



Briefing Notes

Group 62 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

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Afghanistan

Security situation

The exile media Hasht-e Subh reports that on 01.04.23, the religious scholar Mufti Rohullah, who appears to have close links to the Taliban, was shot dead by unidentified assailants in Kabul. No one has claimed responsibility for the attack. On 02.05.23, two young men were killed by unknown attackers in Farah and Logar provinces, according to media reports. On 06.05.23, another religious scholar was murdered by unknown individuals in Ghor province. Media reports say that unidentified killings and suicides are on the rise throughout the country. On 07.05.23, heavy fighting was reported between the Taliban and the National Resistance Front (NRF) in Baghlan province (Khost district). No casualty figures were reported.

Government leadership

Abdul Malik Haqqani, the Taliban's appointed deputy chief justice said on 04.05.23 that since taking power, the court has imposed 175 qisas (translated as retribution verdicts, here presumably floggings), 37 stonings and four sentences in which the convict is buried by a collapsing wall. Some of the sentences have not yet been carried out. On 05.05.23, it was reported that in Bamiyan province, a couple was sentenced to death by stoning for having an extramarital affair. The sentence has not yet been carried out.

Saied Khosti, the former spokesman of the Taliban's Interior Ministry, called on social media on 02.05.23 to kill opponents of the Taliban inside and outside Afghanistan with knives. He said that there were hundreds of volunteers in Europe and the USA, and that any refugee who preached against the Taliban should be killed. Apparently, this also applied domestically. The tweet has since been deleted.

On 05.04.23, Taliban Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi held trilateral talks with his counterparts from Pakistan and China in Islamabad. The meeting focused on the inclusion of Afghanistan in the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).

Persecution situation

On 27.04.23, the UN Security Council adopted a resolution on the situation of women in Afghanistan, criticising the Taliban's increasing erosion of human rights and fundamental freedoms for women. The Council expressed deep concern by the Taliban's ban on women to work for the UN, saying that would hamper and block the work of the UN. Apparently, a possible withdrawal of the UN from Afghanistan is imminent (cf. BN of 17.04.23 and 24.04.23). In this context, the UN Secretary General António Guterres invited representatives of the UN member states to a conference in Doha, Qatar, on 01.05. and 02.05.23. The Taliban were not invited there. The discussion was about how to deal with the de facto government of Afghanistan and how to exert pressure to lift the ban on women working and girls attending school, as this was the only way the UN could continue to operate in the country. According to a media report on 01.05.23, the local Taliban ministry of virtue in Bamiyan Province closed a sports stadium because the athletes were wearing un-Islamic clothing. Following the closure, the stadium manager was

arrested. On 01.05.23, the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) called on the Taliban government to investigate the murder of a pregnant woman by two Taliban fighters in Ghor province. On 30.04.23, the Taliban reportedly arrested a former Afghan army general from Panjshir province in Kabul. Also on 30.04.23, media reported that the Taliban's Information and Culture Department in Ghazni province warned all local media not to broadcast advertisements recorded with female voices, saying that violation would be punished. On 03.05.23, the Taliban's local department of virtue in Herat province warned drivers not to allow women to ride in their cars without veils.

Angola

Cabinda: FLEC reports killing of soldiers

According to a media report of 06.05.23, the separatist organisation Frente de Libertação do Estado de Cabinda (FLEC), which is fighting for the independence of the Cabinda exclave, stated that its armed wing (FLEC-FAC) had killed three soldiers and two Brazilian employees of a gold mining company during an operation against the army in the Buco Zau area. The statement reportedly regretted the deaths of the two Brazilians. The government's claim that Cabinda has been pacified was a lie, the statement continued, as the region was still in a state of war. There has been no reaction from the government so far.

Benin

Deadly attacks in the north

Media report that on 01.05. and 02.05.23, unknown assailants killed a total of 20 civilians in the northern towns of Kaobagou and Guimbagou. Apparently, a large number of unidentified gunmen on motorbikes entered Kaobagou late on 01.05. and slit the throats of 15 people. About ten young men are reportedly missing from the village which is located in the department of Atacora. Security in the region is considered to be under threat, including from jihadist groups. In the border region with Burkina Faso, as in the north of the neighbouring country Togo, there have been frequent acts of violence against the security forces and military installations, but also against civilians (cf. BN of 28.11.22, 13.03.23 and 24.04.23). There have also been occasional reports of intercommunal conflicts between different ethnic groups in northern Benin.

Belarus

Journalist sentenced to several years in prison

On 03.05.23, journalist, blogger and opposition activist Roman Protasevich was sentenced to eight years' prison camp by a regional court in the capital Minsk. He had been hauled from his plane and arrested on 23.05.21 after his flight scheduled from Greece to Lithuania was diverted and forced to land in Minsk by Belarusian fighter jet claiming there was a bomb threat. He was the editor-in-chief of the Telegram messaging channel Nexta, which was used to post meeting places and other notices of protest actions during the mass protests against President Lukashenko in 2020. The court also sentenced in absentia both the founder and a senior editor of Nexta to 20 and 19 years' imprisonment, respectively. The charges against all the defendants included conspiracy to seize power.

Burundi

Appeals court upholds ten-year prison sentence for female journalist

Local media report that the Court of Appeal in Bujumbura upheld the lower court's verdict in a decision published on 02.05.23. Journalist Floriane Irangabiye had been arrested on 30.08.22 by members of the secret service in Bujumbura. On 02.01.23, the Mukaza High Court in Bujumbura Province sentenced her to ten years imprisonment and a fine of approximately USD 482 for undermining the integrity of the national territory. On 28.04.23, five human rights defenders who had been detained for more than two months on charges of rebellion and undermining state security were released. Despite concerns about the press freedom situation, both the EU and the US had resumed

financial aid to Burundi in 2022, citing political progress under President Evariste Ndayishimiye. He has reportedly slowly ended Burundi's years of isolationism under the rule of former President Pierre Nkurunziza. However, he has not been able to improve the human rights situation. Burundi is one of the world's poorest countries. The USA and the EU had imposed sanctions on the country over the political crisis that erupted in 2015. The political and social unrest at the time reportedly claimed 1,200 lives, and 400,000 people fled Burundi.

Central African Republic

Fleeing Sudan: humanitarian situation

The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and media citing other UN agencies reported 06.50.23 that around 9,700 people, mostly women and children, have arrived in the border town of Am-Dafok (also Am Dafok, Vakanga prefecture) since the beginning of the current conflict in Sudan (cf. BN of 17.04.23), with more expected. About one third of them, 3,460, are Central African returnees. They were accommodated in host families or improvised camps and will be redistributed within the country if possible.

The conflict in Sudan is also having an indirect impact: The northern prefectures of Vakanga and Bamingui-Bangoran are dependent on the supply route from Sudan particularly during the rainy season that starts later in May 2023 and lasts until October 2023. In Vakanga's capital Birao, prices for sugar and millet have already doubled. OCHA warned that without adequate support, the already dire food insecurity (cf. BN of 30.01.23), which affects 120,000 people in the north of the country, may significantly worsen by August 2023. The current annual humanitarian plan for the entire country is only 22 percent funded.

Security in border areas (South Sudan, Cameroon, Chad)

The border areas with other neighbouring countries have also been the subject of recent media reports.

On 22.04 and 23.04.23, fighting reportedly broke out in the far east of the Central African between the local militia "Azande ani kpi Gbe" and South Sudanese soldiers who had crossed the border, resulting in between the local militia "Azande ani kpi Gbe" and South Sudanese soldiers who had crossed the border, resulting in deaths and injuries. Azande ani kpi Gbe is fighting to liberate the village of Bambouti, which is controlled by the rebel group Unité pour la paix en Centrafrique (UPC). The UPC and the South Sudanese army are reportedly partners in controlling cross-border trade.

A report on 25.04.23 states that Cameroon's military announced that it would deploy more troops on the border with the Central African Republic as rebel groups have repeatedly crossed into Cameroon from fighting with the UN blue helmet mission MINUSCA to resupply.

According to a press report of 28.04.23, Foreign Minister Sylvie Baïpo-Témon has attempted to improve relations with Chad following inter-ethnic clashes in the south-west on 17.04 and 18.04.23, which allegedly also involved Chadian rebels operating from the Central African Republic. Baïpo-Témon said that her country could not accept serving as a refuge for groups from neighbouring countries. For their part, pro-government organisations accuse Chad of supporting the rebel alliance Coalition des patriotes pour le changement (CPC).

Egypt

Al Jazeera journalist released after nearly four years in prison

On 01.05.23, the authorities reportedly released Egyptian journalist Hisham Abdel Aziz of the Qatari news channel Al Jazeera from pre-trial detention after nearly four years in prison. The journalist, who had been arrested during a family visit in 2019, was accused of spreading false news and belonging to a terrorist organisation. According to the Qatari news channel, two of his colleagues remain in detention; they were also arrested during a visit to their home country.

Ethiopia

Fighting and assassination in Amhara

On 27.04.23, the leader of the ruling Prosperity Party in the Amhara regional state, Girma Yeshitla, was the victim of an assassination attempt along with his driver and four security personnel. Sources report that the incident was linked to the disarmament of the local militias and the integration of the regional special forces into the Ethiopian army, which had supported Girma (cf. BN of 24.04.23). For this reason, Amhara nationalists called him a 'traitor' on social networks. Three days later, the arrest of 47 suspects was reported. In addition to involvement in the assassination, they were reportedly accused of plotting to overthrow the regional government. The government blames the Amharic Fano militia for the attack and has announced an operation against the militia.

Local reports say that since 01.05.23, intense fighting has been taking place between the Ethiopian military and the Fano in the Amharic part of the North Shewa Zone. People suspected of supporting Fano are threatened with arrest. According to the military, Fano fighters are hard to identify because the Ethiopian government had distributed large numbers of weapons in Amhara during the conflict in Tigray.

First peace talks with Oromo rebels inconclusive

The first round of peace talks between the Ethiopian government and the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA; Oneg-Shane), which is classified as terrorist organisation, aiming to resolve the armed conflict in the regional state of Oromia, ended without a result on 03.05.23. While the negotiations were reportedly constructive, agreement could not be reached on certain issues. However, both sides agreed to meet again, but a new date has not yet been set. The talks involving Norway, Kenya and the Executive Secretary of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) had begun a week earlier on the Tanzanian island of Zanzibar.

The OLA, a splinter group of the Oromo Liberation Front, refuses to engage in political discourse with the Ethiopian government and demands, at gunpoint, autonomy for the Oromia region, Ethiopia's largest regional state by area, which completely surrounds the capital Addis Ababa. Since 2019, the government has been persecuting members and suspected supporters of the OLA. Expert observers estimate their strength at a few thousand men but consider them too poorly organised and armed to pose a real threat to the Ethiopian government. Since October 2022, fighting has increased in Oromia, with the involvement of government forces, the OLA as well as regional militias. Human rights violations, including indiscriminate killings, displacement, destruction, and looting, have been reported by all parties involved (cf. BN of 15.11.22, 12.12.22, 19.12.22 and 20.02.23). In January 2023, the Ethiopian army launched a new offensive against the OLA (cf. BN of 09.01.23). Recently, there have been increasing calls for peace negotiations with the OLA to reach an agreement similar to that with the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) concluded in November 2022 (cf. BN of 09.01.23).

Gambella Liberation Front (GLF) ends armed struggle

The Gambella Liberation Front (GLF) has announced that it will end its armed struggle and defend the interests of the Gambella ethnic group peacefully. This follows peace talks between the GLF and the Ethiopian central government and the Gambella regional state government in Addis Ababa and in Juba in South Sudan. It was agreed that the GLF would return to Gambella and be included in a rehabilitation programme.

The GLF was one of several rebel groups that had allied with the TPLF in November 2021 to overthrow the Ethiopian government. On 14.06.22, members of the OLA and the GLF temporarily took control of the town of Gambella, the capital of the regional state, in a joint operation (cf. BN of 20.06.22).

The Gambia

NHRC updates on suspension of accused public officials

According to the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), a total of 22 people accused of crimes committed under the previous government of President Yahya Jammeh have been suspended so far (cf. BN of 13.06.22 and 30.05.22). In September 2022, JusticeInfo had criticised the lack of progress in the procedures announced by the state for the suspension, dismissal and disqualification from office of persons with criminal records who continue to work in the public service, particularly in the security sector (cf. BN of 12.09.22).

RSF certifies The Gambia significant progress in press freedom; safety of media professionals

The NGO Reporters Without Borders (RSF) has ranked The Gambia in 46th position out of 180 countries surveyed in its 2023 Press Freedom Index, with a score of 71.06/100. This is an improvement of four places compared to the previous year (50th position with a score of 69.25/100). In retrospect, the Gambia has thus improved by almost 100 places since the change of government from long-time President Jammeh to President Adama Barrow at the end of 2016/ beginning of 2017 respectively (Press Freedom Index 2017: 143rd position with a score of 53.3/100).

RSF notes that since the transition, a freer, more diverse, and pluralistic media environment has emerged. In some cases, a better legal framework has been created for media professionals. In addition, media workers are now less exposed to attacks and threats; during the Jammeh era, they had been regularly subjected to arbitrary arrest, detention, forced disappearance and other reprisals. There have also been no known cases of detention of media workers since 2017.

However, the repressive media laws, which have not yet been reformed and some of which are still in force, encourage self-censorship, according to RSF. In addition, the authorities sometimes exert pressure on the media. In particular, the issue of protection and security of media professionals needs to be addressed. For the reporting year 2022, RSF notes that security forces continue to frequently treat media workers 'brutally'. No further details were provided on this issue.

The Gambia Press Union (GPU) has taken the publication of the Press Freedom Index 2022 as an opportunity to point out once more to the ongoing problem of impunity in cases of violent attacks on media workers, saying that cases of this kind are mainly the responsibility of police forces and political party supporters. Since Barrow's inauguration, more than 15 unpunished attacks on media workers have been documented (cf. BN of 07.11.22). The GPU also criticised verbal attacks on media representatives by political figures, including President Barrow.

Ghana

Security agencies strained by conflicts over traditional leadership

On 26.04.23, Ghana's Minister of Chieftaincy and Religious Affairs, Stephen Asamoah-Boateng, said in an interview that currently 70 percent of all matters handled by the Ministry of National Security are conflicts over traditional leadership. 139 of the 505 ongoing conflicts are increasingly putting a strain on the security budget and the stability of the country.

One example is the tense security situation in the town of Bawku in the Upper East Region. Following a visit to the district on 04.05.23, the Ministry of National Security announced the deployment of a task force to Bawku municipality. Reportedly, long-standing rivalries over traditional rule between the Mamprusi and Kusasi ethnic groups escalated violently on 15.02.23, with one group declaring a parallel king. Security experts warn that terrorist groups in the Sahel could exploit the precarious security situation at the borders to increase instability. Fuelling the local conflict in Bawku, they say, is a way of gaining a foothold in Anglophone West Africa.

Guinea

Opposition declares failure of dialogue

A news agency reports that on 28.04.23, the coalition of political parties, trade unions and civil society groups "Forces Vives de Guinée" (FVG) declared the failure of the dialogue with the ruling transitional government moderated by religious authorities since 13.03.23 (cf. BN of 20.03.23). The consultations were reportedly unproductive. Instead, the demonstrations in public space, which had been suspended and generally prohibited in the meantime, would be resumed.

Action by the security forces

On 27.04.23, transitional president and junta leader Mamadi Doumbouya disbanded the Bataillon de la sécurité présidentielle (BSP), which is the unit in charge of the Head of State's security. No explanations were given, according to media reports. It is presumed that Doumbouya mistrusts the BSP and other units. On 05.09.21, he himself had seized power as head of the Groupement des forces spéciales (GFS), which is also close to the president.

According to a media report, members of the BSP had tried to stand in his way at the time. A few days before the dissolution of the BSP, Doumbouya had already dismissed the director of the military intelligence service.

Haiti

Gang members lynched by civilians; UN warns about security in Port-au-Prince

Various media report that on 24.04.23, several lynchings took place in the capital Port-au-Prince, when between ten and 14 suspected gang members arrested by the police were killed by a crowd of people. According to the UN, the security situation in the capital is increasingly resembling that of a war zone due to the spread and intensification of violent clashes between rival gangs, but also with the police.

India

Kashmir: Five soldiers killed

Last week, five soldiers were reportedly killed in the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir after a suspected rebel attack in the Rajouri sector (cf. BN of 24.04.23).

Manipur: Ethnic conflicts

Following the outbreak of unrest in the north-eastern state of Manipur bordering Myanmar, the government has sent thousands of soldiers to the region, imposed curfews and restricted internet access. The background to the unrest is conflict between the Hindu Meitei ethnic group and the Christian Kuki and Naga tribes. The dominant Meitei want to be classified as a 'Scheduled Tribe', which would give them access to government subsidies and privileged access to forest areas. The other tribes fear being marginalised. The violence led to protests by the Kuki tribe on 03.05.23. More than 50 people have since died in the ensuing unrest. As of 07.05.23, a total of 23,000 people have been evacuated.

Iran

Female activist sentenced to prison again

According to media reports on 05.05.23, prominent labour activist Sepideh Qolian has been sentenced to a further prison term. She was re-arrested on 15.03.23 shortly after being released from Tehran's Evin prison and publicly chanting slogans against the Supreme Revolutionary Leader Khamenei in the media (cf. BN of 20.03.23). Her brother informed on social media that she was sentenced to two years in prison for of this action. Official reports of the trial have not yet been made public.

Reports on the execution of prisoners

Foreign media have reported the executions of several prisoners in different prisons, saying that at least 45 people convicted of drug offences (drug trafficking) or murder have been executed since the beginning of May 2023. A disproportionate number of death sentences has been carried out against members of the Baloch ethnic minority. A human rights organisation based in Norway estimates a total of twelve executions of persons of Balochi origin. Other reports say that the number is at least 19. In the province of Sistan and Baluchistan, high unemployment and a lack of infrastructure mean that smuggling fuel, goods, and drugs is often the only way to make a living. According to human rights organisations, the Islamic Republic carried out at least 582 executions in 2022, which is a 75 percent increase on the previous year.

Union strikes and arrests

Media report that on the eve of International Labour Day, 01.05.23, several trade union and labour activists were arrested in Tehran and in the provinces of Kordestan and Gilan. Twelve people were detained by security forces in Tehran. Three to four people require hospital treatment. Several people have reportedly already been released on bail. There were also reports that strikers in the oil, gas and petrochemical industries were threatened with

dismissal. As of 01.05.23, workers' rallies were held in several cities in eleven provinces (Khuzestan, Isfahan, Fars, Tehran, Kermanshah, Gilan, Mazandaran, Sistan and Baluchistan, Markazi, Khorasan Razavi and Yazd).

Freedom of expression in 2022: 57 writers in prison

At least 57 Iranian writers were imprisoned in 2022, according to PEN America's Freedom to Write Index. The index shows that a total of 311 writers are imprisoned worldwide, most of them in China (90), followed by Iran. Also, Iran is the country with the highest proportion of female writers in prison (16 out of 46 worldwide).

Iraq

Turkish military operations

On both 04.05. and 05.05.23, the Turkish military informed that it had killed one wanted PKK member in Iraq. On 06.05.23, Türkiye carried out air strikes in the Metina region, but there were no casualties.

Sinjar: Tensions between Yazidis and Muslims

On 27.04.23, dozens of Yazidis protested in Sinjar against the return of 25 Arab families to the district. The protesters accused the families of having links to IS. Shortly afterwards, a video of the protests circulated on social media with a caption stating that the Yazidi protesters had set fire to a mosque. This in turn led to hate messages against the Yazidis, and local imams also reportedly made negative comments about Yazidis in their Friday sermons. The head of the Yazidi community denied the attack on the mosque, as did the security forces.

US Commission: Deficiencies in religious freedom in Iraq and the Autonomous Region of Kurdistan (KR-I)

The annual report of the Commission on International Religious Freedom published on 01.05.23 accuses the Iraqi government of failing to adequately implement the 'Yazidi Survivors Law' passed in 2021, which provides for financial assistance for members of the Yazidi, Christian, Turkmen and Shabak communities who became victims of IS terror. The report also criticises the actions of members of the Popular Mobilisation Forces (PMF) against religious minorities at informal checkpoints, which it says is preventing displaced Christians in particular from returning to Mosul and the Nineveh Plain. Furthermore, the Kurdish Regional Government is accused of tolerating and in some cases instigating discriminatory acts against the Christian population, including poorer communal services and illegal land transfers.

Iraqi government: Decrease in poverty

A spokesperson for the Iraqi Ministry of Planning informed on 30.04.23 that the poverty rate in Iraq has continued to decrease to currently 22 percent (compared to 31 percent in 2020).

Death penalty for killer of Hisham al-Hashimi

On 07.05.23, the main suspect in the murder of Hisham al-Hashimi was found guilty and sentenced to death. Hisham al-Hashimi was a well known and critical political analyst among the Iraqi public who was attacked and shot dead by a group of masked men outside his home on 06.07.20. He was under the protection of the powerful militia leader Abu Abu. He was under the protection of the powerful militia leader Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis and the Iranian Revolutionary Guards commander Qasem Soleimani, who had been killed by an American drone strike on 03.01.20.

Jordan

Emergency law repealed

On 07.05.23, a decree by the King confirmed the cabinet's decision to repeal the Emergency Law, which had been in force since March 2020. The law allowed the Jordanian Prime Minister to curtail basic rights of the population and to suspend already existing laws for the duration of the Emergency Law. Critics have accused the government of using the law to crack down on the political opposition in recent years.

The announcement came two days after the WHO lifted its classification of COVID-19 as a global health emergency.

Lebanon

Action against Syrian refugees

Administrative pressure on Syrian refugees continues to increase. On 02.05.23, the Ministry of Interior issued a general order to local authorities that only Syrians with legal residence be allowed rent apartments. Also, local curfews are in place for Syrians. There are numerous reports of raids in refugee camps and other places where large numbers of Syrian refugees are suspected to be living.

An international news agency reported on 28.04.23 that the Lebanese army has intensified measures against Syrian refugees in recent weeks. Apparently, some 450 people have been arrested and at least 66 deported to Syria. The UNHCR also documented at least 13 raids on Syrian communities in Lebanon in the month of April 2023. In practice, the authorities make little distinction between legal and illegal residence, according to reports from affected people and activists. Regularisation of stay for Syrians in Lebanon is subject to high hurdles that are beyond reach for most refugees from Syria. According to the Lebanese authorities, there are approximately two million Syrians living in Lebanon.

New registration of refugees has been suspended since 2015. Lebanon has no asylum law and did not ratify the Geneva Refugee Convention.

UNHCR has stated to be able to assist only about 43 percent of the refugees in Lebanon in local currency. The maximum rate for a vulnerable family of five or more members is currently the equivalent of about 80 USD.

Libya

Six Libyans face death penalty

According to media reports, six Libyans face the death penalty if convicted after they were arrested by security forces in March 2023. Their conversion to Christianity and their alleged proselytising violated Article 207 of the Libyan Penal Code, which criminalises acts aimed at changing fundamental constitutional principles and social order, as well as the possession of media that endangers the state. Critics say that the recourse to legislation is increasingly being used to intimidate NGOs and civil society. The 2011 transitional constitution, drafted after the fall of Muammar al-Gaddafi, guarantees non-Muslims the freedom to practice their religion, but ongoing political disputes have led to disagreement about the legal provisions.

Mali

Attacks in central Mali

Media report that on 22.04.23, three suicide bombings took place in the town of Sévaré (Mopti region) near a military base, leaving at least nine civilians dead and 60 injured. The attacks reportedly involved the detonation of explosive-laden vehicles. Twenty houses were destroyed in the blasts. No one has yet claimed responsibility for the attacks.

Montenegro / North Macedonia

World Press Freedom Index 2023 shows improvements, says RSFs

Recent media reports say that press freedom in Montenegro and Northern Macedonia has improved significantly, as the latest World Press Freedom Index 2023 shows. Compared to last year, Montenegro has recorded one of the most significant improvements, moving up 24 places to 39 in the world. In the Western Balkans, North Macedonia is currently the best performer at 38 (also a significant improvement from 57 in 2022). However, on the occasion of the World Press Freedom Day on 03.05.23, journalists' associations and media organisations in the Balkan region called on the authorities to take the increasing threats against journalists in the region more seriously, to prioritise the prosecution of such acts and to guarantee a safe working environment for media professionals.

Morocco

Amazigh New Year now an official holiday

Various media report that with King Mohammed VI's decision on 03.05.23, the Amazigh New Year will be an official public holiday. This further strengthens the rights of the Amazigh, whose script and language is now the second official language alongside Arabic. The Amazigh New Year is celebrated on 12 January.

Prisoners denied access to reading and writing facilities; press freedom curtailed

Amnesty International stated on 03.05.23 that several detainees were denied the right to reading and writing facilities. Journalists critical of the government and a human rights lawyer were denied materials, and in some cases notes and diaries were confiscated or destroyed. Reporters Without Borders also reported a deterioration in working conditions for media professionals. Morocco has dropped nine places in the press freedom ranking and is now 144 out of 180 countries.

Nicaragua

Mass arrests of suspected government critics, summary trials and house arrests

Reuters reports that in raids on the night of 04.05.23, at least 40 oppositionists critical of the government were arrested, among them media workers and human rights defenders. According to the national human rights organisation Monitoreo Azul y Blanco, the number is at least 57 people. After being charged in Managua with crimes including treason and conspiracy to undermine the national identity, they have been placed under house arrest, according to relatives.

Niger

Soldiers killed

On 07.05.23, seven soldiers were killed when their vehicle drove over a landmine near the village of Samira (Tillabéri region). The village is located in the south-west of the country near the border with Burkina Faso. It is home to the only industrial gold mine in the country. The region has been the target of repeated attacks by jihadist groups.

Nigeria

Kogi State: Security forces rescue dozens of hostages

Police forces in central Kogi State, in a joint operation with local vigilante groups fighting criminals in the region, have rescued 58 people kidnapped by gangs. Media reports of the successful operation did not specify how long the hostages had been held. A police spokesperson said on 07.05.23 that the rescue operation took place in the Udulu forest. One of the hostages did not survive the operation and an unknown number of kidnappers escaped injured.

ISWAP activities in April 2023

A recent BBC report provides an overview of the violence perpetrated by the Islamist group Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) over the past month. The sources used are ISWAP statements, media reports and social media research. The compilation published on 03.05.23 shows, among other things, that the ISWAP group has claimed responsibility for 29 attacks in April 2023, which is a decrease compared to 38 attacks in March 2023. During the Ramadan period from mid-March to mid-April 2023, a total of 39 attacks were reported to have resulted in 107 deaths or injuries. Most of the incidents targeted security forces in north-eastern Borno state. There were also four attacks on Nigerian territory. One attack was recorded for the first time in northern Jigawa state and another one for the second time in south-eastern Edo state. When reporting on Islamist groups in Nigeria, it should be noted that the terminology is not always used consistently. This holds particularly for the terms Boko Haram, Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'Awati Wal-Jihad (JAS) and ISWAP (cf. BN of 27.03.23).

Pakistan

Explosions at police station

On 24.04.23, at least 12 people were killed and another 50 injured in explosions at a police station in Kabal in Swat district, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. The building then collapsed. According to the head of the authorities, the blast was not the result of an Islamist attack but was caused by a short circuit in a basement room where explosives were stored.

Balochistan: protests over disappearances; school closures

At the end of April 2023, various groups and families of missing Baloch people, student organisations and political parties held rallies in Balochistan province and in the capital Islamabad. In Turbat, the Baloch Students Organisation (BSO), together with families of missing people, organised a protest against state repression and violence against the Baloch ethnic group.

In addition, the Balochistan National Movement (BNM) reported that at least 76 schools in Balochistan province have been occupied by the Pakistani army and used as military posts.

Chinese worker accused of blasphemy granted bail

On 27.04.23, a court in Abbottabad released on bail the Chinese worker accused of blasphemy citing lack of evidence (cf. BN of 24.04.23).

Mob lynches man for alleged blasphemy

On 07.05.23, a local religious leader was killed by a crowd following a speech perceived as blasphemous at a rally organised by the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party in Sawaldher village, Mardan district (Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province). Security forces initially managed to take the victim to safety in a nearby shop, but the mob entered the building, dragged the man out and beat him to death with batons.

Attacks on media workers

A recent report by the Pakistani media rights organisation Freedom Network has documented a total of 140 cases of violence or threats against media workers and media organisations between May 2022 and March 2023, with 56 of the cases registered in the capital Islamabad. This represents a 60 percent increase on the previous reporting period.

According to the Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists, militant Islamist groups are responsible for the increasing number of attacks. Traditionally, the military and intelligence services have also posed a threat to media workers.

TTP militants kill security forces in North Waziristan

Six soldiers were killed in an attack by Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) militants in North Waziristan, the military said on 04.05.23.

Shia teachers killed in attack on school in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

On 04.05.23, unidentified gunmen killed seven teachers belonging to the Shia Turi tribe in an attack on a school in Kurram district of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, bordering Afghanistan. A few hours earlier, a Sunni teacher from the same school had also been shot dead in the street. The Shia population living in the former tribal areas is regularly targeted by local Islamist groups.

Palestinian Autonomous Territories / Israel

Jerusalem: Seven injured

On 24.04.23, seven people were injured when a Palestinian man drove his car into a group of passers-by. The driver was shot dead by a bystander. According to the Israeli ambulance service Magen David Adom, he was probably suffering from mental illness.

West Bank: Several dead and injured

The Israeli military continues to conduct military operations and arrest raids in the West Bank almost every night, in what it says is an attempt to counter growing militancy. As a result, the number of Palestinians held in Israeli administrative detention has reached a new high for the past two decades. In clashes between the military and armed Palestinians, seven Palestinians were killed in raids between 24.04. and 06.05.23, among them a minor and the suspects in the murder of three Israeli-British women (cf. BN of 17.04. 23). Five of those killed were reportedly members of the armed wing of Hamas and the al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades.

On 25.04.23, gunmen opened fire on a group of Israelis who were walking near a settlement in the West Bank, leaving one individual wounded. On 03.05.23, a Palestinian man was seriously wounded by military gunfire after refusing to cooperate at a checkpoint and attempting to attack an army soldier, according to the military. On 04.05.23, the Israeli military shot dead a Palestinian woman at a checkpoint near the village of Huwara after she attacked a soldier with a knife, the military said.

Palestinian dies after hunger strike in Israeli custody

After almost three months on hunger strike, Khader Adnan, a senior member of the Islamic Jihad militant group, died in Israeli custody on 02.05.23. His death sparked a general strike, protests and clashes between civilians and the Israeli military, as well as rocket fire from Gaza (see below). Adnan had already been imprisoned and held under administrative detention a dozen times in the past and was a symbol of resistance against the Israeli occupation for many Palestinians. Several times he organised hunger strikes to demand his release. Administrative detention allows the Israeli authorities to detain people without formal charges for extended periods of time, which can range from months to years. The Israeli authorities justify the use of administrative detention on the grounds that it allows them to detain suspects without having to reveal sensitive intelligence information. Human rights groups criticise that this concept denies individuals access to due process.

Gaza / Israel: Rocket fire

Following the death of a Palestinian detainee (see above), militant groups from Gaza fired rockets and mortar shells at populated areas in southern Israel, with many projectiles landing inside Gaza. On Israeli territory, at least three people were wounded, one of them seriously. The Israeli military responded by directing jets and tanks at targets of the militant groups such as military posts, tunnels and weapons depots. One uninvolved Palestinian was killed when shrapnel hit his house. Five others were wounded. The exchange of fire was ended by a ceasefire in the early morning of 03.05.23.

WFP: Significant reduction in aid to Palestinians from June

On 07.05.23, the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) announced that it will no longer be able to provide food aid and monthly food vouchers to more than 200,000 Palestinians from June 2023 due to a lack of funding. While 140,000 people will continue to receive food, the cut will amount to 60 percent of previous assistance, WFP said. Families will be hardest hit in Gaza, where food insecurity and poverty are widespread, and 80 percent of the inhabitants are dependent on international aid. WFP Country Director Abdeljaber also announced a complete cut-off of aid in August 2023 if the UN agency does not receive further funding.

Paraguay

Election results; protests and arrest of a losing opponent for 'disturbing the peace'.

The National Electoral Authority has informed that Santiago Peña, the candidate of the ruling right-wing party Colorado has won the presidential elections with over 42 percent of the votes. He thus defeated his rival candidates, among them his opponent Efraín Alegre, who had been almost tied with Peña in the pre-election polls. Reports of corruption within the Colorado party had recently surfaced. Since re-election is not possible in Paraguay, the current incumbent Mario Abdo Benítez did not run again. The Colorado ruling party, which has been in power almost permanently for decades, won majorities in both chambers of congress and secured 15 of 17 governorships. On 01.05.23, after the third-placed candidate Paraguayo Cubas had called for a vote recount citing irregularities, clashes broke out between his supporters and the state security forces. In this context, more than 70 people were

arrested and investigations were launched. On 05.05.23 Cubas himself was also arrested for 'disturbing the peace'. International election observers saw no signs of irregularities.

Peru

Report on social protests (December 2022 - January 2023)

In its report on recent social protests based on numerous interviews with those affected, relatives, authorities and civil society organisations, which was published on 03.05.23, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) found that disproportionate and lethal violence had been used in the cities of Lima, Ica, Arequipa and Cusco, among others, and that in Ayacucho there may even have been extrajudicial killings. The Boluarte government has denied that extrajudicial killings have taken place but has announced that it will examine the implementation of the report's recommendations.

Russian Federation

New Russian citizenship law

On 28.04.23, President Putin signed a new law on citizenship which allows Russian citizenship not acquired by birth to be revoked in a number of cases, among them denigrating the armed forces or spreading false information about the armed forces, rehabilitating national socialism, and involvement in extremist acts. At the same time, the law makes it easier to obtain Russian citizenship by reducing the necessary requirements for more than 20 groups of people. In particular, former citizens of the Soviet Union and their children, as well as those who have signed a contract for at least one year of service in the Russian military or in another military formation, will benefit from simplified access to citizenship.

Tightening of criminal law

A law signed by President Putin on 28.04.23 drastically increased the penalties for various offences in the Russian Criminal Code: The maximum penalty for treason against the state was increased from 20 years to life imprisonment, and for sabotage from 15 to 20 years imprisonment. Similarly, up to 20 years' imprisonment can now be imposed on those who commit acts aimed at destabilising the political system. In addition, the minimum sentence for facilitating terrorist activities has been increased from five to seven years.

Senegal

Arrest of several underage girls for homosexual activities

Citing the Senegalese daily Libération, the news portal PressAfrik reported on 02.05.23 on the arrest of seven underage girls in connection with homosexual activities in the Cité Mixta district of the capital Dakar. The girls were caught in flagrante by the police in a private apartment; their parents were summoned by the police and eventually released after 24 hours. No further information could be found on the incident or whether charges were brought or whether the case was dropped.

Sonko supporters injured and arrested

Media report that on 30.04.23 police fired tear gas at the convoy of opposition leader Ousmane Sonko and his supporters in Taiba Ndiaye (Thiès region). Eight people were arrested. Sonko's supporters further reported that seven people were injured, some of them seriously. Sonko's supporters also criticised the police action, the general repression of the opposition and the violation of the constitutionally protected freedom of expression and assembly. The police justified their action on the grounds of non-compliance with a ban on demonstrations and disturbance of public security and other public interests.

Senegal is among the countries with the sharpest deterioration in press freedom in 2022

In its Press Freedom Index 2023 published on 03.05.23 by the NGO Reporters Without Borders (RSF), Senegal ranked 104 out of 180 countries assessed in the index, with a score of 55.82/100. This is a significant deterioration

compared to the previous year (73rd position with a score of 63.07/100). According to RSF, Senegal, once considered a 'regional model' for upholding press freedom, is one of the countries where press freedom has deteriorated the most in 2022. RSF found that the security of media workers has deteriorated sharply. Arrests and intimidation of media workers have increased, as have cases of violence and threats of various kinds against media workers. RSF also criticised the criminal proceedings against the two journalists Pape Alé Niang and Pape Ndiaye (cf. BN of 16.01.23 and 14.03.23).

Media reports say that the director of the news site Kewoulo, Babacar Touré, was charged with spreading false news and other offences and that he was placed under judicial supervision on the day of the publication of RSF's Press Freedom Index. Touré had been held in police custody since 26.04.2023. His detention was extended six times by the public prosecutor's office recurring to the practice of 'retour de parquet', which has been criticised for years by the UN Committee against Torture (CAT). A former police officer who had filed the complaint reportedly accused Touré of personally endangering him by reporting on one of the pending court cases against opposition politician Sonko.

On 03.05.23 the recently formed heterogeneous opposition movement Mouvement des forces vives du Sénégal - F24 (cf. BN of 24.04.2023) criticised the 'numerous' arrests of media workers in the country, including those of Ndiaye and, more recently, of Thioro Mandela and other media workers.

Somalia

Al-Shabaab attacks

On 04.05.23, Prime Minister Hamza Abdi Barre said in a speech to the cabinet that the number of al-Shabaab attacks have reportedly decreased by 70 percent in the past six months due to robust security measures. President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud said on 03.05.23 that the government planned to launch the second phase of the offensive against al-Shabaab with the expected support from Kenyan, Ethiopian and Djiboutian troops. Security experts believe that although al-Shabaab has been pushed out of some areas (cf. BN of 23.01.23 and 17.04.23), it still poses a major threat to the security of Somalia and the whole region.

Five people executed by al-Shabaab

On 05.05.23, al-Shabaab executed five men in a public square in Jilib (Middle Juba region), claiming that they were spying on al-Shabaab for the governments of Somalia and the U.S.

Sudan

Ongoing fighting

After both sides had at least partially disregarded several ceasefire agreements, the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) agreed to a seven-day ceasefire on 02.05.23, effective from 04.05.23, according to the South Sudanese Foreign Ministry. The agreement was brokered by South Sudan's President Salva Kiir, representing the regional alliance IGAD. Despite the agreed ceasefire, however, fighting has continued, including in Khartoum.

The Sudanese Ministry of Health has stated that more than 500 people have been killed and over 4,000 injured so far.

Talks in Saudi Arabia

On the initiative of the United States and Saudi Arabia, representatives of the SAF and the RSF have been meeting in Jeddah (Saudi Arabia) since 06.05.23 for the first face-to-face talks lasting several days. Both sides said they would discuss a humanitarian ceasefire, but not an end to the conflict.

Deteriorating humanitarian situation

Despite some improvements in the accessibility of the internet and the functionality of the country's banking system, which had been severely restricted due to the fighting, Sudan's health system remains severely damaged. Two thirds of hospitals have had to close down (cf. BN of 24.04.23), according to information provided by the Sudanese Doctors' Union and confirmed by the WHO, leaving the health system on the brink of collapse.

In addition, health facilities in Khartoum are frequently used for military purposes by the warring parties. To date, some 26 attacks on health facilities have been recorded, resulting in the deaths of people working or receiving medical treatment there. According to further information from the UN, it is still possible to ship aid supplies by sea to Port Sudan. However, the supplies need to be stored because the ongoing fighting has made distribution too dangerous. The UN also stated that previous aid convoys from the UN's World Food Programme (WFP) were attacked and robbed on their way to Darfur. In total, almost a quarter of the aid in stock has been stolen in this way, which is why the Emergency Relief Coordinator for Sudan has repeatedly called on the warring parties in Sudan to arrange for the opening of humanitarian corridors.

Thousands of people fleeing violence

The UNHCR stated on 01.05.23 that if the conflict persists, more than 800,000 people are likely to leave Sudan and seek protection in Sudan's neighbouring countries. So far, 100,000 people have already fled Sudan. Based on these assumptions, the UNHCR is preparing for this scenario with partner countries and institutions.

Evacuation of foreign nationals

In response to the ongoing fighting and the deteriorating humanitarian situation, a civil movement has formed in the capital (Popular Initiative to Stop the War in Sudan), and has called for an end to the fighting and a return to the process of political transformation to a civilian government. The initiative has criticised what it sees as a lack of action by Western governments and international organisations to address the conflict. The large-scale evacuation of non-Sudanese nationals, which has already been completed, is seen as an evident turning away from the problems of the Sudanese people.

Syria

HRW: Syrian civilians mistreated by Turkish border guards

On 27.04.23 Human Rights Watch released a statement accusing Turkish border personnel of serious human rights violations against Syrians on at least two occasions in March 2023.

On 11.03.23, eight Syrian individuals were allegedly beaten and tortured by Turkish border guards after attempting to cross the border, resulting in the death of one man and an underage boy. Apparently, the Turkish authorities are investigating the incident.

On 13.03.23, a 59-year-old Syrian man was reportedly killed by indiscriminate shots fired by Turkish border guards at people in Syria. According to HRW, there is no information yet on an investigation into the incident by the Turkish authorities.

Since the beginning of the year, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR) has recorded a total of 11 deaths and 20 injuries resulting from clashes with Turkish border guards.

Civilian casualties after Israeli strike on Aleppo airport

The state news agency SANA reported an Israeli air strike on the international airport near Aleppo on 02.05.23, resulting in the deaths of seven people and a temporary suspension of flight operations.

According to the opposition-aligned Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR), four people were killed. They were members of militias loyal to Iran and one Syrian officer. Israel has not commented on the incident.

Togo

President comments for the first time on armed attacks in the north

In an interview of 27.04.23, President Faure Gnassingbé commented on the security situation in the north of the country. So far, the government has hardly given any information on this issue. According to President Gnassingbé, the armed attacks have so far claimed the lives of around 40 victims among defence and security forces and around 100 victims among civilians, with half of the civilian victims being non-Togolese nationals. At least 27,000 Burkinabe nationals have fled across the border to Togo in recent years.

Improvement in the area of freedom of the press

In the Press Freedom Index published on 03.05.23 by Reporters Without Borders (RSF), Togo has moved up 30 positions from 100 (in 2022) to now 70 out of 180. However, with a score of 63.06 out of 100, the country is still categorized as having 'identifiable problems' (score in 2022: 57.17). RSF noted that in case of insubordinate reporting, journalists in Togo face legal proceedings, intimidation, and violence, for example from the media regulator HAAC or the police.

Türkiye

Arrests among pro-Kurdish opposition circles

On 25.04.23, a large-scale police operation resulted in the arrest of more than 100 people from the pro-Kurdish opposition spectrum, including legal representatives and local politicians, across 21 cities in Türkiye, including Diyarbakır, Istanbul, Ankara and İzmir, as was reported by the NGO Reporters Without Borders (RSF). The arrests were made 19 days before Türkiye's presidential and parliamentary elections, which are due to take place on 14.05.23. A further seven people were arrested on 03.05.23. Among those arrested are several candidates for the parliamentary elections. Another seven people were placed under house arrest and nine others were released on conditions. The detainees are accused of organizing and participating in women's protests, the May Day rally, and the Pride March, as well as of making preparations for these protests.

Report of the Journalists' Union

On 03.05.23, the Turkish Journalists' Union (Türkiye Gazeteciler Sendikası, TGS) published a report on the situation of press freedom in Türkiye. During the reporting period between 2022 and 2023, at least 32 media workers were arrested, 96 physically assaulted and 43 verbally threatened. Currently, 47 journalists are held in prison for their journalistic activities. 80 percent of the detainees are accused of 'membership in an armed organisation'. 263 journalists were tried in 125 criminal cases in 2022, with 35 cases concluded and 63 journalists acquitted. In addition, access to 4,148 news articles and 46 news websites was blocked during this period. 682 news articles were wholly or partially removed, and nine news articles were blocked in search engines.

Ukraine

Developments in the war

In the night of 08.05.23, drone strikes on the capital Kyiv left five civilians injured and caused damage to residential buildings, according to the Ukrainian authorities. In the port city of Odessa, explosions and a fire at a food warehouse were reported overnight. The situation for civilians has grown increasingly dangerous in recent days, particularly in the Ukrainian-controlled parts of the Kherson region. According to the regional authorities, a total of 23 people were killed and another 46 injured on 03.05.23 following Russian attacks on various localities near the frontline in and around the regional capital of Kherson. A 58-hour curfew was imposed on the city of Kherson between 05.05.23 and 08.05.23. The Ukrainian General Staff reported heavy fighting around the towns of Bakhmut, Avdiivka and Marjinka in the Donetsk region, among other places. According to the Ukrainian Ministry of Defence, the possibility of an intensification of combat actions around the Russian symbolic Victory Day on 09.05.23 can neither be confirmed nor ruled out. In the Russian-occupied part of the Zaporizhzhya region, the occupation administration announced on 05.05.23 that children, elderly, and disabled people from 18 villages near the front would be evacuated. As of 08.05.23, a total of 1,679 people around the Zaporizhzhya nuclear power plant occupied by Russian forces have been moved to a temporary accommodation centre in the town of Berdyansk. On 02.05.23, the Ukrainian parliament approved draft laws submitted by President Zelensky to extend both the general mobilisation and the martial law for a further three months from 20.05.23 until 18.08.23.

Decree on deportations from occupied territories

Media report that on 27.04.23, Russian President Putin signed a decree allowing the deportation of individuals from the Russian-controlled areas of Ukraine as of 01.07.24 if they have not taken Russian citizenship by that date. Apparently, deportations and entry bans may be imposed on individuals from the areas concerned who are deemed a threat to Russia's security.

Venezuela

Report on alleged extrajudicial killings in police and military operations 2022

The Lupa por la Vida project of the two NGOs Centro Gumilla and Provea has documented more than 820 cases of alleged extrajudicial killings in police and military operations in 2022. Of those killed, nearly 98 percent were men; the proportion of women had doubled, albeit at a very low level. 66 percent of those killed were young men aged between 18 and 30 from poorer, densely populated neighbourhoods (known as zonas populares). The National Police (PNB), the Special Investigation Unit Cuerpo de Investigaciones Científicas, Penales y Criminalísticas (CICPC) and the Armed Forces (FANB, 129) were responsible for the majority of deaths, accounting for 196, 142, and 129 homicides, respectively. Various state police units accounted for 193 homicides, with the Carabobo and Zulia police units involved in 49 and 41 cases, respectively. There are still no official figures for the number of deaths that occurred during security operations.

Yemen

Detention conditions

Following the conclusion of the prisoner exchange between the Houthis and the internationally recognised government on 16.04.23, details of the detention conditions have now emerged. Former detainees in Houthi-controlled areas have reported daylight deprivation, solitary confinement, humiliation, beatings with sticks and wires, electric shocks, inadequate food supplies and inadequate medical treatment. Allegations by former detainees of the internationally recognised government include beatings, insults, and inadequate medical care.

Fighting around Taiz

On 06.05.23, fighting around Taiz briefly flared up again, leaving at least three Houthi fighters dead. This attack was one in a series of attempts by the Houthis to take over positions in the region with quick, small advances.

Group 62 - Information Centre for Asylum and Migration
Briefing Notes
BN-Redaktion@bamf.bund.de