this as a massive restriction of freedom of expression and assembly because it is considered as arbitrary measures by government.¹⁴

The Gambia

FGM remains outlawed

On 15.07.24, The Gambia's parliament rejected a bill that would have repealed the ban on female genital mutilation (FGM) enacted in 2015. According to media reports, the majority of MPs voted down the bill to amend the Women's Amendment Act ahead of the third and final vote. Human rights groups and the UN had called on MPs to vote against the decriminalisation of FGM. The bill was introduced on 04.03.24 by independent MP Almameh Gibba following pressure from conservative religious forces. Gibba justified the bill on the grounds of preserving religious purity and upholding traditional norms and values (cf. BN of 11.03.24). It is said that this was occasioned by the first and as yet only conviction of three women who were found guilty of performing FGM on eight infant girls in 2023. The Gambia would have been the first country in the world to lift an existing ban on FGM. According to the UN Population Fund (UNFPA), 75 % of girls and women between the ages of 15 and 49 in The Gambia are affected by FGM in 2020.

According to Articles 32 A and 32 B of the Women's Amendment Act, any person who performs, demands or instigates FGM despite the ban is liable to imprisonment not exceeding three years and/or a fine of up to Dalasi 50,000 (approx. EUR 677; as of 22.07.24). Anyone who causes the death of a girl by carrying out FGM is punished with life imprisonment.¹⁵

Ghana

Decision on anti-LGBTIQ law postponed

On 17.07.24, Ghana's Supreme Court postponed a decision on a petition to prevent parliament from sending the controversial anti-LGBTIQ bill to President Nana Akufo-Addo for final approval.

Two lawsuits are currently pending against the adoption of the so-called "Promotion of Proper Human Sexual Rights and Ghanaian Family Values Bill", which has been heavily criticised internationally for restricting human rights. The main lawsuit disputes the constitutionality of the law. The second suit seeks an injunction to prevent the Speaker of Parliament, the Attorney General and the Clerk of Parliament from transmitting the bill to President Akufo-Addo for assent.

The Supreme Court declared that it would postpone the decision on the motions for interim injunctions expected for 17.07.24 and instead hold an early hearing on the original main action. In the end, the court wants to issue a joint comprehensive judgement that deals with the aspects of both actions, the court said. The proceedings were adjourned indefinitely. The media assume that the Supreme Court's decision means that the debate about the law, which is dominating political discourse, is to be kept out of the campaign for the presidential elections in December 2024.

The anti-LGBTIQ law passed by the Ghanaian parliament on 28.02.24 (cf. BN of 04.03.24) not only provides for harsher punishment for same-sex sexual acts, but also criminalises the deliberate promotion, encouragement or support of LGBTIQ activities. When the lawsuits were brought before the Supreme Court after parliamentary approval, President Nana Akufo-Addo announced on 05.03.24 that he would not approve the anti-LGBTIQ law until its constitutionality had been confirmed. He said, he wanted to wait until the country's Supreme Court had ruled on the matter (cf. BN of 11.03.24).¹⁶

Guinea

Authorities deny arrest of FNDC leaders

Following the arrest and disappearance of two leaders of the civil society-political alliance Front national de défense de la Constitution (FNDC), Oumar Sylla ("Foniké Menguè") and Mamadou Billo Bah, on 09.07.24 (cf. BN of 15.07.24), the Office of the Attorney General contradicted the FNDC's account on 17.07.24, saying that neither had been arrested nor sent to any detention centre. Instead, investigations into their disappearance are to be initiated, they said.

According to media reports, the country's lawyers have been on strike since 17.07.24 until the end of July 2024. In doing so, they are emphasising the demand for Sylla and Bah's release and also demanding the restoration of fundamental freedoms and constitutional order by the end of 2024. The ruling junta had originally promised to complete the transition phase by then but has since called this into question (cf. BN of 25.03.24). The FNDC had also called for mobilisation at home and abroad, it was reported.¹⁷

Iran

Press freedom: Sentencing a journalist to 40 lashes

According to reports by human rights organisations on 16.06. and 17.07.24, a journalist from Markazi Province was sentenced to 40 lashes after he made critical comments about the Director General of the Sports and Youth Authority of Markazi Province in one of his articles.

Among other things, the reporter was accused of insulting an official. The man was acquitted of other charges, including personal insult, defamation and spreading falsehoods.¹⁸

Killing of a Kolbar (load carrier) on the border with Iraq

According to media reports, Iranian security forces killed at least one Kolbar and injured three others on the border with the Autonomous Region of Kurdistan Iraq (KRI) on 16.07.24.

Kolbar are load carriers who transport untaxed goods between Iraq and Iran, sometimes also Türkiye. According to reports from Kurdish human rights organisations, forces of the Revolutionary Guards (IRGC) fired on a group of

Kolbar in the Kandil Mountains region. A 19-year-old porter from Sardasht (West Azerbaijan province) was killed. Iranian border guards have repeatedly attacked Kolbar in the border region. The work of the Kolbar is illegal. Due to poor economic conditions and a lack of alternative employment opportunities, men opt for this quite dangerous activity to earn a living.¹⁹

Iraq

Attack on Kurdish politician

According to media reports, the local politician of the Kurdish KDP, Akram Salih, was attacked on 15.07.24. A charge of explosives attached to his car detonated, lightly injuring Salih's driver and his assistant. Salih himself escaped unharmed. The incident took place in the city of Kalar (Sulaymaniyah province). The Kurdish Security Council blamed the PKK for the attack, but the PKK denies the accusation.²⁰

Türkiye-PKK conflict

A civilian has been killed in suspected Turkish air strikes on Shildaze district (Dohuk province). Türkiye is fighting the PKK in the Iraqi-Turkish border region and has expanded its military presence in northern Iraq, intensifying its attacks over the past month. According to the U.S. NGO Community Peacemakers Teams (CPT), nine civilians have been killed since the beginning of the year.²¹

Family feud in Basra

According to media reports, a fatal domestic dispute occurred in the southern Iraqi city of Basra on 16.07.24. The trigger is said to have been a woman fleeing to her parents' house seeking protection from her husband. He is said to have then stormed his in-laws' house with other relatives, resulting in a total of four deaths. Several people have since been arrested by the police. Central Iraq has no law protecting against domestic violence. A law proposed in 2019 to criminalise domestic violence has not yet been passed. Feuds between tribes or different branches within a family are commonplace in Iraq and often end fatally.²²

Allegations of torture against police

A woman from Baghdad raised allegations of torture against the local police on 18.07.24. According to her, she wanted to report a burglary of her house in July 2024, she was then accused of insulting the Minister of the Interior and the local police chief. She was beaten several times and transferred to a women's prison from where she was released six days later. The police authority has not yet commented on the allegations. The U.S. government's latest human rights report lists serious human rights violations by the security authorities in Iraq, including torture, inhumane treatment and arbitrary arrests.²³

Libya

Civilian killed in fighting in western Libyan coastal town

According to media reports, a civilian was killed by a stray bullet on 16.07.24 when two rival armed groups engaged in violent clashes in the western Libyan coastal town of Tajoura. The fighting broke out after members of one armed group arrested a fighter from another militia. The fighting ended with an agreement between the parties to the conflict to withdraw to their headquarters and station two neutral armed groups in the area of the city.²⁴

Journalist released after three days in detention

The well-known journalist and TV presenter, Ahmed Sanussi, was reportedly released without explanation on 14.07.24 after being arrested and detained for three days by the local security authorities in Tripoli. As editor-in-chief of a Libyan financial news website, Sanussi has been reporting on corruption in his home country for a long time already, with his most recent report focussing on the Ministry of Economy.²⁵

Nigeria

South-west: Fulani herdsmen should leave the region

According to media reports, Sunday Adeyemo, a Nigerian activist known as Sunday Igboho, who advocates self-determination for the Yoruba, once again urged cattle herders of the Fulani ethnic group to leave the forest regions in south-west Nigeria on 15.07.24. He said that if they failed to do so voluntarily, they would be expelled. The reports say that the prominent activist had expressed concern that non-sedentary Fulani were making it difficult for people in this region to farm by grazing their cattle on their fields and destroying crops. Food security can only be achieved if a peaceful environment for agricultural production is guaranteed, he said and called the efforts of the governors and traditional rulers in the region commendable. According to media reports, Fulani are suspected of being involved in murders and kidnappings in the south-western state of Oyo.

Conflicts between nomads and sedentary people occur in several federal states in Nigeria. These acts of violence, also known as inter-communal violence, can be caused by conflicts over land, grazing and water rights, but also by a desire for retribution for earlier acts of violence – or at the same time – by smouldering ethnic rivalries (cf. BN of 06.05. and 27.05.24). Sunday Igboho enjoys great popularity in south-western Nigeria. On 07.03.22 he was released after months of imprisonment in neighbouring Benin. Some believe that this detention was masterminded by Nigeria (cf. BN of 14.03.22 and 11.12.23). The Yoruba are one of Nigeria's three largest ethnic groups and also make up part of the population of Benin and Togo.²⁶

Delta State: Positive developments in the healthcare system

The number of people insured under the Delta State Contributory Health Insurance Scheme has risen to 2.4 million, according to media reports from 18.07.24. This corresponds to 35 % of the population of the state, which is located in southern Nigeria. The services provided by the health insurance scheme include maternal and neonatal healthcare, surgery, eye and dental treatment and emergency services. For example, over 300 caesarean sections are performed every month, the reports say. The annual contribution for health insurance amounts to NGN 7,000 (approx. EUR 4; as at 22.07.24).

In general, Nigeria's public healthcare system is considered to be underfunded and sometimes characterised by very limited infrastructure. There is also a clear gap between the medical care provided in urban and in rural areas (cf. BN of 13.11.23). However, the situation is not and does not remain difficult everywhere in every respect. Quite regularly there are reports on positive developments in the healthcare system, e.g. with regard to successful vaccination campaigns (cf. BN of 18.12.23 and 24.06.24).²⁷

Oman

At least nine dead in attack on mosque

In the evening of 15.07.24, the Ali Abi Talib Mosque in the capital Muscat was the target of an armed attack during the Ashura prayer. Reports say that three gunmen opened fire on the worshippers in the mosque. According to the state news agency ONA, at least nine people were killed and 28 injured, including the three perpetrators and four Pakistani nationals.

IS claimed responsibility for the attack stating that it considers Shiites "apostates of Islam" and despises them. According to reports, it is general knowledge that the attacked mosque is predominantly attended by Shiites. The country is often described as a comparatively safe country in the Arab world. Religious and political leaders often emphasise confessional harmony and religious tolerance as the key to the country's stability.²⁸

Pakistan

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa: Security situation

On 15.07.24, at least four soldiers were killed and 50 others injured in an explosion and subsequent firefight at a military barracks in the city of Bannu, according to media reports. Initially, a suicide bomber detonated an explosives-laden vehicle on the outer wall of the barracks; armed fighters then opened fire. A group called Jaish-e

Fursan-e Muhammad claimed responsibility for the attack in a message to the media. The authenticity and existence of this group could not be independently confirmed. All five attackers were killed.

On 19.07.24 shots were fired at a protest in the district of Bannu and triggered mass panic. According to the local hospital, one person was killed and 27 were injured. According to further media reports, up to three people were killed. It remains unclear whether the shots were fired by the military. In view of the unrest, the government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has cut mobile phone and internet connections in the district of Bannu.

On 22.07.24, two civilians were killed and four others, including a policeman, were injured in South Waziristan by a remotely detonated explosive device.

On 22.07.24, a police officer was killed and two others seriously injured in a grenade attack on a checkpoint at the archaeological site of Takht-i-Bahi.²⁹

Palestinian Territories / Israel

Gaza Strip: Current developments; humanitarian situation

On 18.07.24, the Hamas-led Ministry of Health stated that more than 38,848 Palestinians had been killed and 89,459 others wounded in the Gaza Strip since the start of the war. The ministry does not officially distinguish between combatants and civilians.

According to the Israeli military on 19.07.24, a total of 326 military personnel have been killed and 2,134 others wounded since the start of the ground offensive. Around 120 hostages are still believed to be held by Hamas in the Gaza Strip.

The fighting in the Gaza Strip continues.

Medical capacities in the Gaza Strip are still limited. According to the UN, only around 1,500 hospital beds are available. It is said that there were 3,500 beds before the war began. Medical equipment is still lacking, which leads to a further increase and spread of infectious diseases, among other things. The WHO recently reported that polioviruses were detected in six environmental samples in Khan Younis and Deir al-Balah. The prevailing water shortage, overcrowding in the camps for displaced people, disastrous hygiene conditions and malnutrition are aggravating the situation further.

During the war, Israeli military operations and its occupation focussed on eight hospitals because these facilities were used by Hamas. According to UN figures, 23 of the total of 36 hospitals are currently not operational at all and the remaining 13 are only partially operational. Five out of a total of nine field hospitals are currently operational and more than 60 % of Gaza's primary healthcare facilities are closed. In addition, more than 500 medical professionals are said to have been killed in the ongoing fighting since the war began.

According to UN figures, a total of 1,288 lorry loads of aid supplies were brought into the Gaza Strip and distributed between 01.07. and 15.07.24. At 86 lorries per day, this is a higher average than in June. However, it is lower than in May 2024, when around 94 lorries transported relief supplies to the Gaza Strip every day. The floating harbour built by the USA off the coast of the Gaza Strip is to be dismantled following numerous weather and security problems. In future, aid supplies are to be brought in via the Israeli harbour in Ashdod instead.

On 17.07.24, HRW published a report concluding that the armed groups led by Hamas "committed numerous war crimes and crimes against humanity against the civilian population" on 07.10.23. The organisation says that the purpose of the attack was to kill civilians and take hostages. The organisation called for the immediate release of all hostages.³⁰

Israel: Dead and injured in drone attack in Tel Aviv

On 19.07.24, one person was killed and ten others were injured by a Houthi drone attack on Tel Aviv. The Iranian-made drone had previously passed through the Israeli air defence systems on its way to Tel Aviv. According to reports, it was presumably modified to cover the distance of more than 2,000 kilometres from Yemen via Egypt to Israel. According to the Israeli military spokesperson, the drone had been detected, but mistakenly no interception was initiated. Since 07.10.23, numerous Houthi drones and missiles have been intercepted by Israeli air defences. In most cases before they could reach or pass the southern city of Eilat.

During the attack, another drone was reportedly intercepted, which was presumably launched in Iraq.³¹

Rwanda

Presidential election

Presidential and parliamentary elections were held in Rwanda from 14.07. to 15.07.24. According to initial counts, the incumbent president, Paul Kagame, received more than 99 % of the vote. More than nine million people were eligible to vote, there was a remarkably high voter turnout of 98 % according to the electoral commission. The official election results should be available by 27.07.24 at the latest. Only the leader of the Democratic Green Party of Rwanda and an independent candidate were authorised as opposing candidates. With 0.53 % and 0.32 % of the vote respectively, they remained well below 1 %. If re-elected, Kagame will be entering his fourth consecutive term in office, HRW considers this result as proof that there is hardly any political room of action for the opposition. Reports refer to a "spurious" election. The parallel parliamentary elections were a novelty.³²

Somalia

Conflict between government troops and local militias

Between 12 and 15 people have reportedly been killed in clashes over illegal arms shipments, including at least two soldiers from the Somali National Army (SNA). In Shiilamaow (Galguduud region), near the Ethiopian border, local militias illegally imported weapons into Somalia on 16.07.24. This was followed by an intervention by the Somali security forces and the confiscation of the weapons.³³

Explosion in Beledweyne

On 17.07.24, a landmine reportedly exploded in front of a restaurant in the Hawo Tako area, Beledweyne (Hiiran region), killing a soldier and a civilian. So far, no one has claimed responsibility for the incident.³⁴

Sudan

Humanitarian situation

The UN-initiated talks in Geneva between the Sudanese military (SAF) and the paramilitary organisation Rapid Support Forces (RSF) ended on 19.07.24 largely without results. The talks lasted from 11.07. to 19.07.24 and were conducted indirectly by envoys of both parties. The main objective was to establish secure access to humanitarian aid in the country. According to the UN Special Envoy for Sudan, however, there were only announcements of unilateral commitments to improve the humanitarian situation and the protection of the civilian population by the representatives of the SAF and RSF.

According to the UNHCR, up to 143,000 people have been displaced from the city of Al Fasher and its surroundings in the past three months alone because of the ongoing fighting between the army and the RSF. With a current total of over eleven million internally displaced people, Sudan is the country which has the largest proportion of internally displaced persons worldwide, says the UNHCR. Of these, 7.8 million people have been displaced specifically by the ongoing fighting since April 2023. In addition, over two million people have fled abroad since April 2023, reports the UNHCR.

The three UN organisations FAO, UNICEF and WFP are warning of a drastic deterioration in living conditions for the people of Sudan. Currently, 755,000 people are in a disastrous situation (IPC-5) due to the continuing deterioration of the situation. This is the first time that IPC Phase 5 has been declared in Sudan since 2004. There is also a risk of famine in 14 regions, with 25.6 million people affected by acute hunger (IPC-3+), according to these UN organisations.³⁵

Syria

North-east: Increase in attacks by IS; general amnesty by AANES

In a statement dated 16.07.24, the U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) spoke of an increasing number of attacks by IS against targets in Iraq and Syria. Between January and June 2024, the group claimed a total of 153 attacks in both countries. Should the figures continue to develop in line with this trend, the number of attacks is expected to

double in 2024 compared to 2023. According to an anonymous source of the U.S. Department of Defence, the group staged a total of 121 attacks in Syria and Iraq in 2023. As the latest figures only relate to the attacks for which IS officially claimed responsibility, experts assume that the number of unreported cases is higher. A U.S. think tank specialised in the region cites data suggesting 551 attacks in Syria in the first half of 2024.

One day after the press release, the administration of the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES) issued a general amnesty that could benefit hundreds of Syrians who were imprisoned because of their positions in IS. The amnesty provides for life sentences to be commuted to 15 years. People who have been sentenced to life imprisonment and suffer from incurable diseases or have reached the age of 75 are to be released. IS members who fought against the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) or killed people in explosive attacks will not be covered by the amnesty. According to information Associated Press received from a legal expert, around 600 Syrians who have been detained on the basis of terrorism charges or links to IS could benefit as long as their "hands are not soaked in blood" or they have been detained in fighting.³⁶

Israeli air strikes

According to media reports, a well-known, pro-government businessman was killed in a suspected Israeli air strike on 15.07.24. A drone hit a vehicle he was travelling in near the Lebanese-Syrian border. He was reportedly on his way back to Syria from Lebanon.

Previously, on 09.07.24, air strikes had already targeted Tartus governorate, causing material damage. On 12.07.24, the Israeli military reported that it had attacked a military post in southern Syria after a missile had been fired from Syria into Israel. The Syrian army also announced that one Syrian soldier had been killed and three others wounded on 14.07.24 when Israeli air strikes hit military installations in southern Syria and residential buildings in Damascus. The Israeli military then stated that it was a response to the launch of two drones in the direction of Eilat the previous day.³⁷

North-west: Protests against HTS leaders; increased use of so-called suicide drones

On 12.07.24, protests were held in several towns in Idlib, demanding the overthrow of the leader of the ruling group Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) and the release of prisoners. Türkiye's efforts to normalise relations with the Syrian government were also criticised.

Such protests have been occurring regularly since February 2024, including on 05.07.24 in the village of Binnish. The media reported that the security forces of the HTS-dominated so-called Salvation Government opened fire on protesters and arrested several people after the police station in the village was attacked and a vehicle was set on fire. On 21.07.24, a total of 28 people were reportedly detained during raids by HTS forces in the villages of Binnish and al-Fu'ah.

The private organisation Syrian Civil Defence, also known as the White Helmets, published a report on 08.07.24 in which they point to an increase in the use of so-called kamikaze/suicide drones by the Syrian government along the front lines in the country's north-west. The areas surrounding Hama, Aleppo and Idlib are particularly affected. In the first half of 2024, the organisation, which is active in the north-west of the country, was called out to a total of 41 such attacks that are increasing every month. A total of 21 villages are said to have already been affected, with a total of three dead and 18 wounded. In addition to the personal injuries, the use of drones also results in numerous material damages and disruptions to the daily lives of the population at risk. The organisation and several media outlets have already reported the increased use of drones in the past (cf. BN of 26.02.24).³⁸

Southern Syria: Leader of an armed group killed

According to media reports, the commander of the armed group Liwa al-Jabal, al-Jarmani, was killed in his home in Suweida city on 17.07.24. Allegedly he died from a shot fired at close range through the window of his house while he was sleeping. Although it is not known who ordered the killing, many are blaming the Syrian government. Al-Jarmani was very active in the anti-government protests that have been going on for a year in the Suweida governorate. The group he commands is one of the best-known groups in the governorate and has been involved in battles against IS in the past. It also countered the increase of the Iranian presence in the governorate. In the past, it has also supported action against other local groups linked to the government's security services that were involved in drug smuggling and criminal activities (cf. BN of 01.08.22). The group's self-declared goal is to protect the Druze population.

According to a report by Syria Direct, Al-Jarmani was one of the toughest opponents of the Syrian government in Suweida and had already been subjected to death threats in the past. He was an important supporter of and participant in the anti-government protests, which have now been going on in Suweida for almost a year (cf. BN of 10.06.24).³⁹

Türkiye

Court of Cassation confirms prison sentences for alleged leaders of the 2016 coup attempt

According to media reports of 17.07.24 and 18.07.24, on 17.05.24 the Court of Cassation completed the appeal review for the generals and admirals convicted in connection with the coup attempt of 15.07.16. The verdicts of the 17th High Criminal Court in Ankara on 20.06.19 in the amount of 138 aggravated life prison sentences for 17 defendants, including the former commander of the Air Force, Akın Öztürk, who were tried as the main perpetrators and leaders of the coup attempt, were confirmed in a 757-page verdict. The Court of Cassation also decided to approve the sentences of the defendants for 416 years imprisonment each for 26 counts of attempted premeditated murder.

According to Justice Minister Yılmaz Tunç, a total of 705,172 people have been investigated for their suspected links to the Gülen movement in the course of the attempted coup since 2016. 125,456 people have been convicted and 13,251 of them are still in prison.⁴⁰

Human rights situation in Kurdish-majority provinces

The Diyarbakir branch of the Turkish human rights organisation İnsan Hakları Derneği (İHD) published a report on human rights violations in eastern and south-eastern Türkiye on 17.07.24. The report covers the period from the beginning of January to the end of June 2024. According to the report, 3,895 rights violations occurred during this period. These include violations of the right to life, freedom of expression, freedom of assembly, prisoners' rights and the political rights of the Kurdish minority living in the affected regions. According to the report, at least 98 people, including minors, were mistreated by law enforcement officers. İHD stated that the authorities' restrictions on freedom of expression had led to the detention of 1,164 people, including 88 minors. Of those detained, 56 people were sentenced, including media professionals. The authorities also banned 56 public events and forcibly dispersed 34 gatherings.

According to İHD, three inmates died of illness in the prisons. The authorities had denied 116 inmates access to medical care. In addition, the political rights of the Kurdish minority have been restricted as the mayor of Hakkari, who was elected in the last local elections on 31.03.24 (cf. BN of 08.04.24), has been removed from office and four other mayors have been investigated by the authorities. Furthermore, travel bans were imposed on nine Kurdish mayors, İHD said.⁴¹

Ukraine

Civilian casualties, missing persons and suspected war crimes

According to the regional prosecutor's office, five people were killed by Russian attacks in the Donetsk region on 18.07.24. According to the responsible regional governor, one person was killed by Russian shelling in the Kherson region on 19.07.24. In addition, the regional administration for the Russian-occupied areas of the Kherson region reported one fatality on 17.07.24 following Ukrainian shelling. According to local authorities, four people were killed in a Russian missile attack in Mykolaiv on 19.07.24. The regional law enforcement authorities reported that at least three civilians were also killed by Russian shelling in the Kharkiv region on 20.07.24. On the same day, according to police reports, one person was killed by Russian artillery fire in Nikopol (Dnipropetrovsk region). On 21.07.24, three people died in the Donetsk region and one in the Sumy region as a result of Russian shelling, the authorities stated. At the same time, Russian-controlled authorities in the Kherson region reported one person killed by Ukrainian shelling. In addition, the governor of the Lviv region announced that the Ukrainian politician and former member of parliament for the nationalist Svoboda party, Iryna Farion, was murdered in Lviv on 19.07.24. A manhunt is underway for the murderer.

According to the Ministry of the Interior, around 42,000 people are currently missing in Ukraine, most of them soldiers, but also civilians.

In its new report based on interviews with victims and eyewitnesses, the World Organisation Against Torture accuses Russian authorities and armed forces of allegedly committing crimes against humanity in the occupied territories of Ukraine between 24.02. and 31.10.22. According to the report, acts against civilians such as systematic and widespread arrests, torture, enforced disappearances, sexual violence and other crimes were not isolated incidents, but were based on a large-scale and coordinated chain of command and a deliberate policy orchestrated at the highest level of the Russian state.⁴²

Energy infrastructure

On 16.07.24, the Ukrainian energy supplier Ukrenerho announced that emergency shutdowns will continue in several regions due to ongoing Russian air strikes on power plants and the current heatwave, which pushed electricity consumption to record levels.

Against the backdrop of the tense energy supply situation, the Ukrainian parliament has voted in favour of abolishing taxes and customs duties on the import of energy equipment such as generators, solar panels and electricity storage systems.⁴³

War, recruitment, prisoner exchange and military tax

The Russian Ministry of Defence reported the capture of towns in the Donetsk, Luhansk and Kharkiv regions, including the almost complete capture of the small town of Krasnohorivka (Donetsk region). The US research organisation Institute for the Study of War (ISW) confirmed the advance of Russian troops into the centre of Krasnohorivka after analysing geo-localised images. In addition, according to the Ukrainian military, Russian troop reinforcements have been detected in the Kharkiv region.

The Ukrainian investigation authority DBR reported that four Ukrainian military personnel attempted to illegally cross the border to the Republic of Moldova on 14.07.24, a physical confrontation resulted in which one deserter lost his life when he was shot by a Ukrainian border guard.

According to the authorities, a grenade was fired on a Ukrainian army recruitment centre in the small western Ukrainian town of Busk (Lviv region) on 15.07.24. A search is underway for a suspect. The government's increased recruitment efforts caused resentment in parts of the population.

Ukraine and the Russian Federation announced the exchange of 95 prisoners of war each on 17.07.24. The 54th exchange in total since 24.02.24 was arranged by the UAE.

According to media reports from 19.07.24, the Ukrainian government approved a draft law to amend the state budget and tax law. According to the bill, military tax for the Ukrainian population will be raised to finance the armed forces. According to government plans, the tax could increase from 1.5 % to 5 % of income. Around 500 billion hryvnia or EUR 12.4 billion shall be raised to finance the defence campaign by other, unspecified tax increases as well as by borrowing and reallocations of expenditures.⁴⁴

Representative survey on peace negotiations

Despite Russia's refusal, President Zelensky has renewed his call for Moscow to take part in a second peace summit this year. According to a representative survey conducted by the renowned Razumkov Centre on behalf of the internet portal Dzerkalo Tyschnja, only around a third of the Ukrainian population are strictly against negotiations with the Kremlin. Over 40 % are in favour of peace talks. Around a fifth of respondents are undecided. Particularly residents of central Ukraine (49 %) and southern Ukraine (60 %) are in favour of the start of official negotiations. In eastern Ukraine, a third are either in favour of or against the start of negotiations or are undecided. At the same time, over 80 % of respondents reject President Putin's call for further territorial cessions to Moscow; around 76 % reject the lifting of sanctions against the Russian Federation and around 60 % are against a neutral status for Ukraine. Kyiv's mayor Vitaly Klitschko advised President Zelensky not to decide on possible territorial cessions to Moscow alone, but recommended a referendum in such a case.⁴⁵

Venezuela

Further arrests in connection with the election campaign of the opposition's unity candidate

According to the NGO Foro Penal on 16.07.24, a total of 114 people have been arrested for political reasons in 2024 to date. 102 of these arrests were connected with the election campaign of the opposition's unity candidate González Urrutia and election rallies organised by Maria Corina Machado. The number of people arrested since the official start of the election campaign on 04.07.24 amounts to over 75. According to the NGO Laboratorio de Paz, a large proportion of the arrests were made in the state of Táchira. Most recently, according to Vente Venezuela, the head of security in Machado, Milciades Ávila, was arrested on 17.07.24; however, he was released the following day subject to conditions.⁴⁶

Yemen

Israeli attacks in Hodeida

The Israeli military reported that it had attacked several targets in the western Yemeni city of Hodeida, which is under Houthi control on 20.07.24. According to a Houthi-affiliated television station, oil facilities and a power plant were hit. The Houthi Ministry of Health reported three dead and 87 injured.

Israel cites the Houthis' attacks on Israeli territories, which have been ongoing for months, as the reason. In recent months, the Houthis have regularly attacked targets in Israel using drones and rockets, most recently on 19.07.24 in Tel Aviv, killing one person and injuring ten. A Houthi rocket travelling towards Eilat after the Israeli attack was intercepted by the Israeli military.⁴⁷

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