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Briefing Notes

Group 62 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

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Afghanistan

Human rights violations by Taliban

Last week the UNHCR and Human Rights Watch reported mass executions of former Afghan government employees and former members of the Afghan security forces in various parts of the country, despite the amnesty announced by the Taliban. Furthermore, according to the UNHCR, women's freedom of movement has been restricted in some regions, and girls are no longer allowed to go to school in some places. In addition, minors are said to have been recruited to serve in the armed forces. According to reports from a news channel, a journalist was beaten and robbed of his equipment by Taliban fighters in Kabul on 25.08.21. It was said that there had been several previous attacks as well.

Humanitarian situation

The number of IDPs caused by the conflict is currently estimated at over 500,000, 400,000 of whom have been registered since early May 2021. The total number of people internally displaced by the conflict was reported to exceed 3.5 million in December 2021 (plus around 1.1 million displaced by natural disasters). IOM and the UNHCR, together with mostly Afghan partner organizations, are currently trying to organize health and food supplies and shelter. This is complicated by several factors such as insecure access conditions, lack of information and partial obstruction of aid agencies, despite the Taliban's declarations to the contrary. The United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) warned that the effects of drought, the COVID-19 pandemic, conflict escalation and humanitarian access restrictions following the transfer of power may further worsen food security. The UNHCR expects that another 500,000 Afghans will attempt to leave the country over the next four months.

Attacks, fighting

On 26.08.21, two attacks claimed by IS hit Kabul airport and a hotel in its immediate vicinity. At least 60 to 100 people are believed to have been killed (including at least 13 US soldiers) and at least 150 injured. On 27.08.21, social media reported gun battles, some of them fierce, in several parts of Kabul. On the same day, US forces carried out a drone strike in the eastern province of Nangarhar, which reportedly killed an IS member involved in planning attacks. In another US drone strike on 29.08.21, a vehicle loaded with explosives had reportedly been hit near Kabul airport. Several further explosions were triggered by this which also injured civilians. A mortar shell may also have hit a house. On the morning of 30.08.21, several rockets were fired at the airport, which were intercepted by the US troops' missile defence system.

Armenia / Azerbaijan

Situation in Nagorno-Karabakh

Armenia and Azerbaijan had been engaged in heavy fighting over Nagorno-Karabakh for six weeks after 27.09.20. According to official figures, 3,773 soldiers died on the Armenian side and 2,783 on the Azerbaijani side. In addition, about 200 civilians were killed on both sides. The warlike conflict only ended on 09.11.20, after Russian President Putin mediated a ceasefire. The ceasefire agreement is to be guaranteed by the Russian military's own peacekeeping forces. In the meantime, around 2,000 Russian soldiers have been stationed along the ceasefire line. Russian peacekeepers are also stationed in the Lachin Corridor, which connects Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh. Although the ceasefire is generally observed, there are occasional border skirmishes, which are said to have resulted in deaths and injuries on both sides. Therefore, Armenia's Prime Minister Pashinyan advocated an expansion of the deployment of Russian border guards to permit the establishment of a demarcation line that will prevent military clashes. Allegedly, isolated cases of abuse and war crimes against members of the Armenian population in Nagorno-Karabakh occurred in connection with the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Overall, the humanitarian and economic situation in the area remains difficult. Infrastructure, particularly in several border villages, has been completely destroyed and it is difficult to supply people with food. It is estimated that of the approximately 150,000 people previously living in Nagorno-Karabakh, around 100,000 had fled to Armenia by the end of 2020. In the meantime, around 50,000 of these refugees are said to have returned to Nagorno-Karabakh, especially to the capital Stepanakert. Several Armenian and foreign aid organizations are active in Nagorno-Karabakh to support reconstruction.

Bangladesh

Vandalism in Hindu temple

Several statues of Hindu deities were vandalised by unidentified persons at a Hindu temple in Nesarabad (Pirojpur District) on 27.08.21. According to police, an investigation has been launched.

Cameroon

Scores of Boko Haram members report to state agencies

According to media reports, hundreds of former Boko Haram members have surrendered to the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJT) at the Cameroon-Nigeria border. On 22.08.21 alone, there were said to be over 200, including 100 former fighters in addition to many women and children. It was said that the arrivals looked tired, unkempt and hungry. At the Center for Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) in the town of Meri on the border with Nigeria in northern Cameroon, the number of former Boko Haram members more than doubled from 700 to 1,500 in three weeks, reports said. DDR director Francis Fai Yengo said Cameroon's president had called for the pardon of all fighters who had laid down their arms and found their way back into society. Former Boko Haram members from Nigeria are to be handed over to Nigerian authorities.

In Nigeria, too, over 1,000 former members of the Islamist group have reported to state authorities in recent weeks (cf. BN of 23.08.21).

China

Assembly of a house church dissolved; members arrested

According to media reports, on 22.08.21, a meeting of the Early Rain Covenant Church in the city of Chengdu (Sichuan Province) was broken up by police forces over allegations of illegal assembly. Two people were reportedly arrested.

Arrests for possession of photos of the Dalai Lama

Around 60 Tibetans were arrested in Dza Wonpo greater township in Kardze (Ganzi) autonomous county (Sichuan province) on 22.08.21 for possessing photographs of the exiled Tibetan spiritual leader Dalai Lama, according to a report.

Colombia

Killings of Colombian activists on the decline

The country's human rights commissioner, Carlos Camargo, announced on 25.08.21 that the number of murders of human rights and community activists fell from 90 to 78 in the first half of the year as against last year. The highest number of killings of activists between January and June 2021 were recorded in the provinces of Antioquia, Valle del Cauca, Cauca, Narino, and Choco. President Duque blamed the killings on the guerrilla organization Ejército de Liberación Nacional (ELN), former members of the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC), and criminal gangs such as the Clan del Golfo that are fighting for control of drug trafficking routes and illegal mining areas. According to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), Colombia has the highest homicide rate among this group in Latin America, with more than 400 human rights defenders killed between 2016 and 2020.

DR Congo

Arrest and detention of another Lucha activist

On 23.08.21, Ghislain Muhiwa, another political activist of the civil society movement Lutte pour le Changement (Lucha), was reportedly arrested and detained in the capital Goma, North Kivu, the province under state of emergency (cf. BN of 26.07.21). According to Lucha, the arrest is related to accusations of embezzlement of donations from the foundation of the First Lady Denise Nyakeru Tshisekedi, which were intended for the victims of the eruption of the volcano Nyiragongo on 22.05.21. According to unofficial sources in judicial circles, the activist had failed to comply with a summons from the military justice system. In the event of a formal indictment, Muhiwa will have to answer to a military tribunal as a civilian, as civilian criminal jurisdiction was fully transferred to military tribunals when the state of siege came into force. The military justice system in the state of emergency regions reportedly suffers from major deficiencies (cf. BN of 12.07.21). Both Lucha and Human Rights Watch (HRW) denounce, among other things, the intensifying crackdown on political dissidence in the country (cf. BN of 26.07.21).

Eastern provinces of North Kivu, Ituri: murders of journalists, security situation

The International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) condemned the killings of two journalists in connection with their work: on 07.08.21, Heritier Magayane, a journalist with the national radio station (RTNC) and presenter of a popular youth programme in the Rutshuru region (North Kivu), was killed by unknown persons. On 14.08.21, the director of Baronnie de Byakato radio - television, Joel Mumbere Musavuli, and his wife were allegedly stabbed to death in their home in northern Ituri. Mai-Mai militias are suspected. Musavuli had reportedly received threats since broadcasting a report on militia violence on 26.06.21. On 27.08.21, journalists held a vigil in Goma because of the two murders to draw attention to the dangers they and the freedom of the press are facing.

The security situation continues to deteriorate in both provinces (cf. BN 16.08.21). Thousands of people continue to be displaced by militia violence and civilians are losing their lives; most recently North Kivu experienced incidents with major numbers of victims. According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the Beni region is particularly affected by the faltering of security. According to a civil society group's count, 450 civilians have been killed by local and foreign armed groups, including the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), in Ituri, since the beginning of the year.

Ituri: spread of bubonic plague

On 24.08.21, UNICEF warned of the spread of bubonic plague in Ituri province, a danger especially for children. In 2020-2021, 578 cases with 44 deaths were recorded in the province. Outbreaks of bubonic plague are attributed to poor sanitary conditions and transmitted by fleas as intermediate hosts. The disease can be treated with antibiotics. During this period, it also appeared in areas that had not recorded any cases for over 15 years, it was said. The situation is similar for pneumonic plague, which is transmissible from between humans by air. Only the DR Congo, Madagascar, and Peru have reported cases of bubonic plague.

Rutshuru/North Kivu: Floods destroy houses

More than 1,500 houses are said to have been destroyed by floods in the village of Nyamagana/Rutshuru, north of Goma. It is suspected that the destruction of vegetation caused by the eruption of the Nyiragongo volcano in May 2021 (cf. BN of 31.05.21) encouraged the floods.

Ethiopia

Military advances of Ethiopian units in Amhara

According to media reports, Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy stopped over in the Eritrean capital Asmara on his way to an official meeting in Turkey and met with President Isaias on 17.08.21. It is assumed that they agreed on how to proceed further in Tigray. This assumption was not officially confirmed. Abiy is said to have concluded a military cooperation agreement with Turkish President Erdoğan, that includes the delivery of drones. For observers this hints at a new major offensive against the Tigray Defence Forces (TDF).

Then, on 25.08.21, reports came in that the advance of Tigrayan units in the neighbouring regional state of Amhara had been halted for the time being. The Ethiopian military and Amharic militias had also succeeded in recapturing individual towns, it was said. The US and the EU also reported that Eritrean forces were once again deployed in Tigray. Units of the Eritrean Defence Forces (EDF) are said to be stationed in the western part of Tigray near the towns of Adi Goshu and Humera and to have captured TDF positions.

Human rights commission reports 150 fatalities in Oromia

On 26.08.21, the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC) reported that members of the Oromo Liberation Front (OLA) killed at least 150 ethnic Amhara in Gida Kiremu Woreda (district) in East Welega zone in Oromia regional state. The OLA, a splinter group of the formerly banned opposition Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), denies the allegation saying that it repelled an attack by Amharic militias. Fighting between the OLA and Amharic units has broken out repeatedly in the border region to the regional state of Amhara, especially since the Ethiopian military was withdrawn for the operation in Tigray.

Gambia

Poverty increases; fighting poverty and food insecurity

According to an article published by the Gambian news portal The Point on 24.08.21, that refers to the "National Food System Survey", the poverty rate in the country is on the rise. Rural households and underprivileged families in the cities are particularly affected by forms of extreme poverty. The already persistent food insecurity has worsened in rural areas, the article said. 33% of rural households have only one daily meal. As recently as May 2021, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), citing the March 2021 "Cadre Harmonisé" analysis, stated that the total number of people affected by severe food insecurity (CH Phase 3 or higher) was declining (cf. BN of 31.05.21). However, according to the FAO, the number will go up again significantly unless appropriate measures are taken.

In 2021, the government made various efforts to mitigate the further deterioration of the economic and living conditions of the poorest, most vulnerable households that were most affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. In collaboration with the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP), several hundred thousand tax-funded tonnes of rice had been provided. The implementation of the World Bank-supported Social Safety Net Project (SSNP) was also been accelerated. According to Fatou Gibba, Director of the Community Development Department at the Ministry of Lands, Regional Governments and Religious Affairs, 40% of households affected by extreme poverty currently benefit from the SSNP, which is implemented by the National Nutrition Agency (NaNA). In order to support these households to feed themselves and invest in a small business, they benefit from an 18-month cash transfer and receive GMD 3,000 (approx. EUR 50, as of 25.08.21) every two months.

Iran

Prison conditions: Criticism after dissemination of footage from Evin Prison

According to media reports, on 23.08.21 a group of cyber activists hacked images and video footage from the surveillance system of Tehran's Evin prison and published them on social networks. The footage also shows guards abusing inmates. This sparked widespread protest on social media, as well as criticism from pro-regime press outlets. The head of the Iranian prison administration apologized via Twitter for the guards' unacceptable behaviour. In a letter to the Prosecutor General, that was made public, Judiciary Chief Gholamhossein Mohseni Ezhei ordered an investigation on 24.08.21. In a statement on 25.08.21, Amnesty International (ai) demanded that the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights be granted access to Iranian prisons.

Statistics Centre Iran: high proportion of women among victims of violence - increase in child marriages

According to media reports, the statistics centre has released figures showing that out of over 80,000 people who had undergone a forensic examination for physical abuse in 2020, at least 77,000 were women. According to the ISNA news agency, the proportion of cases of physical and psychological violence against women in the marriage had increased in 2020. It also said that the number of official marriages of girls aged ten to 14 (31,379) in 2020 had increased by 10.5% (previous year: 28,373).

Access to theatre training for girls suspended

With reference to Twitter messages of journalists and artists of 27.08.21, foreign media report that the country's only women's theatre department at the Soura art college has suspended the admission of female students. A feared closure of the department could thus deny female applicants access to theatre studies altogether in the future. The ban is being linked to the new culture minister Mohammad Mehdi Esmaili taking office. Previously he had sharply criticized the art and culture community, especially the cinema and music industry (cf. BN of 23.08.21). Esmaili was confirmed by the Iranian parliament on 25.08.21, together with 17 other ministers of the new government under President Raisi.

Iraq

Mortar attack in Erbil

Several mortar shells hit rural areas south of Erbil on 24.08.21, some near the main highway between Erbil and Kirkuk. Not all of the mortar shells exploded and no personal injuries or property damage were reported. So far it is unclear who is responsible for the attacks.

Moqtada al-Sadr announces participation in elections

After announcing in July 2021 that he would not participate in the upcoming elections, al-Sadr reversed that decision in a televised speech on 27.08.21, calling on his followers to cast their ballots in October 2021. The Shiite cleric is one of the country's most influential politicians and leader of a political movement named after him.

Nationwide arrests of suspected IS supporters

Iraqi security forces arrested six suspected IS supporters in Kirkuk on 24.08.21. Explosives and several rockets were also seized. On 25.08.21, seven more terror suspects were arrested in Baghdad, Nineveh, Anbar, and Kirkuk. Two more suspected IS supporters were killed in air strikes by the Iraqi army in Diyala.

UNICEF: Majority of children in Iraq have no access to clean water

On 29.08.21, UNICEF announced that three out of five children do not have access to clean and potable water. Less than half of the country's schools have an adequate water supply. The lack of rainfall and falling water levels have affected the water supply in Iraq for years.

Lebanon

Water supply to be cut off in parts of the country

The water supply utility announced on 24.08.21 that it would no longer be able to supply large parts of Beirut and the Mount Lebanon governorate with water, citing a persistent lack of fuel to operate the pumps.

Violence escalates in northern Lebanon

After disputes between two family clans escalated into armed confrontations, Lebanese forces were sent to the northern governorate of Akkar on 25.08.21. Two people were killed in the incident. The dispute was caused by disagreements over logging. Since the outbreak of the acute fuel shortage, there have been repeated violent clashes over petrol or other goods for daily use; violence is particularly frequent at petrol stations. Especially in the economically weak north of the country such incidents are on the rise.

Mexico

Human trafficking in Mexico

According to data from the Executive Secretariat of the National System of Public Security (SESNSP), at least 550 people were victims of human trafficking in 2020, an increase of 43% compared to 2016. From January to April 2021, the agency registered at least 219 cases. NGOs Hispanics in Philanthropy (HIP) and Insight Crime also report a rise in human trafficking fuelled by the COVID-19 pandemic and the increase of the number of affected states. They also assume that the number of unreported cases is significantly higher. Particularly vulnerable groups for human trafficking are women and girls, LGBTQI persons, the indigenous population and migrants. Female trafficking victims are mainly sexually exploited, while men and boys are forced to work in the construction and mining sectors.

Same-sex marriage allowed in Yucatán state

After same-sex marriage was allowed earlier this year in Sinaloa and Baja California, Yucatán became the 22nd of Mexico's 32 states to pass same-sex marriage rights on 25.08.21.

Montenegro

Inauguration of SOC Metropolitan heightens domestic tensions

According to a recent media report, Prime Minister Zdravko Krivokapić and opposition politician and former police chief Veselin Veljović filed criminal charges against each other on 25 and 26.08.21. Veljović currently is an advisor to President Milo Djukanović and, like him, a member of the Democratic Party of Socialists (DPS). The reason for this was the upcoming inauguration of Metropolitan Joanikije as the new head of the Serbian Orthodox Church (SOC) in Montenegro and the announcement of protests against this event. In his criminal complaint Krivokapić reportedly asked the Special Prosecutor's Office to arrest Veljović, accusing him of calling on police officers to support the announced protests during the church ceremony in the town of Cetinje, in a public press column. According to the report, the opposition as well as Montenegrin patriotic organizations believe that the SOC is working to undermine Montenegrin independence from Serbia and that holding the ceremony in the town of Cetinje, the former capital of Montenegro's monarchy, violates the centuries-long struggle for sovereignty.

Morocco

COVID-19 pandemic

The government has extended the health emergency for the whole country until 10.10.21. This means that the measures previously in force can be continued. These were: a curfew between 9pm and 5am, travel restrictions to and from Casablanca, Marrakech and Agadir. Vaccinated persons, public service employees and medical emergencies are exempted.

Although the number of new infections is falling in the country in general, it is rising in the metropolitan areas of the cities of Casablanca, Marrakech, Rabat, and Agadir. Therefore, a second field hospital with 104 intensive care beds and 20 places for artificial respiration is being established in Agadir.

Myanmar

Raids in Sagaing and Magwe, arrests in Yangon, fighting in several parts of the country

Between 19.08.21 and 22.08.21, the military (Tatmadaw) reportedly raided villages, arrested civilians and engaged in looting in Sagaing and Magwe regions. On 23.08.21, several individuals were arrested in Yangon (Rangoon) during raids by security forces. Also, on 23.08.21, several Myanmar Army soldiers were reportedly killed in an ambush by the People's Defence Force (YDF) in Gangaw Township, Magwe Region.

Clashes between the military and ethnic armies and People's Defense Forces were reported in Sagaing Region and Kachin, Kayah, Kayin and Karen States between 21.08.21 and 24.08.21.

Nicaragua

Arrest of another UNAB member; 15 NGOs lose legal personality; COVID-19 pandemic

On 23.08.21, official sources confirmed the arrest of Roger Reyes Orix, a member of the Unidad Nacional y Blanco (UNAB) association and lawyer. He had represented the former presidential candidate Félix Maradiaga and had already been arrested on 20.08.21.

On 26.08.21 the parliament voted in favour of the motion to deprive 15 more local NGOs of their legal capacity (cf. BN of 23.08.21).

According to information from the NGO Observatorio Ciudadano and reports from doctors, the number of cases and hospital admissions due to the COVID-19 pandemic are again increasing drastically. In the week from 19.08.21 to 25.08.21 Observatorio Ciudadano recorded at least 796 new infections and 97 deaths. More than 500 people were hospitalized due to COVID-19, 300 people in the capital Managua alone. According to the Pan American Health Organization (PHO), Nicaragua has so far had the fewest people in Latin America and the Caribbean fully vaccinated against COVID-19, i.e. only about 3% of the population, second only to Haiti. The vaccination campaign is progressing slowly and there is a lack of vaccine. Nevertheless, according to media reports, the government continues to encourage holding events, although many lack an adequate hygiene concept.

Nigeria

Assault with mass kidnapping in the north-west

Unknown gunmen killed at least four persons and abducted at least 50 in Goran Namaye locality of Zamfara State on 23.08.21. The incident is also reported by media quoting police sources. A large number of armed men on motorcycles entered the locality at night and fired on the residents, the report said. According to a police spokesman, a search operation for the abductees was launched shortly after the crime. Recently, armed assaults have strongly increased in the region. For example, on 19.08.21, at least 60 people were abducted from Rini, a neighbouring community of Goran Namaye (cf. BN of 23.08.21). Observers attribute the increase in assaults to the Nigerian Air Force's recent attacks on camps of armed groups in the north-west (cf. BN of 16.08.21).

Deadly raid on military academy

Heavily armed men attacked the country's largest military academy in the city of Kaduna in northern Nigeria on 24.08.21. According to a military spokesman, two officers were killed and another officer abducted in the attack. Efforts were under way to free the hostage, he said. No further details were released at the time. According to media reports, three mass kidnappings around educational institutions have taken place in Kaduna state since the beginning of 2021, including one not far from the targeted military academy.

Gunmen kill 36 villagers in Plateau State

Unknown assailants shot dead at least 36 people and destroyed several buildings in a raid on Yelwa Zangam village near the central Nigerian town of Jos late in the evening of 24.08.21. Several media coincide in reporting this incident. Jos is the capital of Plateau State, which is part of Nigeria's so-called Middle Belt. As recently as 14.08.21, gunmen had killed over 20 people in an attack on a convoy of Muslim pilgrims in the same area (cf. BN of 16.08.21). Several parts of Nigeria have recently experienced an increase in kidnappings, armed robberies and other forms of violence. According to observers, many tensions are caused by poverty as it intensifies competition for resources and jobs. Ethnic and religious rivalries in the region add to the complexity of the situation.

Numerous kidnap victims freed

The governor of Niger State declared on 27.08.21 that 92 persons, including 90 school children, who had been kidnapped from Salihu Tanko Islamiya School in Tegna locality in Rafi Local Government Area on 30.05.21 (cf. BN of 31.05.21), had been freed. In the evening of the same day, according to police reports, 32 of the 63 schoolchildren of Bethel Baptist High School in Kaduna State who had still been held by the kidnappers, were released on payment of a ransom of an undisclosed amount. Already on 21.08.21 25 students of this school had been released (cf. BN of 23.08.21). Also, on 27.08.21, according to media reports, the police presented the governor of Zamfara State, Bello Matawalle, with 18 freed kidnap victims who were allegedly abducted on 15.08.21 or 16.08.21 from the College of Agricultural and Animal Sciences in Bakura locality (cf. BN. of 23.08.21). According to the police, the release was the result of negotiations initiated by Bello Matawalle. No ransom had been paid. According to UNICEF, about 200 students are still in the hands of kidnappers notwithstanding all of the liberations.

Outlawing gender-based violence in Enugu State

The Enugu State Traditional Rulers Council of southern Nigeria has condemned and outlawed gender-based violence and practices against women and girls in a statement released in mid-August 2021. Nigerian media reported that this included child marriages and discrimination against widows. The Council of Rulers is also said to be committed to ensuring that more women are appointed to local government leadership positions and that local government laws are enacted to protect women and girls. The declared aim is to abolish anti-human customs still existing in Southern Nigeria. The communiqué is the result of a conference attended by the Rulers' Council and a number of NGOs. Traditional rulers are still very influential in large parts of Nigeria.

Peru

Situation of women and girls: Disappearances and femicides 2021

According to Peru's Human Rights Ombudsman's Office, more than 3,400 women and girls disappeared between January to July 2021, and the monthly figures have been rising again since May 2021, with an overall increase of around 16% against last year for the overall period. The capital Lima and other large cities in the country, such as Arequipa, were particularly affected. In addition, the ombudsman's office reports 92 committed and 79 attempted femicides in the same period. It therefore pleads for improvements in prevention, the handling of reports and investigations in cases of gender-based violence, appropriate training of staff and increasing awareness in society.

Republic of the Congo

Opposition demands release of political prisoners

According to a media report, the president of the radical opposition party Congrès Africain pour le Progrès (CAP) has called on the government of President Denis Sassou-Nguesso to release all political prisoners. The report said that the need to release former opposition presidential candidates Jean-Marie Michel Mokoko and André Okombi Salissa had been stressed again, saying that they have been illegally detained for more than five years and were sentenced to 20 years of hard labour each in 2018 for endangering internal state security.

Somalia

African Union and Somalia sign agreement on support after end of 2021

On 19.08.21, following two days of talks, the African Union (AU) and the Somali government signed an agreement on the nature and proposed mandate of AU peace support to Somalia beyond the actual ending of the mandate in December 2021. The agreement shall initiate a transitional phase before Somali forces assume full responsibility for security in the country. As recently as July 2021, the Somali government had rejected proposals by the AU to modify the mandate (cf. BN of 19.07.21).

Attack on military base: temporary recapture of the city of Amara

On 24.08.21, heavily armed al-Shabaab fighters attacked and captured a military base in Galmudug region and temporarily regained control of Amara town, which had fallen to Somali forces in July 2021. A few hours later, Somali forces, backed by the US military, recaptured the military base. Explosions and gunfire erupted, killing at least 18 people, including civilians, according to official figures. Hundreds of local residents were reported to have temporarily fled, and schools and shops were closed. Al-Shabaab seized military vehicles and equipment.

South Sudan

Continuing struggles

The media reported ongoing fighting in Tombura County, Equatoria State. Since July 2021, there have been repeated clashes between the ethnic groups of the Azande and Balande. The opposition group National Salvation Front (NAS) published a statement reporting about 20 people killed and more than 20,000 displaced. It also said that the fighting affects other regions such as Yubu, Akpa and Mabenge. The NAS accuses the South Sudanese government of deliberately fuelling the present intra-ethnic hostilities. Since NAS recruits both Azande and Balande, it called on both groups to cease violence. Due to the ongoing fighting, the UN mission UNMISS sent patrols to the affected region.

Upcoming rallies

The opposition group People's Coalition for Civil Action (PCCA) has called for nationwide rallies against the government on 30.08.21. The PCCA accuses the government of President Salva Kiir of doing too little to address the problems facing the people of South Sudan. The group stated that it had announced the planned protests to the police by letter. A police spokesman warned against participating in the protests, stressing that they would not be tolerated by the authorities. At the same time, he invited the organizers to hold talks. According to further media reports, the police and the National Security Service (NSS) concentrated substantial forces in the capital Juba. According to these reports, some police officers have been equipped with assault rifles and bamboo sticks. There are orders to arrest any person out on the streets intending to join the protests.

Syria

Syrian army shells positions in Dar'a

On 29.08.21, the Syrian army opened fire on the southern part of the governorate capital Dar'a, where several thousand rebels are said to still be holed up. At least six people were killed in the artillery fire. The affected district, Dar'a al-Balad, has been under siege for about two months (cf. BN of 16.08.21 and 02.08.21). Since then, the transport of food, medicine and fuel has been cut. In exchange, the Syrian army set up a safe passage corridor by which almost all of the 50,000 civilian residents are said to have left the area meanwhile.

The operation is led by the Fourth Division, an elite unit of the Syrian army with close ties to Iran. Meanwhile, Russia is working on a non-violent settlement of the conflict, according to which the remaining rebels would be guaranteed free passage to north-western Syria, if they handed over Dar'a to the Syrian army without offering resistance. As recently as 26.08.21, units of the Russian military police evacuated 50 rebel members and their families from Dar'a al-Balad.

The region was recaptured in 2018. In an agreement reached with the rebels, they only had to hand over their heavy weapons, but were allowed to retain control of Dar'a al-Balad in return. At the time, Russia promised the US and Israel that the region would not be controlled by militias under Iranian influence. The Dar'a governorate not only shares a border with Jordan, but is also very close to the Golan Heights annexed by Israel.

Togo

Prison sentence for opposition member

On 27.08.21, a court in Lomé sentenced Paul Missiagbeto to four years' imprisonment, two of which were suspended, for threatening, insulting and disturbing public order. He is accused of spreading fake news on social media. Missiagbeto was arrested on 17.05.21. He is a member of the party Mouvement Patriotique pour la Démocratie et le Développement (MPDD) and an advisor to opposition politician Agbéyomé Kodjo (cf. BN of 31.05.21). As a candidate of the MPDD, Kodjo lost the presidential election of February 2020 against the incumbent Faure Gnassingbé.

Tunisia

Indefinite extension of the state of emergency

Citing Article 80 of the constitution, President Kaïs Saïed announced on 24.08.21, after the expiration of the one-month period (see BN of 26.07.21), that the suspension of parliament would be extended until further notice. The immunity of members of parliament would also remain suspended. He said that in the next few days he would address the nation, but did not give any details.

Similarly, Saïed announced to reject and take action against local market monopolies of goods and services in various sectors in view of the continuing poor economic situation.

ai calls for "arbitrary travel bans" to be lifted

Amnesty International (ai) demanded on 26.08.21 that the "arbitrary travel bans" imposed on many Tunisian nationals since 25.07.21 be lifted. President Saïed had ordered this along with several other measures. ai said that it had documented cases of at least 50 people, including civil servants, judicial officers and businessmen.

Turkey

Trial and arrest of suspected Gülen members

On 27.08.21, during joint operations by the police and the intelligence service (MIT) in 32 provinces, 30 military and former military personnel were arrested on charges of involvement in conspiratorial activities of the Gülen movement. The Ankara prosecutor's office issued a further eleven arrest warrants for suspected supporters of the movement who are being sought.

On 28.08.21, the Coast Guard arrested six people accused of belonging to the Gülen movement on a boat off the town of Bodrum in Mugla province.

The trial of Selahaddin Gülen opened on 28.08.21; he had been captured by Turkish intelligence in Kenya on 07.06.21 and then taken to Turkey. Selahaddin Gülen, a nephew of Fethullah Gülen, is accused of being a leading member of the Gülen movement and of being responsible within the group for alleged infiltration of the military by Gülen members. After hearing several witnesses, the trial was adjourned until 18.11.21.

Ruling of the Constitutional Court on body searches by means of pat-downs

On 27.08.21, the Constitutional Court ruled in the case of Hüseyin Ali Kudret, who was body-searched by police officers in Hatay province in 2017 without his consent and forcibly detained due to his resistance. The court ruled in favour of Kudret and ordered the payment of 10,000 TRY in damages. According to the court, the police officers had failed to include the pat-down in their police report. In addition, the prosecution had failed to (effectively) investigate the allegations of ill-treatment and to review security camera footage.

Twitter user sentenced for insult

On 23.08.21, the Court of Cassation ruled in the case of a Twitter user who had shared an insulting post about an official on the platform. The court ruled that by sharing, the post had reached more people, thereby increasing the

effect of the insult, and held that sharing someone else's post with insulting content also constituted a criminal offence.

Ukraine

Clashes at LGBTQI parade

During the annual LGBTQI parade in Odessa on 28.08.21, police and the extreme right-wing organization Tradition and Order clashed violently. According to media reports, at least 51 members of the organization were temporarily arrested after they attempted to get near to the participants of the parade using tear gas. Those arrested are now being investigated for resistance against state authority, mass disturbances and hooliganism.

Venezuela

Violations of freedom of the press and freedom of expression; death of a political prisoner

The recently published report on the situation of freedom of expression in the first half of 2021 by the NGO Un mundo sin mordaza (UMSM) shows that the freedom of expression is still systematically undermined by the state, but that the absolute number of incidents has declined significantly since the previous year. UMSM documented a total of 29 cases of arbitrary arrests of media professionals (15) and civilians (14) related to free dissemination of information, as well as 63 cases of threats and attacks, and 13 cases of blocked websites or social media channels in the first six months of 2021. In addition, the NGO recorded six violations of the right to property, including an arson attack on a national journalism school and an attack by government sympathizers on a radio station.

On 29.08.21, the NGO Foro Penal confirmed the death of political prisoner Gabriel Medina Díaz, who had been in preventive detention without conviction in La Pica prison since April 2020. He was accused of planning, with eight others, the kidnapping of the vice president of the ruling party PSUV, Diosdado Cabello. He had already been in critical health for a month, with inadequate medical care and is already the ninth political prisoner to die in custody since 2014.

Yemen

At least 30 die in attack on military base

On 29.08.21, at least 30 soldiers were killed and around 65 others were injured in an attack with missiles and armed drones on a military base of the anti-Houthi coalition. The base is located in al-Anad (Lahij governorate), north of Aden. President Hadi blamed the Houthi rebels for the attack.

Houthi drones intercepted

Saudi Arabia intercepted three Houthi rebel drones armed with explosives targeting the Saudi city of Khamis Mushait on 29.08.21. This was the third foiled drone attack against Khamis Mushait in a week, following earlier attacks on 24.08.21 and 27.08.21.

Yemen receives 151,000 vaccine doses

Yemen received approximately 151,000 doses of a COVID-19 vaccine from the United States on 29.08.21. To date, only about 1% of Yemen's population has been vaccinated.