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Group 22 – Information Centre Asylum and Migration

Briefing Notes

13 October 2014

Afghanistan

Security situation

On 06.10.14, three civilians were killed in the capital of north-eastern Kunduz province when a bomb hit an Afghan military vehicle.

On 07.10.14, an Imam and his mother died in a bomb attack in Jani Khail district (south-eastern Paktika province). In Zerai district (southern Kandahar province), a landmine killed a villager and injured four others. In attacks on a police station in western Badghis province, four police officers and three attackers lost their lives.

On 08.10.14, two suicide attacks on military vehicles in Kabul killed at least seven people and injured more than 15 others. In southern Kandahar, six were killed when two roadside explosives detonated; several others, among them children, were left injured. A car bomb explosion in Lashkargah (capital of southern Helmand province) killed at least five people and wounded another 19. Other incidents in northern Sar-i-Pul and in southern Zabul claimed the lives of a police officer and three insurgents. The secret service stated to have prevented a car bomb attack in Kabul.

On 09.10.14, two abducted Pakistani engineers were freed in northern Jawzjan province; two insurgents and a police officer died during the operation. In northern Kunduz province, an attack on a military base could be prevented.

On 11.10.14, two attacks were carried out in Khost province, with dozens killed and injured.

On 12.10.14, two Taliban insurgents wearing police uniforms attacked the police headquarters in Mazar-i-Sharif (Balkh province); two people were killed and several others injured. On the previous day, a similar attack had occurred in Lashkargah.

On 12.10.14, several people were killed in a bomb attack in Wardak province.

On 13.10.14, a suicide blast targeted an ISAF convoy in Kabul's Pul-e-Charkhi quarter, apparently killing an Afghan civilian and injuring three others.

Death penalty

On 08.10.14, five men were executed for armed robbery and gang rape. A sixth man convicted as the head of a kidnapping gang was also hanged. International observers raised fair trial concerns including allegations that the confessions were coerced under torture. These were the first executions in Afghanistan in 2014. During Mr Karzai's presidency (December 2001 until September 2014), Amnesty International recorded a total of 51 executions, with approx. 300 convicted apparently still in the death row.

Pakistan

Peace Nobel Laureate Malala Yousafzai threatened by extremists

Shortly after children's activist Malala Yousafzai won the Peace Nobel Prize, the young woman received threats by a Pakistani Taliban breakaway group on 10.10.14. The threats were posted by Jamaat ul-Ahrar, which in August had separated from the Tehreek-e Taliban Pakistan (TTP). Presently, 17-year-old Malala Yousafzai is living in Great Britain. Two years ago, she had nearly died when she was shot in the head by a Taliban gunman. As yet, TTP, an umbrella organisation of more than a dozen insurgent groups, has not

commented on her Nobel Prize. In Pakistan, the young Laureate has received recognition and appreciation, with all major newspapers covering the story on their front page

Two polio vaccinators killed in bomb attack

In northwest Pakistan near the border to Afghanistan, a roadside bomb killed two polio vaccinators and their relative, as was reported by local authorities on 08.10.14. It seems unclear whether the vaccinators were specifically targeted by the bomb. Vaccinators have repeatedly been victims of deadly attacks. Many parents refuse to have their children vaccinated because both religious leaders and Islamist insurgents have reservations against vaccination.

India/Pakistan

Ceasefire violation – several casualties, thousands of refugees

In the heaviest fights between India and Pakistan since 2003, at least 17 civilians have been killed and dozens others wounded in the disputed Kashmir region. India and Pakistan are accusing each other of having violated the ceasefire.

In September, India suspended the Kashmir peace process initiated in 2004, after the Pakistani government had made contacts with insurgents in the Indian part of the disputed province. This move is regarded by India as an unacceptable interference in its internal affairs. Pakistan, in turn, has spoken of a ‘good tradition’ to meet with local leaders in Kashmir before entering consultations with India, in order to prepare for a ‘focused discussion on the problems’ in the region.

Iraq

Recent developments

On 11.10.14, at least 45 people were killed in several bomb attacks in Shia Muslim quarters of Baghdad. Apparently, the Islamic State (IS) is responsible for the attacks. In the city of Qara Tapah (roughly 150 km further northeast), at least 20 people lost their lives when several car bombs exploded on 12.10.14. In Baquba, suicide attacks on a market claimed the lives of at least six civilians.

In Anbar province, IS fighters have launched new attacks. The Iraqi press reports that the IS militia is controlling around 80 percent of the province, with its capital Ramadi being attacked by IS from the north, east and west. So far, government forces have been able to prevent the fall of Ramadi only with the support of US fighter jets, it was reported. On 12.10.14, Anbar’s police chief was killed in a bomb attack. Apparently, attacks have also targeted Abu Ghraib (west of Baghdad).

Syria

IS advance in Kobane stopped for the time being

Apparently, the most recent airstrikes of the U.S. and its allies have hit some IS positions, thus preventing the militia from capturing Kobane. IS is reported to control at least 40 percent of the Kurdish stronghold situated close to the Turkish border. In the meantime, the U.S. had already given up the town. Kobane (Arab name: Ain al-Arab) has been under siege by IS for roughly a month now, with the IS militia having deployed more fighters from their Syrian strongholds ar-Raqqa and Aleppo to Kobane. According to UN estimates, there are still around 12,000 civilians in and around the town. Both UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon and UN Special Envoy to Syria Staffan de Mistura warn of a massacre if the besieged town falls.

Iran

Execution imminent of young woman who killed in self-defence

26-year-old Reyhaneh Jabbari is facing imminent execution. Seven years ago, she was arrested and convicted for murdering a man in what she claims was self-defence. She testified that the victim, 47-year-old

Morteza Abdolali Sarbandi, doctor and former employee of the Iranian intelligence service, had tried to rape her. The case is stirring emotions in the Iranian public and dominates the social networks. In order to save the life of her daughter, Reyhaneh Jabbari's mother had made public the planned execution in the social media and solicited the public. Both Amnesty International and the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights had called for an investigation of the case. The situation leaves serious doubts about the legal process, said UN special envoy Ahmed Shaheed. The family of the slain man can pardon her, but is refusing to do so. The UN estimates that Iran executed 411 people in the first half of 2014.

People's Mujahedin claim cover-ups in nuclear dispute

Iranian opposition group Mujahedin-e Khalq-e Iran (MEK), who had provided the first documents on the then secret Iranian nuclear programme in 2002, claims to have been informed by insiders that key facilities of the Organisation of Defensive Innovation and Research (SPND) have secretly been moved to other locations. The SPND, which comes under the authority of the Iranian ministry of defence, is said to be the control centre of the military part of Iran's nuclear programme. It was also from circles associated to MEK that, in 2011, the CIA had obtained a laptop containing data indicating the development of nuclear warheads.

Journalist released from detention

Journalist Yeganeh Salehi has been released from detention after more than three month, as was reported by informed sources on 06.10.14 in Tehran. In July, Ms Salehi had been arrested together with her husband, *Washington Post* correspondent Jason Rezaian. Ms Salehi reports from Tehran for the Arab newspaper *The National*. As yet, the background of the arrest is unclear. Her husband, U.S. citizen Jason Rezaian, remains in detention.

Yemen

Shia rebels continue to control Sanaa

More than two weeks after the capture of Yemen's capital Sanaa, followed by a ceasefire agreement on 21.09.14, Shia al-Houthi rebels have started to patrol the city streets wearing military uniforms. According to reports by the ministry of interior, the move resulted from an agreement between the Houthis and the Yemeni government. Apparently, the rebels received around 20,000 uniforms. The agreement was confirmed by an al-Houthi spokesperson. Actually, the rebels had pledged to withdraw from Sanaa in a peace agreement negotiated by the UN. The agreement also included the formation of a unity government within two months. The majority of Yemen's population are Sunni Muslims. In 2004, the rebels had launched an armed uprising in order to gain independence for their territories. For several times, the conflict has escalated into civil war.

Newly appointed head of government resigns

The road to a new government formation, as was planned by President Abd Rabbo Mansour Hadi, has been blocked by the Houthi rebels. On 09.10.14, state media reported on the resignation of Ahmed Awad bin Mubarak, who had been appointed prime minister by Mr Hadi only two days before. The Yemeni al-Houthi rebels had rejected his appointment for prime minister. State news agency Saba reports that President Hadi has accepted Mr Mubarak's resignation.

Al-Qaeda-offspring claims responsibility for terror attack

As was reported by the U.S.-based SITE intelligence monitoring service, the militant group Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) claimed responsibility on 10.10.14 for the serious suicide attack on Shia Muslim al-Houthi which had been carried out the day before, killing nearly 50 people. The blast had struck as Shia Muslim al-Houthi rebels gathered in Sanaa, when an AQAP militant detonated his explosive belt, killing 47 people. On the same day, another suicide attack in south-eastern Hadramaut province, 20 soldiers were killed and three others wounded. AQAP is held responsible also for this attack.

Israel

Protest over Sweden's plan to recognise state of Palestine

On 06.10.14, the Israeli government called in Sweden's ambassador to protest against Stockholm's intention to recognise a sovereign Palestinian state. The ministry's deputy director general for Europe expressed Israel's 'disappointment' and told the ambassador that such a move would 'not contribute to the relations between Israel and the Palestinians, but in fact worsen them'. The Swedish Prime Minister had stated that a two-state solution would require 'mutual recognition and a will to peaceful co-existence'. Of the EU Member States, only Malta and Cyprus have so far recognised Palestine as a state.

Lebanon

Presidential elections failed again

On 09.10.14, the election of a new President failed for the 13th time in five months, as only 57 of the total of 128 members of parliament appeared for voting. President Michel Suleiman's tenure had ended on 25.05.14. The boycott of the pro-Syrian politicians has hindered an agreement on a new president who should be a Christian Maronite according to the 'national pact'. The next voting attempt has been scheduled for 29.10.14.

Turkey

Kurdish protests leave several dead

On 02.10.14, the Turkish parliament had equipped the Ankara government with the mandate to take military action against terror groups operating in Syria and Iraq. So far, the troops stationed at the border have not yet intervened in the fighting. In protest against this decision, Kurdish demonstrators took to the streets in several cities last week, demanding more commitment of the Turkish government against the IS insurgents. During the protests, violence, including clashes with the police, erupted in a number of towns. According to official information, 31 people were killed and more than 350 others were injured. A curfew has been imposed in Diyarbakir, Mardin, Siirt and Van provinces. In Istanbul and Ankara, police used tear gas and water cannons against demonstrators. In the south-eastern city of Diyarbakir, ten people lost their lives in a shootout between protesters and Islamist supporters.

Turkey allows use of its airbases

On 13.10.14, President Barack Obama's national security adviser, Susan Rice, said that the Turkish government had agreed to let US and coalition forces use its airbases for operations against the Islamic State. Additionally, the bases may be used for the housing and training of representatives of the moderate Syrian opposition.

Detention of refugees

Last week, members of the security forces detained hundreds of Kurdish refugees who had escaped from the besieged Syrian town of Kobane. The Turkish authorities are suspecting that fighters from the banned Kurdish Workers' party (PKK) or from the Syrian People's Defense Unit (YPG) might have mingled with the refugees. A government official in the border town of Suruç said that the detainees would be released after their identity was established.

Progress report

Despite strong criticism, the EU Commission intends to continue accession talks in principle. Nothing was better than the accession process to stimulate reforms and co-operation projects in the interest of the EU, Enlargement Commissioner Stefan Füle said when he presented the Progress Report on 08.10.14 in Brussels. He also advocated opening up of the negotiations in order to encourage Turkey towards a more EU-friendly course. Also, the EU intends to strengthen its ties with Turkey in the fight against the terrorist organisation Islamic State (IS) and with the return of fighters from Syria. The report lists a whole series of deficits regarding basic democratic rights, principles of the rule of law and the fight against corruption. The report also states concerns over the independence of justice and the freedom of expression. In particular, the dismissal of hundreds of police officers and prosecutors at the beginning of 2014 is pointed out, who had

campaigns for the clarification of corruption allegations involving the ruling party AKP. Also, police action is criticised. 'The frequent use of excessive force during demonstrations and arrests remains a matter of concern', the report says. Another issue is the pressure exerted on the press and on website providers. New legislation was issued to restrict the freedom of speech and that of the press. 'The blanket bans on YouTube and Twitter were a matter of serious concern, even if later annulled by the Constitutional Court. Intimidating statements by politicians and cases launched against critical journalists, combined with the ownership structure of the media sector, led to widespread self-censorship by media owners and journalists, as well as sacking of journalists', the report goes on. The accession negotiations have been stagnating for years, with only one out of 34 chapters closed. Moreover, a whole series of chapters already opened has been blocked for political reasons.

Algeria

According to a media report released on 11.10.14, the Algerian authorities have identified the man who captured Frenchman Hervé Gourdel on 21.09.14 and beheaded him (see BN of 29.09.14). Apparently, it is Bachir Kherza, believed to be the 'mufti' of the Jund al-Khalifah ('soldiers of the caliphate') group, who is responsible for numerous ambushes and terror attacks. Before, the Algerian judicial authorities had issued 15 arrest warrants against jihadists.

West Africa / Ebola

Recent developments

On 10.10.14, the WHO gave the figure of 4,033 cases of death and more than 8,000 cases (confirmed, probable or suspected) of people infected with the disease. Most casualties have been recorded in Liberia. According to estimates of the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention CDC, the number of infections may rise to 1.4m by January 2015 in West Africa, unless comprehensive assistance is offered and a change of behaviour will occur.

Due to the quarantine measures, the agricultural system and trade activities have broken down in Liberia. In Sierra-Leone, quarantine measures are implemented at the national level.

The first infections with Ebola were confirmed in the U.S. on 30.09.14 and in Spain on 06.10.14, with medical personnel being affected.

In the run-up to the General Debate at the 69th United Nations General Assembly, a resolution was adopted on preventing and combating the disease. The EU is already airlifting relief goods to West Africa.

Mali

UN Peacekeeper killed / Foreign minister urges UN to send rapid intervention force

On 07.10.14, a UN peacekeeper from Senegal was killed in northern Mali in a rocket attack on their military camp. Since the deployment of MINUSMA (UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali) in July 2013, a total of 31 peacekeepers have been killed and 91 injured. Apparently, split-off cells of several Islamist groups are staying in the northern parts of the country, supplying themselves with arms in southern Libya.

On 08.10.14, Mali's foreign minister urged the UN Security Council to send a rapid intervention force to fight Islamist militants, to support the peacekeepers and to protect the population.

Somalia

Deadly attack / journalist shot at

On 12.10.14, at least four people (other sources put the figure at 11) were killed and at least eight others were wounded in a car bomb attack on a café in Somalia's capital Mogadishu. So far, no-one has claimed responsibility for the attack. Al-Qaeda-linked group al-Shabaab is suspected of being behind the attack, despite the fact that the intervention force of the African Union (AMISOM) has succeeded in driving the militia out of large parts of the country.

Also on 12.10.14, unknown gunmen attempted to assassinate journalist Abdirisak Jama (who is the Mogadishu director for London-based Somali Channel TV) in front of his house in Mogadishu. Mr Jama was seriously wounded and brought into hospital. No-one has claimed responsibility for the attack so far. For journalists, Somalia is one of the most dangerous countries in the world, with at least seven reporters killed in 2013 alone.

Central African Republic

New clashes claim lives of five

On 09.10.14, violent clashes in the capital Bangui killed at least nine people, among them a Pakistani UN peacekeeper, in what have been the heaviest battles in months. The violence erupted after the expiry of an ultimatum set by the Christian anti-Balaka movement for President Samba-Panza to resign. Already the day before, five casualties were registered when a Muslim man was lynched after having launched several grenades at bystanders. Reprisal attacks followed, claiming the lives of four people.

Kenya

President at ICC

On 08.10.14, Kenyan President Uhuru Kenyatta appeared before the International Criminal Court in The Hague where he is charged with crimes against humanity. He is the first sitting head of state to answer a summons to the ICC. He is charged for his alleged role in the violence following the presidential elections of 2007, which claimed the lives of more than 1,000 people. In the first place, the court will have to decide whether the trial can take place at all. The Kenyan government is being held responsible for the suppression of evidence and for the intimidation of witnesses. The defence wants the proceedings to be discontinued.

Mr Kenyatta has declared his innocence, claiming that the charges brought against him were politically motivated. During his absence, Deputy President Ruto is serving as acting president. He is also facing charges related to the post-election violence, when he was allied with the opposition. Mr Ruto is also denying the charges.

The massacres of 2007 were the worst wave of violence since independence in 1963. At the time, Mr Kenyatta was a supporter of President Mwai Kibaki, who won the elections. The opposition raised accusations of electoral fraud. The dispute about the election results escalated when pro-government groups started to burn down houses and kill political enemies. Uhuru Kenyatta is held responsible for organising and financing the militias. He was elected to office in 2013.

DR Congo

Former combatants starve in camp

As was reported by Human Rights Watch (HRW), over hundred former rebels and their families have died from starvation and disease in a military camp in Kotakoli (western Équateur province). For a year now, the camp has been housing up to 1,000 demobilised fighters of different militias from eastern Congo. According to official statements, typhoid had broken out in the remote camp, and rapid intervention measures were impossible. International aid was also insufficient, it was added. The World Bank is financing a demobilisation programme for foreign rebels to be brought back from Congo to their home countries Rwanda, Uganda or Burundi, but it is not responsible for fighters from Congo itself.

The victims of starvation are fighters of two groups from North-Kivu province, i.e. the Hutu militia Nyatura and the Bahunde militia APCLS (People's Alliance for a Free and Sovereign Congo). In 2013, they had left their groups and surrendered to the Congolese government. Then, they were brought to a regroupment site in Bweremana and were eventually transferred by plane to Kotakoli, which is more than 1,000 km away. Also the other military camps located in Kitona (Bas-Congo) and Kamina (Katanga) were in a desolate state, diplomats reported.

The state demobilisation programme of June 2014 provides for impunity for a total of 25,000 combatants, among them nearly 7,000 child soldiers, if they decide to surrender to the government. In this case, they will either be integrated into the regular army or discharged into civilian life. However, the government is not in a position to actually deliver the promised support (be it in form of paid training or start-up money for a small business as well as psychological counselling), so that increasing numbers of former combatants are retreating to the jungle.

Western Balkans

EU Progress Reports

On 08.10.14, the EU Commission presented the new Progress Reports on the Western Balkan countries (Albania, Kosovo, FYROM, Montenegro and Serbia).

According to the reports, all countries are confronted with considerable economic problems. Unemployment rates remain high, in particular among young people (21 percent on average). Dire poverty is prevailing. For most countries, the main challenge lies in the process of strengthening the rule of law. More often than not, the judicial system is lacking in quality and efficiency. Corruption remains a grave problem. In all Western Balkan states, the situation of ethnic Roma communities is still giving rise to concern. Also still widespread are homophobia, discrimination, hate crimes including violence and intimidation due to sexual orientation and sexual identity.

Serbia (granted EU candidate status in March 2012) started accession negotiations in January 2014. According to the progress report, reform efforts are proving successful. The normalisation of relations to Kosovo is praised, whereas deficits are recorded in the judicial system and in the fight against organised crime.

Montenegro (granted EU candidate status in 2010) started accession negotiations in June 2012. Major deficits are recorded in the fight against corruption and in the protection of freedom of speech.

FYROM (Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) (granted candidate status in 2005). So far, accession negotiations have been blocked by the dispute over the name of the state with Greece. However, the European Commission repeats its recommendation to start the talks. At the same time, failures are recorded in sensitive areas like freedom of speech and of the media and the independence of the judicial system.

Albania (granted EU candidate status in June 2014). The sphere of rule of law remains of concern, as do the tensions between government and opposition.

Bosnia-Herzegovina (potential candidate for EU membership). Overall, the country received poor marks. Unemployment rates among young people are around 70 percent, the government is close to bankrupt, corruption is omnipresent, and the political parties are under criticism for their lack of determination for reform.

Kosovo is also regarded as a potential candidate for EU membership, although Greece, Cyprus, Slovakia, Spain and Romania do not recognise the republic. A Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA) was initialled in July 2014.

Bosnia and Herzegovina

Parliamentary and presidential elections

On 12.10.14, the country held parliamentary and presidential polls. Voter turnout was roughly 50%. The complex elections included not only the three-member Presidency (one representative each for the Bosniak, Croat and Serb ethnic community), a national parliament, the parliaments of the two entities (the Bosnian-Croat Federation and the Serb-run Republika Sprska), but also the seats of parliament in the ten self-administered cantons of the Bosnian-Croat Federation as well as the President of the Republika Sprska.

Official results will be released in the course of the week. The formation of a national government, which last time took 16 months, is not expected to be completed before March 2015.

Serbia

Ebola – 708 people quarantined

For safety reasons, 708 persons have been quarantined for possible infection with Ebola so far, as was communicated by the Serbian Ministry of Health. 92 of the concerned who had entered Serbia were coming from the Ebola regions.

Ukraine

New UN report notes more than 3,600 dead in eastern Ukraine

For about six months now, pro-Russian separatists and Ukrainian government forces have been fighting each other in eastern Ukraine. According to recent information provided by the United Nations, the fights have left at least 3,660 persons dead and more than 8,700 injured since Mid-April.

Despite the ceasefire agreed on 05.09.14 and the resulting temporary calmness, violence in the region has not really abated. Since then, the United Nations has counted 331 casualties and more than 375,000 internally displaced persons. In total, five million people have been affected by the impact of the conflict, the UN Office for Human Rights says. In Donetsk and Luhansk regions alone, 40,000 small and medium enterprises were forced to close, leaving thousands of people without income.

The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Prince Zeid Ra'ad Zeid Al-Hussein, has called for an unreserved investigation and persecution of all human rights violations, including the shelling of civilians, murder, alleged sexual violence, illegal confiscation of property and mistreatment of prisoners. The UN report blames both pro-Russian separatists and voluntary fighters supporting the Ukrainian army for the crimes committed. Both groups were taking extreme action against presumed collaborators, the report states.

Russia/Ukraine

President Putin orders withdrawal of troops from the Ukrainian border

On 12.10.14, Russian President Vladimir Putin ordered the withdrawal of more than 17,000 soldiers from the region near the border with the embattled Eastern Ukraine, his spokesman Dmitri Peskov communicated. He said that the soldiers had conducted a manoeuvre in the Rostov region, which has ended now. The soldiers are to return to their barracks. President Putin had issued this order after talks with his minister of defence Sergei Shoigu, the spokesman said. The deployment of Russian troops close to the conflict region had been criticized as a provocation by both the government in Kiev and western countries. There had been repeated reports of Russian fighters among the pro-Russian separatists and of the provision of arms across the border. The Kremlin had always denied these allegations.

Russian Federation

Judicial proceedings against human rights organisation Memorial

For several years, Russian authorities have been proceeding against the Memorial group. Now, the ministry of justice has scheduled a court hearing with regard to Memorial's organisational structure. In Moscow, Memorial leader Arsenij Roginski stated that the hearing was to take place before the Supreme Court in mid-November 2014. Internationally, Memorial is considered to be one of the most important and most reliable

non-governmental organisations in Russia – it also enjoys the support of the German Federal Government. Memorial leader Roginski has expressed his outrage: if necessary, he would submit the matter to the Russian Constitutional Court and to the European Court of Human Rights, in order to defend the organisation established with the help of the prize money of soviet dissident and Nobel Peace Prize laureate Andrey Sakharov, he said.

Memorial has made valuable contributions to the documentation of the crimes of the Stalin era. The organisation regularly positions itself on human rights questions (e.g. in the Northern Caucasus), and it is facing increasing pressure from the authorities – especially because of the donations from abroad. Memorial rejects the accusation of being politically influenced. Contrary to what has been published by diverse media, the Russian judiciary is not believed to have current intentions to close down the organisation.

Continuing repression against government opponents

Meanwhile, the Russian authorities are targeting other government opponents: according to the news agency AFP, opposition politician and blogger Alexei Navalny has been placed under house arrest for three more months by the Russian judiciary. He has been under house arrest since February now and is neither allowed to use the internet nor to make telephone calls. 37-year-old Navalny is one of leaders of the protest movement against Russian President Vladimir Putin, which emerged in the context of 2011 parliamentary elections.

Myanmar

3,000 prisoners released in amnesty

The government has released more than 3,000 prisoners just over a month before Myanmar will host a summit of leaders from the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), attended also by U.S. President Barack Obama, Chinese president Xi Jinping and high-ranking government officials from Japan and India. Among the released are about a dozen of political prisoners, as was reported by human rights activists. Some of them have been in prison for more than ten years. On 07.10.14, the ministry of information declared the amnesty on humanitarian grounds on its website. International observers see this as an attempt of the government to show its impetus for reform.

North Korea

Existence of labour camps officially confirmed

While, on 07.10.14, North Korean foreign ministry official Choe Myong Nam told reporters in New York that his country has practically no detention centres, he confirmed at the same time the existence of labour camps, “whereby people improve their mentality and look upon their wrongdoings”. Experts say that such ‘re-education-through-labour camps’ are mainly for ordinary criminals, whereas most political prisoners are held in detention centres with a stricter regime.

Dialogue on Human Rights

North Korean vice ambassador to the United Nations, Ri Tong Il, said that a high ranking representative of his government has recently held talks with the European Union’s Special Representative for Human Rights Stravros Lambrinidis, expressing his interest in establishing a dialogue. It was hoped that by the end of the year, political talks will start, followed by a dialogue on Human Rights in the coming year, he added.

Bolivia

Morales wins presidential election

Bolivia’s head of state Evo Morales has declared his victory in the presidential elections. According to the official news agency ABI, the 54-year-old candidate of the left-wing governing Movement for Socialism (Movimiento al Socialismo – MAS) gained about 60% of the votes. Thus, he won the election already in the first round and will lead the country for another five years. Samuel Doria Medina, the candidate of the centre-right party Unidad Nacional, came second with 20% of the votes. Apparently, Mr Morales won in all regions except the north-eastern Departamento Beni. He can also expect to have gained a strong majority in

the Congress elections, which took place on the same day of 12.10.14. He dedicated his victory to Fidel Castro, to the late Venezuelan president Hugo Chávez and to all 'anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist leaders'. Thanks to its gas exports, Bolivia's economy has been flourishing in the last years. Mr Morales has taken advantage of this situation and started an extensive redistribution policy, implementing a range of social programmes. This explains the President's popularity to a large extent. Since he is Bolivia's first President with indigenous roots, large parts of the population see him as a figure to identify with. He had been elected president for the first time in 2006. His third term would last until 2020.