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Briefing Notes

Group 62 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

2 January 2023

Afghanistan

Women banned from attending university and working

The announcement by the Taliban on 20.12.22 that women would no longer be allowed to attend universities until further notice was followed by an order issued on 24.12.22 that women would no longer be allowed to work for non-governmental organisations, justifying the move by claiming that some women working for NGOs were not observing the Islamic dress code. This prompted several NGOs to suspend their work. The United Nations has announced that it intends to continue implementing humanitarian aid missions despite the restrictions.

Bombing in the military area of Kabul airport

According to media reports, a suicide bombing took place at the entrance to the military area of Kabul airport on 01.01.23, in which, according to the Taliban, 10 civilians were killed and eight were wounded. According to eyewitness reports, several Taliban insurgents were also killed. No one has claimed responsibility for the attack.

Public floggings

On 28.12.22, a woman and five men were publicly flogged for allegedly engaging in extramarital affairs in the Qarghayi district of eastern Afghanistan's Laghman province, according to a report issued by journalists of Hasht-e Subh, an Afghan newspaper who are living in exile. On 31.12.22, according to Hasht-e Subh, four men and one woman were lashed in Paktia province following a court order convicting them of having sex before marriage and of stealing. On 27.02.22, four men and two women facing similar charges were also flogged in Laghman province. On 26.12.22, ten men were flogged in Herat province for allegedly drinking alcohol, selling or consuming drugs, and for harassing women. As the Taliban's prospects of gaining international recognition fade, they have increasingly reverted to the repressive policies implemented during their first term (1996-2001) (cf. BN of 19.12.22).

"No Depart" order

Journalists of the Afghan Hasht-e Subh newspaper living in exile report that they have gained knowledge of a list containing the names of 11,000 individuals whom the Taliban have banned from leaving the country. They are reportedly individuals who are members of the National Resistance Front (NRF), former national security employees, members of the Islamic State of Khorasan Province (ISKP), judges, security guards and a number of political, cultural and social figures who are considered to be opponents of the Taliban.

Algeria

Pressure increases on the media

According to various reports, pressure is mounting on the free media as well as journalists. The journalist and Director of the news agencies Radio M and Maghreb Emergent, Ihsane El Kadi, was arrested on 24.12.22 shortly

before a search was carried out on the premises of Radio M and Maghreb Emergent during which computers and documents were seized.

Bangladesh

Deterioration in the freedom of expression and assembly

In its report on the Human Rights Situation in Bangladesh in 2022, the Human Rights Support Society (HRSS) noted the obstruction of peaceful opposition party gatherings, forced disappearances of opposition leaders, mass arrests, and intimidation through domestic raids. In terms of actual figures, 123 members of the opposition were shot dead, 3,038 were imprisoned for political reasons, and 2,257 were injured as a result of the use of force by state authorities. Other sources also noted a deterioration in the freedom of expression and assembly in the country in 2022, claiming that human rights organisations were being subjected to various forms of repression and were being prevented from carrying out their work.

Benin

Journalist released following two days in police custody

The Court of Repression of Crimes and Terrorism (Cour de répression des infractions économiques et du terrorisme, CRIET) ordered the release of journalist Virgile Ahouanssé from police custody on 22.12.22. According to media reports, Ahouanssé had been held in police custody for 48 hours on charges of disseminating false news that disturbed the public peace. The background to this was provided by a broadcast on his web radio on 14.12.22, in which the police were accused of having committed some 20 extrajudicial executions in the capital Porto-Novo based on eyewitness reports. Ahouanssé will now have to report to the police every Friday until his criminal trial, scheduled for 13.02.23, is held.

Cameroon

Ruling against journalist held for six years in pre-trial detention

The former Director General of the state-owned broadcaster Cameroon Radio and Television (CRTV), Amadou Vamouké, was sentenced to 12 years in prison and a fine of FCFA 47 million (approx. EUR 71,650, as of 02.01.23) on 21.12.22 after being held in pre-trial detention for approximately six and a half years (cf. BN of 24.01.22). He was sentenced for allegedly misappropriating the equivalent EUR 24,300 in public funds for the benefit of CRTV and granting unauthorised bonuses to employees. The trial against Vamouké before a special court for serious corruption cases has been adjourned 137 times. His lawyer is said to have filed an appeal in cassation. The NGO "Committee to Protect Journalists" (CPJ) criticised the verdict as unfair. CPJ demanded Vamouké's immediate release on bail considering his age and failing health, as well as the overcrowded conditions at Kondengui Central Prison. According to CPJ's annual prison census of jailed journalists, Vamouké is one of five imprisoned journalists in Cameroon, ranking the country third worst jailer of journalists in Africa. Another NGO, Reporters Without Borders (RSF), which counts Vamouké as the only jailed journalist, also sharply criticised the verdict and called for the charges to be dropped.

Amnesty International (ai) demands activist's release

In a press release dated 22.12.22, ai demanded that peace activist Abdul Karim Ali either be released immediately or that the legal basis for his detention be provided. He had been arrested by gendarmes in Bamenda (Northwest Region) on 11.08.22 without a warrant; since then, no information has been provided on the charges against him. According to ai, the conditions of detention prior to his transfer to Yaoundé, which took place after 84 days, were inhumane. Abdul Karim Ali was arrested after criticising acts of torture committed and broadcast online by the leader of a pro-government militia in the south-west region of the country, also an Anglophone region. On 23.08.22 and 19.11.22, respectively, two of his drivers had also been arrested. In addition, Abdul Karim Ali's wife had received threats through anonymous calls, which had led her to flee their home.

Colombia

Ceasefire agreed with five armed groups, end of first round of negotiations with ELN guerrillas

On 31.12.22, President Gustavo Petro announced a bilateral ceasefire between state security forces and the five main, non-state armed groups. (Ejército de Liberación Nacional (ELN) (National Liberation Army), Segunda Marquetalia (the Second Marquetalia), Estado Mayor Central (Central Joint Staff), Autodefensas Gaitanistas de Colombia (AGC, also known as Clan del Golfo) and the Autodefensas de la Sierra Nevada (Self-Defence Forces of the Sierra), adding that he would engage in peace talks with them. National and international verification mechanisms are to monitor compliance with the ceasefire, which is scheduled to be in place for six months until the end of June 2023; the individual conditions are to be set out in separate agreements.

Earlier, the first round of talks between government representatives and the ELN leadership had ended in Caracas. Humanitarian measures and relief for two regions near the Pacific coast, Bajo Calima in the department of Valle del Cauca and Medio San Juan in Chocó, were agreed upon. Indigenous Embera displaced from the Alto Andágueda area in Chocó are also to be allowed to return there. In addition, the ELN had already implemented a unilateral ceasefire over the Christmas and New Year period and had released a kidnapped naval officer on 27.12.22.

Côte d'Ivoire

Verdict on the terrorist attack in Grand Bassam in 2016

Eleven defendants, all Mali nationals, were sentenced to life in prison at trial after being convicted of carrying out an extremist attack on the tourist coastal resort of Grand Bassam for which al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQMI) claimed responsibility. Several of the accused were found innocent. A total of 18 persons were charged. Only four of the accused charged with aiding and abetting the terrorist attack were present at the trial, though they claimed their innocence. The other defendants were not caught, including Kounta Dallah and Ould Baba, who are believed to be the masterminds of the attack. Nineteen persons, including 10 foreigners, were killed in the attack carried out on hotels and restaurants on 13.03.16 (cf. BN of 14.03.16), 33 people were wounded. Members of the security forces also killed three of the assailants.

DR Congo

Kinshasa: two human rights activists arrested

According to media reports, citing the president of the NGO "Assistance aux personnes vulnérables et enfants du Congo" (APVEC) (Assistance for vulnerable people and children in the Congo), Maïck Lukadi, police officers arrested two human rights defenders working for APVEC in the commune of Barumbu/Kinshasa on 14.12.22 because of the work they are carrying out. Lukadi repeatedly criticised the police crackdown on APVEC members and other human rights defenders in Barumbu. In May 2021, three APVEC activists were reportedly tortured and mistreated by police officers for attempting to mobilise the local population to participate in a demonstration. The three activists, who were being held at unknown locations, were released only when pressure was exerted by several human rights NGOs.

North Kivu: increase in internal displacement; UN report: Rwanda is militarily active and a supporter of M23.

The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) has counted at least 521,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) and more than 7,000 Congolese refugees in Uganda since March 2022 alone, and only as a result of fighting between the rebel group Mouvement 23-Mars (M23) and the Congolese Armed Forces (FARDC) in the Rutshuru and Nyiragongo territories of North Kivu province. The IDPs, the majority of whom are in Nyiragongo, have been living in overcrowded makeshift camps, churches, schools, and with host families in sometimes precarious, existential, and unsanitary conditions that have already resulted in fatalities (cf. BN of 28.11.22). The volatile security situation and the recent outbreak of a cholera epidemic, which has already claimed the lives of several IDPs, are complicating humanitarian relief efforts (cf. BN of 12.12.22). The press continues to report fighting in M23's areas of control, predominantly between M23 and other armed non-state groups, some of whom have joined forces. M23, which according to a statement issued on 23.12.22 have retreated most recently at

least from Kibumba, a town 20 km north of the metropolis of Goma and formerly under its control, is being supported in various ways by Rwanda, according to a report issued by an independent UN group of experts on 28.12.22. The UN experts are being quoted in media reports as saying that for the period between November 2021 to October 2022, there is "substantial evidence of direct intervention by the Rwandan army on Congolese territory, either to strengthen the M23 or to conduct military operations against the Rwandan rebel group Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR)," which in turn, like other non-state armed groups, are being supported by the FARDC.

Egypt

Four persons killed in ISIS attack

Three police officers were reportedly killed and at least 12 others, the majority of whom were recruits, were wounded in an armed attack carried out at a police checkpoint in the north-western city of Ismailia on 30.12.22. The fourth person killed is believed to have been one of the insurgents, according to reports by state media.

El Salvador

Government review, state of emergency and violence in 2022, objections by NGOs: HRW December 2022 report

The state of emergency which was imposed in March 2022 remained in effect throughout the turn of the year. According to government sources, more than 60,000 persons with alleged gang ties had already been arrested, and surveys conducted by local organisations, such as the Instituto Universitario de Opinión Pública de la Universidad Centroamericana (University Institute of Public Opinion of the Central American University) in October 2022, showed that most of civil society supported the state of emergency. While the government led by President Nayib Bukele claims this measure has been a success, given that the number of homicides had fallen to an anticipated murder rate of 8 per 100,000 persons by the end of 2022 (2015: 108/ 100,000 according to World Bank data), including two weeks in which there were no homicides at all in December 2022, many national and international NGOs are critical of the state of emergency and its actions and consequences. In a joint report issued with Cristosal on 07.12.22, HRW once again emphasised the numerous human rights violations by police officers and security forces that have continued for months. The report also criticises the lack of access to comprehensive, state homicide and crime statistics that would facilitate a comprehensive assessment of the situation. The report that is based on approximately 1,000 interviews conducted throughout the country between March and November 2022, speaks of "arbitrary arrests, enforced disappearances, torture and other forms of ill-treatment of detainees," incommunicado detentions, and numerous deaths of detainees that are indicative of government responsibility. The report says the general conditions of detention have deteriorated as a result of the further significant increase in prison overcrowding owing to the high number of arrests; procedural guarantees are not being observed, and the judiciary is largely loyal to the government.

Ethiopia

Further talks between the government and the TPLF

On 26.12.22, a high-level government delegation arrived in Mekelle for the first time in two years to engage in talks with TPLF (Tigray People's Liberation Front) representatives about humanitarian aid, trade and basic services. The talks included creating full access to all parts of Tigray and the withdrawal of Eritrean troops from the area. Representatives of the TPLF accused Eritrean and Amharic troops of remaining in Tigray and thus contributing to an inadequate supply situation, especially in western Tigray.

The Ethiopian Red Cross says it faces logistical difficulties that are making it difficult to distribute aid. Despite this, more and more relief supplies are actually reaching large parts of Tigray. In addition to the import of food and medicine, it has been possible to resume banking services in some areas. In addition, Ethiopian Airlines has resumed flights to the capital Mekelle, and further routes are to follow. The Red Cross says the situation regarding the basic supply of electricity and humanitarian aid is also stabilising, especially in the north of the region.

Ethiopia / Eritrea

Eyewitnesses say Eritrean troops have withdrawn from Tigray

Two months after the ceasefire brokered by the African Union (AU) in Ethiopia's conflict-ridden Tigray region, the Eritrean Defence Forces (EDF) are reported to have withdrawn from the towns of Shire and Axum towards the Eritrean border. The withdrawal of the EDF, which had been fighting against the Tigray Defence Forces (TDF) on the side of the Ethiopian central government, was an essential part of the agreement concluded between the Ethiopian government and the Tigray regional government in a bid to end two years of fighting. Notwithstanding this, reports of ongoing artillery shelling causing civilian deaths and involving looting by Eritrean units continue unabated (cf. BN of 21.11.22). Eritrea's Minister of Information, Yemane Gebremeskel, announced on 30.12.22 that he could neither confirm nor deny reports that the troops had withdrawn.

The Gambia

Alleged plans for coup foiled, UDP campaign manager detained, police violence

According to the government, plans for a coup d'état orchestrated by some military personnel of various troop units in complicity with civilians at home and abroad against the government of President Adama Barrow were foiled on 20.12.22, claiming the situation is under control. There are no independent agency or press reports available to confirm the statements issued by the government. The situation in the capital, Banjul, has been described as calm in by and large unanimous reports to date. However, eyewitnesses have reported the presence of military personnel around the presidential palace in Banjul on the evening of 20.12.22. According to government sources, seven military personnel, mostly non-commissioned officers of low rank, including the alleged mastermind and leader of the planned coup attempt, Sanna Fadera, have been arrested so far. They say no charges have been officially announced and that two other wanted suspects are on the run. The government officially established a controversial commission of inquiry on 27.12.22 to carry out a full investigation of the alleged coup plot. It is not known if there is any connection with exiled former President Yahya Jammeh, as was said to be the case with the coup plot by several soldiers in 2017. It was not until 17.12.22 that Yahya Jammeh addressed his supporters, announcing that he would be returning to the country as the head of state, according to media reports.

Police arrested Momodou Sabally, former Minister of Presidential Affairs under Jammeh as well as current campaign manager for the main opposition United Democratic Party (UDP), on 21.12.22. A police statement cited as grounds for the arrest that Sabally had stated in a brief TikTok video that President Adama Barrow would be overthrown before the upcoming local elections in 2023. Several UDP members who participated in the video were reportedly interrogated. According to media reports, Sabally had been detained without charge up to and including 30.12.22 and reportedly, at times, did not have access to his lawyer. His release came as a surprise and apparently at the intervention of the quasi-governmental Supreme Islamic Council, as on 23.12.22 a court had granted a request by the Prosecutor General's Office to extend Sabally's detention beyond the 72-hour period allowed by law without granting him a legal hearing up to and including 05.01.23. Sabally's prolonged arrest and detention without formal proceedings has reaped strong criticism from civil society and opposition circles who say it was politically motivated and an attack on the freedom of expression. The UDP said that the briefly edited video did not accurately reflect Sabally's position and that Sabally neither stated nor implied that an unconstitutional change of government was being sought. Police forces cracked down on a peaceful protest march involving around 30 people calling for Sabally's release by using tear gas and violence on 26.12.22. According to media reports, one person was arrested, and one activist was injured by police officers.

Kenya

Two killed in gunfight between Kenyan troops and al-Shabaab in Lamu district

According to local press reports, two people were killed in a firefight between Kenyan security forces and suspected al-Shabaab militants on the Kenyan coast on 29.12.22. Four people were rescued in the shootout at a roadblock the insurgents had just erected on Lamu county's main road. The four had been apprehended from their vehicles by the fighters on the road near Witu town. According to police, al-Shabaab fighters had disguised themselves as police

officers and had stopped vehicles traveling on the road through Witu Forest, which has also been used as a base by the militants for years. Two people were killed nearby on 26.12.22 in another suspected al-Shabab attack in Taa village in Witu division.

Liberia

Overcrowding at Liberia's largest prison

Liberia's largest prison, Monrovia Central Prison, is refusing to accept new inmates due to overcrowding and fears of disease outbreaks. This was reported in the media on 15.12.22, citing information provided by the Ministry of Justice and prison officials. Those being denied admission at the facility were inmates accused of committing minor offences. They are to instead be returned to communities and kept under the watch of community leaders.

State-of-the-art hospital inaugurated

According to media reports, Liberia's President George Weah inaugurated the newly built Emirates Hospital in the village of Bopolu on 28.12.22. The inauguration is part of the government's flagship programme, the Pro Poor Agenda for Prosperity and Development (PAPD), which aims to advance the expansion of the health sector, among other things. The aim is to make it easier for the population to access modern healthcare facilities, especially in rural areas. The United Arab Emirates provided significant funding for the new hospital. According to media reports, it has a capacity of 100 beds and several specialist departments.

Libya

Court sentences 17 former ISIS member to death

According to an announcement made by the top prosecutor's office in Tripoli on 19.12.22, seventeen alleged former ISIS members were sentenced to death, accused of killing 53 people in the western Libyan city of Sabratha and destroying public property. Prison sentences were handed down to another 16 alleged ISIS members, two of whom received life sentences. Nothing is known about the date when the sentences will be executed or the nationality of the defendants.

With the fall of Muammar al-Gaddafi in 2011, ISIS expanded its sphere of influence in Libya, temporarily seizing control of cities such as Derna, Sirte, and Sabratha.

Mali

Signatory groups suspend Algiers Peace Agreement

Armed groups from the north of the country, including the Coordination des mouvements de l'Azawad (CMA) (Coordination of Azawad Movements) coalition, decided on 22.12.22 to suspend the Algiers Peace Agreement, which had been concluded on 15.05.15. According to media reports, the groups accuse the transitional government authorities of lacking the political will to implement their part of the agreement. They demand that an emergency meeting with the government be held on neutral ground.

Mali / Côte d'Ivoire

Ivorian troops sentenced to most severe punishments

The verdict was pronounced on 30.12.22 in the trial of the 49 male and female Ivorian soldiers who had been arrested on their arrival at Bamako airport on 10.07.22 and who Mali accuses of being foreign mercenaries (cf. BN of 29.08.22). According to the Ivorian government, the contingent was supposed to have served as support forces for the UN blue helmet mission MINUSMA in Mali. According to further media reports, the 46 soldiers who remain in custody were each sentenced to 20 years in prison. The three female soldiers, who were released on 03.09.22 (cf. BN of 05.09.22) and returned to Côte d'Ivoire, were each sentenced to death in absentia. Charges are said to have

included, in particular, attacks and conspiracy against the government, seeking to undermine state security, carrying weapons of war with the aim of disturbing public order.

In his year-end address, Ivorian President Alassane Ouattara expressed optimism that the 46 soldiers would soon return to their country. He made no mention of the verdict. On 22.12.22, under Togolese mediation, it had been possible to conclude a non-public memorandum between Mali and Côte d'Ivoire. It is reported that, among other things, agreement had been reached, inter alia, to release the soldiers. It leaves the possibility open of a presidential pardon by Mali's junta leader Assimi Goita. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) allowed the ultimatum to Mali to release the Ivorian soldiers by 01.01.23 pass.

Niger

Success in the fight against armed gangs

At least 86 members of armed gangs surrendered their weapons and renounced violence during a ceremony held in the southwestern region of Tahoua, according to media reports issued on 06.12.22. They have called on the government to create more job opportunities. The area has been a hotspot of gangs committing acts of violence in Niger and Nigeria, including kidnappings for ransom.

Army personnel kills five Islamists

Five Islamists were killed, and two army personnel were slightly wounded near the Nigerian border during clashes that erupted between Nigerien troops and Boko Haram militants in the south-east of the country on 22.12.22, according to official sources. The clashes reportedly took place near the towns of Bagué and Tchoungoua in the Diffa region not far from Lake Chad. Four assault rifles belonging to the Islamists were recovered by military personnel.

Nigeria

Arrests at gay wedding

According to unanimous media reports, the Islamic Hisbah police arrested 19 young Muslim men and women in the northern state of Kano on 18.12.22 for allegedly celebrating the marriage of a homosexual couple. According to a news report, those arrested will not be punished but will be required to undergo some form of counselling. The 15 women and four men deny the charges. Hisbah police units are decentralised, non-governmental groups of Muslims who are committed to ensuring religious rules are monitored and observed.

Catholic priest kidnapped

A Catholic priest was kidnapped in the southern Nigerian state of Abia on 17.12.22. Media reports indicate that the incident occurred just days after another Catholic clergyman kidnapped on 08.11.22 in the northern Nigerian state of Kaduna was released. The acts are by no means isolated incidents. The extortion of ransom money is a frequently recurring motive. In 2022, kidnappings of priests were reported from several regions of the country (cf. BN of 18.07.22 and 29.08.22).

Kaduna State: villagers killed in spate of attacks

Armed unidentified persons killed over 20 residents of villages in Kaura Local Government Area (LGA) in northern Kaduna State on 18.12.22. The number of casualties cited in media reports varies and is reported to be as high as at least 38. Criminal gangs have been attacking villages in the region for years in order to loot and kidnap people for ransom (cf. BN of 01.08.22 and 15.08.22).

Zamfara State: dozens killed in airstrikes

Nigerian forces killed at least 64 people in airstrikes carried out in Maru Local Government Area (LGA) in north-western Zamfara State on 18.12.22. The airstrikes targeted what were described as terrorist criminal groups operating in the area. Media reports indicate that civilians were among those killed in the military operation. Zamfara is one of the states in the northwest of the country that has long been most affected by banditry (cf. BN of 28.11.22).

Pakistan

Security situation: TTP gains ground

Violent attacks have been on the rise since the Pakistani Taliban (Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan, TTP) unilaterally called off the ceasefire with the government in late November 2022 (cf. BN of 06.12.22). On 26.12.22, approximately nine attacks were carried out in Balochistan province, killing at least six members of the security forces. The TTP has claimed responsibility for two of these attacks. On 23.12.22, the TTP claimed responsibility for a suicide bombing outside a police headquarters in the capital, Islamabad, in which at least one police officer was killed. In addition, at least four other members of the security forces and two civilians were wounded. On 20.12.22, the Pakistani military ended a hostage situation at a detention centre for terror suspects in the Bannu district of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. According to media reports, special forces killed more than 33 people who had held security personnel hostage for more than 40 hours during the rescue operation. The perpetrators are said to have included TTP militants. Official reports say two soldiers and several detainees and security personnel were also wounded. According to an assessment by the Pakistan Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS), the TTP and affiliated groups carried out more than 150 attacks between January and November 2022, killing more than 150 people, most of them security forces.

Palestinian Autonomous Territories / Israel

West Bank: 2022 records the highest death toll since 2005

On 22.12.22, Israeli forces shot and killed a Palestinian man during clashes that erupted between the military and gunmen near the city of Nablus. The clashes occurred as the military escorted Jewish worshippers to a pilgrimage site. Five other persons were wounded. The militant group Hamas announced shortly afterwards that the man killed had been one of its fighters.

More than 150 Palestinian individuals were killed by the Israeli army in the West Bank in 2022. This is the highest death toll since the UN began systematically recording casualties in 2005. According to Israeli authorities, a large number of those killed were members of militias and armed groups. Twenty-nine Israelis were killed by Palestinian gunmen during the same period, including both military personnel and civilians.

In the early hours of 02.01.23, two Palestinians were shot dead during clashes with Israeli forces in Kafr Dan locality, near Jenin city in the north of the West Bank. According to a statement issued by the military, the servicemen were in the locality to carry out the demolition of the family homes of two residents who had killed an Israeli soldier in September 2022. The military personnel encountered armed individuals at the site. The Al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades announced that one of the individuals killed had been one of its members.

Israel/West Bank: charges brought against two soldiers

According to media reports issued on 29.12.22, Israeli forces brought charges against two of three soldiers who attacked a Palestinian residence with an explosive device in November 2022. It is believed to be an act of retaliation directed against Palestinian militia members' kidnapping of the body of an Israeli teenager from a Palestinian hospital. The prosecution of the third soldier involved was to follow, official sources say. International observers welcomed the move. Prosecutions within the Israeli military rarely take place, they said. Just one week earlier, an Israeli human rights organisation published a report claiming that Israeli military officers accused of harming Palestinians from the West Bank or Gaza Strip in 1,260 cases over the past five years had been prosecuted in less than 1% of cases. Human rights organisations have for years criticized the perceived impunity with which Israeli forces can act.

Israel: three police officers injured in ramming attack

On 23.12.22, police officers shot and killed an Israeli Arab as he rammed his vehicle at security forces, injuring three police officers.

Republic of the Congo

Private TV station shut down for broadcasting political opposition content

Congo's media regulator suspended the private broadcaster Vox TV on 21.12.22 for allegedly continuously broadcasting statements by an opposition politician, according to Radio France Internationale (RFI). The opposition figure referred to two former presidential candidates as political prisoners who were members of the opposition, each of whom had been sentenced to 20 years in prison in 2018 for endangering internal state security (cf. BN of 11.10.21). The media regulator accused Vox TV of disrupting public order with its broadcast.

Russian Federation

Putin's decree on increasing the military by 137,000 troops enters into force

More than ten months since the war of aggression against Ukraine began, the number of military personnel in Russia is set to increase by 137,000 contract soldiers at the beginning of the new year. A corresponding decree signed by President Vladimir Putin to increase combat soldiers and conscripts to about 1.15 million on 25.08.22 officially came into effect on 01.01.23. According to this decree, the size of the Russian armed forces in future is to comprise a total of more than two million people in the years to come. The decree signed by Putin did not explain how the military will beef up its ranks and whether this would be through more conscriptions, more volunteer soldiers or a combination of both. The remaining military personnel comprise civilian personnel such as administrative employees.

President Putin tightens penalties for sabotage and activities endangering the state

In Russia, the punishment for acts of sabotage and disruptive activities is to be increased to include life imprisonment. Putin signed the corresponding amendments on 29.12.22 as indicated in the publication on the official law portal. Accordingly, not only acts of sabotage themselves can be punished, but also the financing, soliciting and preparation of coups and other subversive acts. The tightening of the law comes against the backdrop of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine. Since the start of the war at the end of February 2022, several attacks have been carried out against district military replacement offices and infrastructure in Russia. The number of attacks has increased particularly since Putin announced the mobilisation in September 2022. In total, attacks against more than 75 public buildings, including more than 50 military commissariats, had been registered by November 2022 alone.

Senegal

Amnesty International report: ongoing human rights and children's rights violations in Koranic schools

The NGO Amnesty International (ai) recently reported on human rights and children's rights violations against Koranic students in Senegal (known as "talibés"). Talibés are subjected to physical and psychological violence, abuse and mistreatment, including deprivation of liberty, forms of exploitation, especially economic exploitation, including forced begging, as well as physical neglect and face generally harsh living conditions in the Koranic schools. ai called for, among other things, a stronger legal framework and greater government efforts, including effective child protection programmes, and effective enforcement of existing laws, for the benefit of talibés. Violent acts against talibés often occur in a climate of impunity, particularly due to a lack of control over Koranic schools and insufficient resources for effective child protection, as well as the social status of teachers. The government has repeatedly affirmed its intention to end forced begging by talibés and to improve living conditions in Koranic schools, but the efforts made so far have been insufficient. Societal pressure is preventing the effective enforcement of both national laws and signed international conventions for the protection of children, and a draft children's law is being blocked by conservative forces. Some Koranic teachers are opposed to a draft law on the status of Koranic schools, endorsed by the Council of Ministers in 2018 and not yet introduced in the National Assembly, which aims to integrate them into the national education system, describing it as an "anti-Islamic attack", according to ai.

Journalist detained several times is hospitalised for hunger strike

According to consistent media reports, the anti-government journalist Pape Ale Niang, who had been charged with endangering state security and other crimes and had been provisionally released on 14.12.22, was again arrested on 19.12.22 and subsequently taken into custody (cf. BN. of 19.12.22). Niang had reportedly violated judicial supervision measures by speaking out on the content of the criminal proceedings during media appearances with a government critic, among others, and by accusing the Director General of Police of having a biased attitude. Niang once again protested against the acts with which he was charged by going on hunger strike, for which he was taken to a hospital on 24.12.22, according to one of his lawyers.

Somalia

Somaliland: well-known journalist released from prison

The journalist Abdimaalik Muse Coldoon was released from prison in Hargeysa, Somaliland, on 22.12.22. He was imprisoned in August 2021 and acquitted by the Woqooyi Galbeed Regional Court in February 2022. However, the prosecutor appealed the decision. His arrest came after he accused the Hargeisa Cultural Centre of advocating the spread of Christianity and same-sex marriage. Persons close to the investigation said he was being investigated for links to al-Shabaab.

Somaliland: protests in Las Anod

At least 20 people have reportedly been killed and dozens injured in several days of clashes that erupted between security forces and protesters in Las Anod (bordering Puntland) since 27.12.22. The protesters are accusing the Somaliland government of failing to provide security for civilians and are demanding an administrative takeover by neighbouring Puntland. The protests were triggered by the assassination of a local politician by unknown individuals on 26.12.22.

Freedom on the press

In its latest media directive, the Somali government reportedly stipulated that local news outlets would have to submit content for approval before broadcasting. Several media companies, including Risala Media Corporation, have reportedly been verbally instructed to do so. In October 2022, a crackdown on media outlets publishing al-Shabaab-related propaganda coverage was announced as part of the military offensive against al-Shabaab (cf. BN of 10.10.22). Media professionals view the new measures as further restrictions on their independence.

On 22.12.22, Mustaf Ali Adow, the editor-in-chief, and three other journalists at Radio Hiiraanweyn in Hirshabelle State were arrested and the station was taken off the air after they reported that al-Shabaab was attacking rural areas after local militias fighting them reportedly withdrew due to pay-related issues.

On 25.12.22 and 28.12.22, a total of five journalists were arrested in Adado (Galmudug) and in Mogadishu, including employees of Risala Media Corporation, and were released a few hours later. The reason for the arrests was allegedly critical reporting, including an interview with clan elders who had spoken out in favour of al-Shabaab.

US missile attack

On 23.12.22, at least six al-Shabaab fighters were killed in a U.S. military airstrike in Adale (Middle Shabelle region), according to a statement issued by U.S. Africa Command (U.S. AFRICOM). The attack was described as an act of "self-defence" and was reportedly carried out at the request of the Somali government. The attack is the third drone strike to be carried out within ten days. As recently as 22.12.22, the Somali government had announced that the region had been completely liberated from al-Shabaab.

Violent clashes in Baidoa

Violent clashes broke out in Baidoa (Bay region) on 23.12.22 between the South West Administration Forces and the South West Security Forces, which support the opposition. Militias reportedly joined ranks with the security forces. Tensions between opposition candidates and incumbent South West State (SWS) President Abdiaziz Laftagareen had risen in recent weeks after opposition candidates refused to recognise the extension of the SWS parliament until December 2023. The Somali federal government is pushing for mediation between the two sides. At least ten people are reported to have been killed in the clashes.

South Africa

Ramaphosa re-elected ANC president

President Cyril Ramaphosa was re-elected leader of the party at a party leadership contest of the ruling African National Congress (ANC), despite the corruption allegations against him (cf. BN of 05.12.22 and 19.12.22). The ANC has thus paved the way for Ramaphosa to run for a second term as president from 2024.

South Sudan

Fighting in Jonglei State

According to media reports, an attack carried out by members of the Nuer ethnic group on members of other ethnic groups led to days of fighting and more than 50 people being killed and several dozen injured. The fighting escalated in the region in and around the town of Gumuruk. The Minister of Information of Jonglei State called on the actors involved to stop the fighting. He also called on the government to intervene. The origin of the violence in Jonglei State lies in fighting that broke out between members of two ethnic groups (Nuer and Shilluk) in Upper Nile State, spreading to the neighbouring states of Jonglei and Unity (cf. BN of 12.12.22).

According to media reports, the fighting resulted in killings, gender-based violence, abductions, looting and arson. It was reported that, due to the insecure situation, access to humanitarian aid was severely limited. The displaced persons were therefore undersupplied with food, medical products and sanitation facilities.

Sudan

Fighting in South Darfur

After several villages were attacked on 21.12.22 and the following two days, the police reported the arrest of several people on 25.12.22. The attack carried out on 21.12.22 was allegedly an act of revenge in the wake of an attack on Arab shepherds. The number of fatalities as reported by the media to date fluctuates between 11 and 15, including members of the police and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF). In addition, between 30 and 42 people are reported to have been injured. According to reports, some villages were almost completely burnt to the ground. During the fighting, the local security forces reportedly withdrew without a fight due to the superior strength of the assailants. Since 24.12.22, a state of emergency and a curfew have been in force in the affected region around Belail locality, east of the city of Nyala, until further notice as the authorities fear a further escalation. So far, more than 20,000 people have fled the escalating violence. The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) says at least 16,200 people have been displaced. On 29.12.22, renewed clashes broke out in Zalingei in which 9 people were reportedly killed.

According to media reports, affected people from the attacked villages accused the RSF of being responsible for the violence and demanded their withdrawal from the region. According to the governor of the South Darfur region, more than 400 police officers, intelligence and RSF personnel are currently deployed to keep the situation under control.

Syria

Deir ez-Zor: several persons killed in attack on passenger bus

According to a statement issued by the Syrian Petroleum Ministry, at least 10 oil industry employees were killed in a rocket attack carried out on a bus near the al-Taym gas field in Deir ez-Zor on 30.12.22. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR), which is pro-opposition, blamed ISIS for the attack. The SOHR said that at least 12 people had also been killed.

SDF: New Year's attack by ISIS foiled

According to a statement issued by the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), large-scale searches led to the arrest of a total of 52 suspected ISIS fighters on 30.12.22. The suspects are reported to have been hiding in residential areas and farms where they were working on preparations for an attack at the turn of the year.

The previous day, the SDF leadership had announced that an operation would be carried out in response to an increase in attacks by so-called ISIS, as part of which, sleeper cells in al-Hol and in the nearby Tal Hamis area were to be targeted in particular.

Raqqa: ISIS attacks SDF positions

On 26.12.22, the SDF reported an attack by several ISIS fighters on security force installations in the capital of the governorate of the same name. According to the report, six members of the Kurdish-led security forces were killed, and several others were wounded. They were reportedly attacked by five ISIS fighters, two of whom were wearing explosive belts.

According to the SOHR, the attack was also aimed at a prison where some 200 suspected ISIS supporters are reportedly being held. This was the 16th attack counted by the SOHR in December 2022 that was carried out by so-called ISIS sleeper cells in areas under SDF control.

Damascus: operations at international airport suspended following airstrikes

In the early morning of 02.01.23, Damascus International Airport was hit by several missiles, causing material damage and the complete suspension of operations. According to official statements issued by the Syrian military, two soldiers were killed, and two others were wounded. The SOHR reported that the missiles were Israeli and were aimed at the airport and a nearby weapons depot. The Israeli military generally does not comment on military operations, so there is usually no official confirmation or correction. In the past, however, Israeli authorities have stated that airstrikes are primarily directed against Iranian-backed militias, such as Hezbollah. It was not initially clear for how long airport operations would be disrupted. This is the second closure of the airport, probably caused by Israeli missiles, in the past six months (cf. BN of 13.06.22).

Togo

Restructuring of the security services

President Faure Gnassingbé has replaced the Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces and dismissed the Minister of the Armed Forces. This is according to media reports referring to information provided by Gnassingbé on 22.12.22. In addition, the Ministry of the Armed Forces will reportedly now once again be directly attached to the presidency. Observers assume that the measures are related to the deterioration of the security situation in the north of the country. The border regions with Burkina Faso have been the target of repeated attacks for over a year (cf. BN of 06.12.22), and a security emergency has been in effect for the Savanes region since June 2022 (cf. BN of 20.06.22). In the coastal countries of Togo, Benin, Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire, there are fears that extremist groups operating primarily in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger could extend their radius of action to their national territories.

Tunisia

State of emergency extended

According to the Tunisian Official Gazette (Journal Officiel de la République Tunisienne – (JORT)), President Kais Saied has extended the state of emergency until 30.01.23. This gives the authorities additional powers, independent of the judiciary, such as banning official meetings, imposing house arrests and controlling the media and press.

Official election results announced – criticism of election authorities

According to official data provided by the Independent High Authority for Elections (ISIE), 11.22% of eligible citizens participated in the parliamentary election held on 17.12.22 (cf. BN of 19.12.22). In the election, in which it was possible to vote not for parties, but for individual candidates, only 21 persons prevailed. A run-off ballot is therefore scheduled for 20.01.23, which will affect 131 of the total 161 constituencies. The final results are to be announced on 03.03.23.

During the election held on 27.12.22, Tunisian human rights groups accused the election authorities of threatening the freedom of the press. They said the ISIE was attacking the freedom of expression, censoring media organisations and thus violating the law, as it had filed a lawsuit the previous week against several bloggers and media outlets for alleged offences during a referendum on a new constitution. On 29.12.22, journalists therefore

protested against what they saw as growing repression and intimidation of the press since President Kais Saied seized power on 25.07.21 (cf. BN of 26.07.21). The demonstration was organised by the national journalists' union SNJT.

Türkiye

DBP chairmen arrested

On 27.12.22, it was reported that a court had ordered the arrest of two leaders of the pro-Kurdish Democratic Regions Party (DBP), Keskin Bayındır and Hayrettin Altun, in Diyarbakır province. They are accused of "membership of an armed terrorist organisation". The arrests came after Turkish police had previously temporarily detained 14 members of the party in simultaneous raids carried out on DBP buildings and other locations in 10 provinces, including Istanbul, Ankara and Diyarbakır. According to the statements they issued to the prosecutor's office, the chairmen in Diyarbakır province were put on trial after their arrest, while the other suspects were released pending trial under judicial supervision. The party officials are accused of having links to the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK).

Femicides

On 30.12.22, it was reported that according to the We Will Stop Femicide organisation, at least 392 women were murdered by men and 226 women died under suspicious circumstances in 2022. The number of femicides thus increased compared to 2021 when 280 women were murdered by men and 217 women died under suspicious circumstances.

Arrests for suspected membership of terrorist organisations

On 01.01.23, security forces arrested 33 people during raids carried out in south-eastern Türkiye's Hatay province. They are accused of being members of terrorist organisations. Sixteen of the arrested persons are alleged to be members of the PKK, while another 17 are alleged to be members of ISIS.

Ukraine

Development of hostilities

During the period between 29.12.22 and 01.01.23, Ukraine once again experienced large-scale missile attacks by Russian forces. The west of the country was also affected by missile strikes, especially the oblasts of Lviv and Ivano-Frankivsk. According to the Ukrainian armed forces, most of the missiles were intercepted. However, the attacks, which were mainly directed against the Ukrainian energy infrastructure, again led to massive power and water cuts in parts of the country. Residential buildings were also hit, and civilians injured. Meanwhile, Russian forces continue their efforts to advance towards Bakhmut and Avdiivka. According to Ukrainian sources, the Ukrainian army has managed to advance further towards the town of Kreminna, which is of great strategic importance to Russian forces.

New media law

On 29.12.22, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky signed a new media law, which will come into effect in three months' time. The new law gives the National Television and Radio Broadcasting Council more powers and duties, including, for instance, the right to temporarily ban the distribution of unregistered online media without a court order. The new law also provides for the National Television and Radio Broadcasting Council to cancel the registration of media whose owners have links to Russia. The law is perceived by critics as an attack on the freedom of expression and freedom of the press, but by supporters sometimes as a necessary measure to meet requirements for media regulation as part of European integration.

Venezuela

Opposition parties vote to abolish Juan Guaidó's interim government

In two rounds of voting, the delegates of the Venezuelan opposition parties Primero Justicia (Justice First), Acción Democrática (Democratic Action) and Un Nuevo Tiempo (A New Era), with the exception of Guaidó's party

Voluntad Popular (Popular Will), voted by a majority in favour of a bill to remove the interim government of Juan Guaidó and to set up a five-member commission to manage Venezuelan assets abroad, including the Citgo oil refinery, among others. In doing so, they approved the reform of the statute that is supposed to regulate the transition to democracy (Estatuto de Transición a la Democracia) with 79 votes in favour, 29 against and eight abstentions. The aim of this step by the opposition is to present a unified alternative to President Nicolás Maduro with a new strategy for the 2024 elections. According to the results of a study conducted by Andres Bello University in November 2022, only about six percent of Venezuelans planned to vote for Guaidó if he participated in primaries; other opposition leaders were more popular; many people in the country are also disappointed with the results of Guaidó's interim government, which many governments abroad have also stopped supporting in recent years.

Migration: 7.1 million people have left the country, 70 persons have died on migration routes

According to the opposition's representative on migration David Smolansky, at least 71 Venezuelan nationals died on migration routes in 2022, including 21 people in the Darién Gap between Colombia and Panama and 18 people on routes in Central America and Mexico, among others. The Regional Inter-Agency Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela, co-led by UNHCR and IOM, said that a total of 7.1 million people had fled Venezuela by December 2022. However, according to media reports, arrivals of Venezuelan nationals at the US southern border had recently slowed down as part of a reform of entry requirements, including the introduction of a humanitarian residence permit programme.

Vietnam

Five years' imprisonment for critical Facebook posts

On 26.12.22, a court sentenced blogger and human rights activist Nguyen Nhu Phuong (also known as Phuong Hang Nhat) to five years' imprisonment and three years' probation for subversive activities under Article 117 of the Penal Code. Phuong had regularly drawn attention to political and social issues on his Facebook accounts. The sharing of an audio file in October 2021 in which the police chief of An Giang province talks about how he defied his superior's order to allow migrant workers to return to their homes after months of COVID-19-related lockdowns had led to his arrest. According to state media, the recording was fabricated and was an attempt to incite opposition to the Party and the state.

Zambia

Abolition of the death penalty and the offense of insulting the president

Hakainde Hichilema, a long-standing opposition figure who was surprisingly elected by the people as Zambia's president in August 2021, announced a new penal code on 23.12.22 that would abolish the death penalty for all crimes and the offense of insulting the president. The death penalty has not been carried out since 1997 due to a moratorium imposed on executions. According to Amnesty International (ai), the offense of insulting the president was used until recently to suppress the freedom of expression.