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Briefing Notes

Group 62 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

12 August 2024

Afghanistan

Security situation

According to media reports from 11.08.24, a bomb attack on a minivan in western Kabul (Dasht-e Barchi district, mainly inhabited by ethnic Hazara) killed one person and injured 13 others, among them four women.¹

Governance and persecution

Taliban leader Hibatullah Akhundzada issued a new decree requiring all public employees to perform the five daily prayers in the office on time. Anyone who fails to do so without a valid reason is to be penalised.

According to media reports from 07.08.24, two people were publicly flogged in Kabul for "illicit relations". Taliban members are also said to have shot dead two former soldiers who had served in the eastern Afghan province of Parwan at the time of the republic.

According to a new report by the US Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), religious freedom declined "steadily and significantly" under Taliban rule. Taliban hardliners are silencing clerics and preventing religious minorities from practising their rituals. USCIRF recommends that the US government designate Taliban-ruled Afghanistan as a "country of particular concern" under the International Religious Freedom Act for "serious violations" of religious freedom.²

Angola

Autonomy movement: Prison sentences for almost 200 people

On 30.07.24, a court in Saurimo, the capital of Lunda Sul province, sentenced 198 defendants to prison terms of four, six and eight years respectively. They were also ordered, probably collectively, to pay compensation totalling AOA 1.7 million (around EUR 1,740, as of 12.08.24) to the police and AOA 450,000 (around EUR 461) to one individual. Many of the defendants were arrested during a rally of the Lunda People's Sociological Rights Manifesto Movement (MJSPL) in Saurimo on 08.10.23. The movement demands autonomy for the diamond-rich provinces of Lunda Norte and Lunda Sul (cf. BN of 16.10.23). According to a defence counsel, the charges against the defendants - rebellion, criminal association, disobedience of dissolution orders, participation in riots and damage to public property - have not been proven. The defence has appealed the verdicts.

According to the press report, dozens of people are still in custody awaiting trial. Parallel to the protest in Lunda Sul at the time, more protests were held in support of the autonomy of the "Lundas" in the provinces of Lunda Norte, Moxico and Cuando Cubango. At the time, the Minister of Defence declared that the government would not allow groups of citizens to overthrow the political order, the report said.

Autonomy efforts in the region had already caused clashes and legal proceedings in the past (cf. BN of 08.02. and 22.02.21 as well as 27.02. and 20.03.23).³

Bangladesh

Student protests: transitional government under Muhammad Yunus in office

Nobel Peace Prize winner Muhammad Yunus succeeds ousted Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in the new interim government, which was sworn in on 09.08.24 (cf. BN of 05.08.24). The appointment of Yunus as Prime Minister by President Mohammed Shahabuddin had been - in addition to Hasina's resignation - a central demand of the protesters. Yunus received the Nobel Prize in 2006 for founding a bank that granted microloans to poor people. According to reports, shortly before Hasina's escape, the military leadership had decided that the army would not open fire on civilians to enforce the curfew previously imposed by the government. Thus, Hasina had lost the backing of the army. According to reports, members of the Hindu minority were violently attacked during the protests because of allegations that they were supporting the now ousted ruling party Awami League. After Hasina fled to India, social media disseminated many reports about nationwide attacks on Hindu buildings and temples. Media reports mention that Hindus are fleeing to India, but also cases in which Muslims protected Hindus against attacks.⁴

Benin

President pardons 27 opposition activists

On 02.08.24, according to media reports, President Patrice Talon signed decrees pardoning more than 400 prisoners, including 27 opposition activists, who had been arrested and sentenced to prison terms of between 38 months and ten years following violent incidents related to the elections held in 2019 and 2021. However, two prominent opposition figures, Reckya Madougou and Joel Aïvo, did not benefit from the pardon. Many personalities, including former heads of state of Benin, are now demanding their release as well, the reports said.⁵

Cameroon

Social media activist released after arrest

According to media reports, hairdresser and social media activist Junior Ngombe, who was arrested outside his shop in the city of Douala (Littoral region) on 24.07.24, was released on bail on 31.07.24. The arrest was allegedly made by three people in plain clothes who claimed to work for the secret service. According to his lawyers, Ngombe was initially taken to a gendarmerie post in Douala and then transferred to the State Secretariat for Defence (Secrétariat d'État à la défense, SED) in Yaoundé. He is accused of "incitement to rebellion" and "spreading false information", but no charges have yet been brought. According to his lawyers, his arrest is linked to several TikTok videos he has published in which he calls on the people of Cameroon to register for the presidential election in 2025.

A few days before Ngombe's arrest, government spokesman Rene Emmanuel Sadi had warned against the use of "disrespectful or insulting" language towards President Paul Biya in the context of the postponement of elections (cf. BN of 22.07.24), further reports said.⁶

Central African Republic

End of the arms embargo

By unanimously adopting a resolution, the UN Security Council lifted the arms embargo against the country on 30.07.24, according to media reports. However, UN member states were called upon to take measures at least until 31.07.25 to prevent the direct or indirect supply of arms to the numerous armed groups active in the country. The resolution also extends the mandate of an existing group of experts to monitor illegal transnational supply networks.

In the region, for example in the tri-border region of Chad, Cameroon and the Central African Republic, the smuggling of small arms is considered widespread (cf. BN of 22.07.24). The resolution criticises the proliferation of mines and improvised explosive devices, which is particularly harmful to the humanitarian situation in the country. The arms embargo had been in place since 2013. The UN Security Council had already allowed the resumption of arms deliveries to state security forces in July 2023. Nevertheless, according to the report, the government sees the

complete lifting of the embargo as a diplomatic success for the country. China and the Russian Federation had supported the government in this endeavour.⁷

Côte d'Ivoire

Death penalty: ratification of the second ICCPR Optional Protocol

On 03.08.24, the law ratifying the Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which was passed unanimously in June 2023, came into force. The Optional Protocol definitively and irrevocably commits the signatory states to abolish the death penalty. The Optional Protocol permits solely a declaration on the possible application of the death penalty in times of war on the basis of a conviction for a most serious crime of a military nature committed during war. Côte d'Ivoire has made no such declaration. The death penalty had been abolished in 2000 under constitutional law and in 2015 also under criminal law. The UN Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions emphasised the country's exemplary role in the definitive abolition of the death penalty, in a press release.⁸

DR Congo

M23: Death sentences pronounced

On 08.08.24, the verdict was handed down in the trial against 26 people allegedly linked to the rebel group Mouvement 23 Mars (M23) or to the politico-military alliance Alliance Fleuve Congo (AFC) (cf. BN of 05.08.24). According to media reports, all defendants were sentenced to death, most of them in absentia. In an interview on 07.08.24, President Félix Tshisekedi accused his predecessor Joseph Kabila of supporting the AFC alliance and using it to prepare an uprising.

In the country's east, assistance forces of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), which had replaced a corresponding mission of the East African Community (EAC), are operating in support of the DR Congo against M23 (cf. BN of 04.12.23, 19.02. and 15.04.24). On 06.08.24, the UN Security Council allowed the UN peacekeeping mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) to support the SADC mission by adopting Resolution S/RES/2746 (2024). MONUSCO itself is in a slow process of phased withdrawal.⁹

Egypt

Political activist arrested

According to media reports, Yahia Abdelhadi, an activist and former spokesperson for the political alliance Civil Democratic Movement, was arrested by security officials on 31.07.24.

The public prosecutor's office, which ordered Abdelhadi to be remanded in custody for fifteen days, accused him of membership of a terrorist organisation, spreading false news, misuse of social media and incitement to commit a terrorist offence, among other things. A few days earlier, he had criticised the government, the political opposition and the military on social media.¹⁰

Iran

36 people executed within two days

According to media reports, a total of 36 people were executed on 06.08. and 07.08.24, this includes a group execution of 26 people in Ghezel Hesar prison in the city of Karaj.

According to an NGO based abroad that campaigns for human rights in Iran, the men executed in Karaj were convicted of murder, drug trafficking and rape. In addition to the 26 men executed at the same time, three others were executed in Karaj city prison, one man in Sabzewar, one man in Kermanshah, three in Shiraz and three in Bandar Abbas.

Among the executed prisoners was Reza Rasaei, a Kurdish activist who had taken part in the protests that began in September 2022 following the death of Jina Mahsa Amini. He was executed in the central prison of the city of

Kermanshah. Rasaei had been sentenced to death in October 2023 in a trial in which, human rights organisations said, he was denied legal representation and other basic rights. According to Amnesty International (AI), his confession was also forced under torture. Rasaei was sentenced in connection with the death of an officer of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) during unrest in the Kurdish city of Sahneh. AI reported that Rasaei was executed without his family or lawyer being informed beforehand. His family was then forced to bury his body in a remote area far from his home.

According to the above-mentioned NGO and the UN, at least 345 people have been executed so far in 2024. According to AI, 853 people were executed in Iran throughout the year 2023.¹¹

Appointment of the Cabinet by President Pezeskhian

According to press reports, President Massud Pezeskhian presented his 19-member cabinet on 11.08.24. Abbas Araghchi was appointed to the post of Foreign Minister. Araghchi was the chief negotiator in the nuclear talks from 2013 to 2021. He also served as ambassador to Japan and Finland and as deputy to the then Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif, who was instrumental in reaching the so-called Vienna nuclear deal (JCPOA) in 2015.

Civil servant Farzaneh Sadegh has been nominated Minister of Roads and Urban Development. If the 48-year-old is confirmed, she would be the second Iranian woman to hold a ministerial office since the founding of the Islamic Republic after Marzieh Vahid Dastjerdi, who became Minister of Health in 2009.

Intelligence Minister Esmail Khatib, who already held this post under President Ebrahim Raisi, who died in a helicopter crash, will remain in the new cabinet, the reports say. Amin Hossein Rahimi, who served as Minister of Justice already under Raisi, will also resume this position again.

Parliament will begin vetting the candidates from 12.08.24 and on 17.08.24 they will be presented to MPs for a vote. The vote of confidence on each minister will be held individually.¹²

Kosovo / Serbia

Closure of Serbian post offices and bank branches

On 05.08.24, the Kosovar police closed nine branches of the Serbian state postal company Pošta Srbije in the Serbian-dominated north of Kosovo. The police stated that it was suspected that the branches were being operated illegally. Around two months earlier, Kosovar authorities had already banned the Serbian dinar as a means of payment in northern Kosovo and closed six branches of Serbian financial institutions there. The Serbian government condemned the action as an illegal demonstration of power and provocation against Serbia. The EU and the US criticised the Kosovo government's actions as an arbitrary and uncoordinated step that was fuelling tensions in the region. Serbia and Kosovo signed a bilateral agreement in 2015 that allowed Serbia to operate its own post offices in Kosovo. Until the ban, payments in dinars were customary in the Serbian-dominated communities. The closed bank branches were used to pay salaries and pensions to members of the Serbian ethnic community who received them from Serbia.¹³

Libya

Dead and injured in violent clashes in Tripoli suburb

At least nine people were reportedly killed and 16 others injured in violent clashes between the Rahba Al-Duruae and Al-Shahida Sabriya militias in Tajoura on 09.08.24. The fighting was preceded by an assassination attempt on the militia leader of Rahba Al-Duruae by Al-Shahida Sabriya.¹⁴

Mali

Fighting in northern Mali

According to various media reports, there were several days of fighting in the village of Tin Zaouatine in northern Mali near the border with Algeria between 25.07. and 27.07.24. Malian rebels are said to have killed over 80 Wagner mercenaries and captured several more. 47 Malian soldiers are also said to have been killed. According to reports, Malian soldiers and Wagner mercenaries were ambushed by Tuareg rebels and fighters from the jihadist group

Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM), which is linked to al-Qaeda. The Tuareg rebels are said to have received important information from Ukraine, as stated by the spokesperson of the Ukrainian military intelligence service. The Malian military junta announced that it was breaking off diplomatic relations with Ukraine, as it holds Ukraine partly responsible for the attack on Malian forces and accuses it of supporting international terrorism.¹⁵

Pakistan

Demonstration for the rights of the Baloch ethnic group in Karachi

On 02.08.24, members of the Baloch ethnic group demanded information about missing relatives at a protest in Karachi (Sindh province) which ended with violent clashes between protesters and security forces. According to human rights groups, the disappearance of people from the Baloch ethnic group is due to Pakistani secret services, which are leaving the families in the dark about the whereabouts of their relatives. Also, state discrimination against the ethnic group, particularly by the security forces, was stressed.¹⁶

Demonstration by transgender people in Peshawar

On 09.08.24, transgender people called for more protection against attacks at a protest in Peshawar (Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province). With the slogan "Arrest the blackmailers!" they referred to gangs that kidnap transgender people to extort ransom money. Transgender identity is legally recognised in Pakistan; however, acts of violence against transgender people often go unpunished.¹⁷

Attacks on army posts in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

On 09.08.24, gunmen attacked three army posts in the Tirah Valley on the border with Afghanistan. According to the military, three soldiers and four of the attackers were killed in fierce firefights. No further details were released. The Gul Bahadur group, a faction of the Pakistani Taliban, claimed responsibility for the attacks.¹⁸

Russian Federation

Advance of Ukrainian troops into Russian territory

On 06.08.24, Ukrainian troops advanced into areas of the Russian Kursk Oblast close to the border. According to media reports, the Russian security forces were unable to repel the Ukrainian advances. The Ukrainian soldiers took control of several areas, including parts of the town of Sudzha, the location of the entry point for Russian gas exports through Ukraine to the EU. The invasion is said to have advanced up to locations about 30 kilometres from the Ukrainian border. The Kursk region is also home to a nuclear power plant, the surrounding area of which was affected by power cuts. Over 76,000 people have been "temporarily relocated to safe areas", according to a local official on 11.08.24. According to the regional governor of Kursk, a Ukrainian missile launched on 11.08.24 hit a residential building in the regional capital of the same name and, according to the latest information, injured 15 people. People in parts of the neighbouring Belgorod region were also evacuated due to Ukrainian activities near the border, this was announced by Russian authorities on 12.08.24.

President Volodymyr Zelensky explained the move by, among other things, wanting to bring the war to the aggressor's territory. In the past, Ukraine had pursued this intention with drone attacks, some of which also reached Moscow. So far, only irregulars, paramilitary groups of Russian nationals who fought on Kyiv's side in the Ukrainian war, had invaded the Russian Federation from Ukraine (cf. BN of 05.06.23).

The Russian government responded by declaring an anti-terrorist operation in the Kursk, Belgorod and Bryansk oblasts. This allows the local authorities to restrict the movement of people and vehicles and to order telephone taps and temporary evacuations.¹⁹

Somalia

Suicide attack in Mogadishu

On 02.08.24, a suicide bomber and other armed individuals killed 37 people on Lido Beach in Mogadishu, they also injured more than 200 people, some of them seriously. After the explosion caused by the suicide bomber, the other

attackers opened fire on the fleeing people on the beach. Security forces believe there were at least five attackers, one of whom is said to have been captured. Al-Shabaab claimed responsibility for the attack saying that it killed members of the security forces and the government. According to official information, however, most of the victims were civilians. In the aftermath, hundreds of civilians and government employees protested in Mogadishu against al-Shabaab's acts of terrorism.²⁰

Sudan

Ongoing battles

According to media reports, the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) bombed the Zamzam camp for internally displaced persons (IDPs) south of the town of El Fasher (North Darfur) in the night of 04.08. to 05.08.24. According to the reports, two barrel bombs were dropped, one of which did not detonate. Nevertheless, more than 20 dwellings were destroyed and several people were injured. This was the first time that the Zamzam camp, which is home to around 500,000 people, has been hit in the ongoing conflict. Two other camps in North Darfur, Abu Shouk Camp and Abuja Camp, have each been hit several times in recent months by shelling from the SAF or the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) militia, the reports said.

On 03.08.24, the town of El Fasher itself was also shelled by RSF artillery, resulting in 23 deaths and 60 injuries.²¹

Syria

Northeast: Fighting in Deir ez-Zor

On 07.08.24, armed clashes erupted between pro-Iranian Arab tribal fighters and the so-called Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) along the internal border between areas under SDF and nominal government control.

According to media reports, the tribal fighters attacked SDF checkpoints and military posts during the night. The tribal fighters are said to have been supported by pro-Iranian militias. The SDF maintains that the attackers were government troops and their allies from the National Defence Forces (NDF) militia alliance.

The fighting lasted several days and left at least 16 civilians dead as well as two SDF members and eight members of pro-Iranian militias, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR). Armed clashes resumed again in the morning of 12.08.24.

When the fighting began, the SDF declared a curfew in the areas affected by the clashes in the south and the east of Deir ez-Zor. The bombing and fighting caused many residents to flee.²²

Northwest: Car bomb in Azaz

On 07.08.24, at least nine people were killed by the explosion of a bomb attached to a lorry near a checkpoint in the town of Azaz. Twelve others were injured. Initially, no one claimed responsibility for the attack. Among the dead were four members of the Syrian National Army (SNA) militia alliance. Shortly afterwards, the area was reportedly shelled with rockets. These were fired from areas under the joint control of the Syrian government and the SDF, this is reported by the private civil defence organisation known as the White Helmets. No one else is said to have been injured.

The so-called Syrian Interim Government, which is supported by Türkiye and exercises control in Azaz with the support of the SNA, accused the SDF of the attack. Shortly afterwards, several rockets and artillery shells were reportedly fired at SDF sites by various SNA militias and the Turkish army. So far, there are no reports of casualties. A few days later, on 10.08.24, the Turkish Ministry of Defence announced that the army had "neutralised" (killed, wounded or arrested) twelve people it attributed to the SDF in the Aleppo governorate. The Manbij Military Council, which is associated with the SDF, stated that the Turkish military had shelled several villages with mortar and artillery shells. SOHR reported further villages under fire.²³

Northeast: US military personnel and allies wounded in drone attack

Several US military personnel were slightly wounded in a drone attack on the Rumayn landing zone on 09.08.24. Initially, no one took responsibility for the attack, which was the second drone strike against the US military within a week. In the past, such attacks were executed by Iranian-backed groups. The US military is stationed in the

Rumalyn landing zone together with the military personnel of other countries belonging to the international coalition combatting IS.²⁴

Türkiye

Instagram blocking lifted

According to media reports, the Information Technology and Communications Authority (BTK) lifted the ban on Instagram imposed on 02.08.24 (cf. BN of 05.08.24) on 10.08.24. The Minister of Transport and Infrastructure, Abdulkadir Uraloğlu, announced on 10.08.24 that Instagram representatives had agreed to comply with the authorities' demands.

According to Uraloğlu, the authorities had demanded that Instagram delete thousands of posts relating to gambling, drugs and child abuse. In addition, Instagram's parent company Meta had agreed to comply with Turkish law and ensure the removal of posts and content if they contained elements of certain criminal offences, such as insulting the founder of the state Atatürk, or terrorist propaganda. Meta denied having not been in compliance previously and stated that in the first half of 2024 it had already deleted around 2,500 posts at the request of the Turkish authorities.²⁵

Arrests of Kurdish wedding guests

According to press reports, the police arrested five people on 05.08.24 for allegedly singing Kurdish-language songs at a wedding in Osmaniye province, performing the folk dance "Halay", which is associated with the Kurdish minority, and decorating the wedding cars with yellow and red streamers.

Among those detained were the two co-chairs of the Osmaniye district's Equality and Democracy Party (DEM). The arrests follow recent police operations in the provinces of Istanbul, Aydın, Mersin, Ağrı, Siirt, Batman and Hakkari, in which more than 30 people were arrested on similar charges. According to press reports, a total of eleven people were arrested on 27.07.24 for allegedly carrying out "propaganda for terrorist organisations" at various weddings in Istanbul, as an Istanbul court described it. In Hakkari, wedding celebrations were raided on 28.07.24 because Kurdish songs were played and danced to. According to reports, an unknown number of musicians and wedding guests were arrested during the raids on the charge of "propaganda for a terrorist organisation".²⁶

Removal of Kurdish-language traffic signs

According to press reports, on the instructions of the governor's office Kurdish-language road signs were once again removed in Diyarbakır province on 05.08.24. The Ministry of Interior had issued a directive on 26.07.24 stipulating that all traffic signs had to comply with the standards set by the Turkish General Directorate of Motorways (KGM). As a result, the governors of several eastern provinces ordered the removal of Kurdish-language road signs since they were non-incompliant with traffic marking standards. The KGM had ordered the removal of the Kurdish-language road signs on instructions of the ministry, but the local governments had reinstalled the signs first in Van and then in Diyarbakır, Batman and Mardin. The signs have now been removed a second time in Diyarbakır.

According to the deputy chairman of the Diyarbakır Bar Association, there are no legal obstacles preventing local governments from offering public services in different languages, and there have been warning signs in Kurdish in Diyarbakır for 15 years. The removal of road signs in Kurdish was preceded by attacks on those same road signs in Diyarbakır and Van. According to media reports, several people, including a 16-year-old, defaced pedestrian signs and pedestrian crossing signs written in Kurdish on 29.07.24. The sentence "Türkiye is Turkish and will remain Turkish" was written on one sign.²⁷

Uganda

Arrest of protesters

On 09.08.24, 47 activists were reportedly arrested in Kampala. During a protest march to the Ugandan parliament against the construction of an oil pipeline and its impact on the population and the ecosystem, they were stopped by security forces and taken into custody. According to official information, some of the protesters were charged with "incitement to violence".²⁸

Ukraine

Civilian victims

According to media reports from 07.08.24, at least one person was killed in a Russian missile attack in Kharkiv. The Sumy regional military administration announced that two people were killed by a Russian bomb attack in the north of the region on 08.08.24. On the same day, two people were killed by Russian shelling in Kostyantynivka and Selydove (Donetsk region). According to Ukrainian authorities, at least 14 people were killed by a Russian missile attack in Kostyantynivka on 09.08.24. According to media reports from 11.08.24, two people died in a Russian attack near Kyiv. On the same day, Ukrainian authorities reported three fatalities following Russian attacks in the Donetsk and Kharkiv regions.²⁹

War effort

According to the Institute for the Study of War (ISW), Russian troops have advanced further near Torezk and Pokrovsk (Donetsk region). A report by the Russian National Security Council on 06.08.24, according to which the Russian armed forces have captured approx. 420 km² of Ukrainian territory since mid-June 2020, was rejected by the ISW as "vastly exaggerated", they say that actually approx. 290 km² have been captured.

After Ukrainian forces advanced into the Russian region of Kursk on 06.08.24, the Ukrainian authorities ordered the evacuation of around 20,000 people in the neighbouring Sumy region. President Zelensky commented on the counterattack on 08.08.24 that Moscow must "feel the consequences" of its war and explained the operation two days later as part of Ukrainian efforts to restore justice after the Russian invasion in 2022. On 07.08.24, President Zelensky approved the draft laws to extend martial law and general mobilisation for a further 90 days (12.08. to 09.11.24).

According to the head of the UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine, 95% of Ukrainian soldiers captured by the Russian side are tortured. They are "tortured during the first interrogations, including with metal rods and sticks, stripped of their clothes, brutally beaten and tortured with electric shocks". The information comes from Ukrainian soldiers who were released from Russian captivity.³⁰

Recruitment

According to media reports, protesters in Kovel (Volyn region) attempted to force their way into a local recruitment centre on 03.08.24 to demand the release of a small group of young men who, in their view, were being held there illegally as part of the country's increased mobilisation efforts. This was triggered by the temporary arrest and transfer of the individuals to the recruitment centre due to a lack of military registration documents. According to local media, they were released on the same day.

Ukrainian border guards have arrested 48 conscripts, the largest group of suspected Ukrainian draft evaders to date. They were travelling in a lorry via the Odessa region to the Moldovan region of Transnistria, which is controlled by pro-Russian forces. They are said to have paid the escape helpers the equivalent of over EUR 3,300 per person.

A survey by the news agency epd shows that in Germany generally no replacement travel documents are issued to Ukrainian men of military age who do not have a valid passport. According to the survey, the responsible ministries in the federal states confirm that it is reasonable for men of military age to travel to Ukraine to obtain a passport and to do their compulsory military service.³¹

Judgement

According to media reports, on 08.08.24, a Russian military court sentenced a Ukrainian citizen to six and a half years in a high-security prison for allegedly attempting to assassinate Kostyantyn Ivashchenko, the then mayor of Mariupol (Donetsk region) appointed by Moscow, in August 2022.³²

Zaporizhzhya nuclear power plant

According to media reports from 12.08.24, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) announced that heavy smoke was seen in the northern area of the Zaporizhzhya nuclear power plant following several explosions. The IAEA reported no impact on nuclear safety. Both warring parties accused each other of having started a fire. According to the statement of a Russian official of 12.08.24, the fire was extinguished.³³

Venezuela

Current situation: ongoing repression

The tensions in the country continue and detailed election results have still not been published. According to the NGO Foro Penal, there have been more than 1,300 arrests as of 10.08.24, including of people with disabilities, indigenous people and over a hundred young people between the ages of 14 and 17. While the majority of those arrested come from poorer neighbourhoods (so-called *barrios populares*), around 50 (local) politicians, human rights defenders and activists have also been arrested recently. Individuals, such as LGBTIQ activist Yendri Velásquez, who was arrested at Maiquetía airport on 03.08.24, and university professor Edni López, who was arrested on 04.08.24, were later conditionally released. According to the national press union SNTP, four arrested media professionals have been charged in connection with alleged terrorism offences. They face long prison sentences of up to 30 years. Many others who have been arrested are also accused of incitement to hatred. According to SNTP and Espacio Público, at least 13 media professionals have been arrested since 28.07.24 for their reporting on the protests. According to the NGO Provea, 24 civilians and two members of the army have been killed in the course of the protests.

Most recently, the Attorney General's Office announced the opening of criminal investigations against María Corina Machado and the opposition unity candidate González Urrutia for conspiracy and incitement to insurrection, among other things, after they published an open letter calling on the security forces to stand with the people and stop the repression of protests. González also faces further legal consequences for ignoring a summons from the Supreme Court in connection with the confirmation of the election results.

On 08.08.24, President Maduro publicly announced that he had ordered the National Telecommunications Authority Conatel to block X for ten days; according to media reports, access to the messenger app Signal was also blocked recently. Information about protests in the wake of the presidential elections had been widely disseminated via social media, which Maduro had recently accused of inciting hatred and violence.

According to France24, a government app for anonymous reporting of opposition protests and subversive activities was recently removed from the app stores by Apple and Android, while a telephone hotline of the military secret service (DGCIM) for the same purpose is still active. Arrests were recently made as part of the so-called Operation Tun Tun, the name of which refers to security forces knocking on doors.³⁴

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Briefing Notes
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- 1 AmuTV: List reveals Kabul explosion casualties at one killed, 13 wounded, 11.08.24; Hindus aus Bangladesch suchen nach Unruhen Schutz in Indien; Explosion in Western Kabul Kills At Least One, Injures 11, 11.08.24.
 - 2 AmuTV: Taliban leader mandates group prayer for public employees, 08.08.24; AmuTV: Taliban flogs two, including woman, in Kabul, 07.08.24; Kabul Now: Taliban Kills Two Former ANDSF Members in Parwan, Continuing Its Campaign of Vengeance, 07.08.24; VoA News: Religious freedom in Taliban-ruled Afghanistan on steady decline, US watchdog says, 07.08.24.
 - 3 Voice of America (VOA): Angola: Tribunal de Saurimo condena 198 cidadãos à prisão por alegado apoio à autonomia das Lundas [Angola: Saurimo court sentences 198 citizens to prison for allegedly supporting Lundas autonomy], 31.07.24.
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