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Briefing Notes

Group 62 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

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Afghanistan

Security situation: house searches and resistance offensive

The Taliban have continued to carry out extensive house searches in the capital Kabul and in the provinces of Panjshir, Parwan, Balkh, Daikundi and Bamyan, which are mainly populated by Tajiks and Hazaras (cf. BN of 28.02.22), confiscating arms, among other things. The Taliban say that in doing so, they are targeting criminals and terrorists. There are reports to the contrary that former government employees and security forces have been arrested and possibly tortured. The searches have been condemned by the international community. They may be pre-empting a spring offensive planned by the National Front of Resistance (NWF) (Persian New Year Nowruz begins on 21.03.22) (cf. BN of 31.01.21).

Persecution events

The Taliban detained a professor in Kabul on 04.03.22 and released him on 07.03.22. A female comedian has been missing for a month. In Kapisa province, it is now officially forbidden to play music, according to the local Ministry for the Propagation of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice. According to unconfirmed social media reports, in Kunar province two musicians were forced by the Taliban to destroy their instruments and a young man was shot dead by the Taliban in a car for playing music at a wedding.

Government business: freedom of travel and education

The announcement of exit restrictions by a Taliban spokesperson has drawn a strong international response. Initially, all evacuations were said to be suspended because Afghan refugees abroad (Qatar, Turkey) were facing such poor living conditions (cf. BN of 28.02.22). On 01.03.22, however, the spokesperson stated that holders of legal travel documents would be allowed to leave the country unhindered. He said the aim was merely to prevent illegal migration. Women are only allowed to leave the country with a male escort and for a valid reason. At the same time, the news portal "8am" published a document issued by the Ministry of the Interior's authority responsible for border security, calling on security forces at land borders and airports to prevent the departure of former employees of NATO and the U.S. army.

The few students who have returned to state-run universities since they reopened have complained about a shortage of lecturers (because many have left the country), restrictions imposed by the Taliban (e.g. dress codes), the ban on the use of smartphones and cameras, a lack of financial resources and a lack of career prospects (cf. BN of 28.02.22).

Economic and humanitarian situation

Deborah Lyons, the UN Secretary-General's Special Representative for Afghanistan, told the UN Security Council on 02.03.22 that 20 million Afghans in 397 of 401 districts had been provided with humanitarian assistance over the winter. However, she said this was merely buying a little time and was not a long-term solution. To prevent the next winter from being so catastrophic, it is now necessary to build the economy. She said UNAMA will cooperate

with the de facto government of the Taliban. On 02.03.22, the World Bank decided to use US\$ 1 billion of the reserves frozen in the U.S. for humanitarian aid in Afghanistan.

Benin / Nigeria

Activist objects to months of detention

Sunday Adeyemo, a Nigerian activist for Yoruba self-determination also known as Sunday Igboho, is demanding USD 1 million from the Republic of Benin for each day of his detention, which has now lasted seven and a half months. According to media reports, his lawyers filed a complaint to this effect with the Court of Justice of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) on 10.02.22. The activist was arrested at the airport in Cotonou, Benin's largest city (cf. BN of 26.07.21) on 19.07.21. Nigeria is said to have charged him with inciting violence and rioting, Benin with illegal entry and plotting to incite unrest. His supporters consider Sunday Igboho's detention to be politically motivated. According to media reports, Adeyemo has not yet been charged in Benin and Nigeria has not yet filed a formal extradition request. His lawyers argue that Benin is violating his rights to freedom of movement and is failing to grant him an impartial trial within a reasonable period of time, thus violating his human rights.

Burkina Faso

"Constitutional charter for transition" adopted

A national assembly (Assises nationales sur la refondation), which had been meeting since 28.02.22 and comprises the military, political parties and trade unions as well as civil society organisations and displaced persons, adopted a "constitutional charter for transition" in the early hours 01.03.22, which junta leader Paul-Henri Sandaogo Damiba signed. It outlines the three-year transition period until the return to constitutional order, calculated from 02.03.22, the date of Damiba's inauguration as interim president. The charter provides for a transitional government comprising a maximum of 25 members, whose prime minister (a civilian) is to be appointed by Damiba (see below). The transitional parliament will have 71 members. A Transition Guidance and Monitoring Council is to set the broad guidelines for state policy during the transition.

According to the charter, the transitional president will not be able to run in the presidential, parliamentary or local elections scheduled for the end of the transitional period. This also applies to the prime minister and the president of the transitional parliament.

The charter envisages the following key issues for the transitional phase, among others: fighting terrorism, restoring the integrity of the national territory and ensuring security, as well as improving the humanitarian situation, implementing good governance and fighting corruption.

Discussions between the junta and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) on the Charter are to follow.

Prime minister, government and governors appointed

On 03.03.22, junta leader and transitional president Paul-Henri Sandaogo Damiba appointed Albert Ouédraogo, an economist and head of a consulting and accounting firm, as prime minister of the transition. His transitional government, which was presented on 05.03.22 and in which no members of political parties are represented, comprises 25 people. Damiba appointed new governors for nine of the country's 13 regions on 01.03.22. All of them belong to the security forces (military and gendarmerie as Defence and Security Forces (FDS) (Forces de Défense et de Sécurité, (FDS)).

Rise in number of IDPs

According to the Permanent Secretariat of the National Council for Emergency Relief and Rehabilitation (SP/CONASUR), the number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) increased by 10.23% to 1,741,655 between the end of December 2021 and the end of January 2022. It said the most affected regions were Centre-Nord (626,602), Sahel (546,385) and Nord (207,096). Plateau Central (16,628), Centre-Sud (4,429) and Centre (100) regions have the lowest number of IDPs. The majority of IDPs (492,831) hail from Soum province in the Sahel region. The 13 regions of the country are divided into a total of 45 provinces.

People killed in attack and blast

Extremists attacked a military and gendarmerie base in Toéni (Boucle du Mouhoun region) on 28.02.22. According to the security forces, two of their members were killed and about 20 members were injured. At least 20 of the assailants were reportedly killed or wounded. Unknown individuals killed two members of the gendarmerie in Oursi (Sahel region) on 01.03.22.

Colombia

Annual Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

At the presentation of the Annual Report on the human rights situation in Colombia 2021 on 03.03.22, the representative of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights warned of a significant increase in the level of violence and human rights violations. Not only have the number of verified homicides involving at least three fatalities increased (78) and has the general rate of homicides risen compared to the previous year, the threats facing human rights defenders and líderes sociales (social leaders) has also intensified, with violent displacement due to the presence of armed groups more than doubling (2020: 26,291, January to November 2021: 72,388). Restrictions on the movement of almost 58,000 people due to landmines and armed groups have also been recorded in the same period. The report assesses the militarisation of areas particularly affected by the volatile security situation as insufficient to limit the influence of non-state armed actors and recommends strengthening the state civilian presence, especially in the rural regions of the departments of Antioquia, Amazonas, Arauca, Caquetá, Cauca, Bolívar, Chocó, Nariño, Norte de Santander Putumayo and Valle del Cauca. The human rights violations and killings by state security forces during the social protests (so-called Paro Nacional) in spring and summer 2021 have also been mentioned again (cf. BN of 20.12.21). In addition, the report states that the pandemic has further deepened social inequality in the country and has impacted the situation of education. In Antioquia, for example, the absence of classroom instruction has heightened the risk of minors being recruited by armed groups or criminal organisations. By contrast, the report describes the demobilisation of at least 13,000 former FARC fighters since the 2016 peace agreement as positive, as well as the activities of the Special Jurisdiction for Peace (JEP) and the Truth Commission.

Democratic Republic of the Congo

Several ECIDé party activists convicted

On 28.02.22, N'djili District Court in Kinshasa sentenced ten of the 16 activists of the opposition party Commitment for Citizenship and Development (Engagement pour la Citoyenneté et le Développement (ECIDé)) who had been arrested in Kinshasa on 25.02.22 to ten years imprisonment respectively. The defence lawyers have said that they will be appealing the verdict. Among other things, the activists were accused of assaulting a national deputy of the ruling party Union for Democracy and Social Progress (Union pour la Démocratie et le Progrès Social; (UDPS)). The ECIDé, chaired by Martin Fayulu, one of the biggest critics of the government of President Félix Tshisekedi, denounced the instrumentalisation of the judiciary on 02.02.22. He said the unprofessional and politically orchestrated criminal investigations as well as the political show trials with predetermined verdicts were only aimed at weakening the ECIDé, intimidating its members and silencing them.

Human rights activists seriously threatened for reporting

According to the group New Civil Society of the Congo (Nouvelle Société Civile Congolaise (NSCC)), two of its human rights activists in the Kivu provinces, Beni (north) and Uvira (south), are facing intimidation, death threats and kidnapping attempts by political actors and have been forced into hiding. The people concerned have repeatedly reported on the problematic situation in eastern Congo and the presence of foreign armed forces in the country.

Indonesia

Situation in Papua and West-Papua

Independent UN Special Rapporteurs expressed concern about the human rights situation in Papua and West Papua provinces on 01.03.22 and called for an independent inquiry. The Indonesian government has rejected the demands. Between April and November 2021, several cases of extrajudicial killings (including of children), forced disappearances, torture and inhuman treatment, and the displacement of at least 5,000 indigenous people by security forces have been reported. Since the conflict escalated in December 2018, it is estimated that between 60,000 and 100,000 people have been displaced. Access to the displaced is limited or impeded. The security situation in the Papuan highlands has deteriorated dramatically since the assassination of a brigadier general in April 2021 by the West Papuan National Liberation Army (Tentara Pembebasan Nasional Papua Barat/ TPNPB) (cf. BN of 10.05.21).

On 04.03.22, separatists killed eight people who were repairing a telecommunications tower in Puncak district (Papua province). The separatist Organisation for a Free Papua (Organisasi Papua Merdeka/ OPM) has claimed responsibility for the incident and described those killed as members of the military.

Iran

Religious minorities: converts to Christianity acquitted of charges

Nine Christian converts have been acquitted of charges by Tehran Provincial Court of Appeal, according to reports by human rights organisations. The men were accused of holding services in house churches and promoting evangelical Christianity and Zionist sects in early 2019. They were each sentenced to five years imprisonment by the Revolutionary Court in Tehran in June 2020 for acts against national security. In the revision proceedings, the Supreme Court on 24.11.21 put the punishability of Christian religious practices, including house churches and Christian missions, to the test (cf. BN of 13.12.21). This led to the suspension of the first sentence and the release of the defendants, as well as to a retrial.

According to Christian human rights organisations, the acquittal is not only to be welcomed in this case but should also be seen as a positive signal for the legal position of Christian converts in Iran in general.

Parole denied for activist suffering from COVID-19

Foreign media, citing reports on social media, say that well-known detained civil activist Sepideh Qolyan has been denied temporary parole despite being re-infected with COVID-19. They say the woman is suffering from acute symptoms and other health issues. Qolyan has been serving a five-year prison sentence since 2020 and had already contracted coronavirus in September 2021. She took advantage of a leave of absence granted at the time to report on the conditions in Bushehr prison (southern Iran) (cf. BN of 18.10.21).

Iraq

Return of Iraqi refugees

Iraq again repatriated a large number of Iraqis from Syria on 03.03.22. Their number was estimated to be in the region of about 800. This time it seems to be mainly people who had fled ISIS to regions along the Syrian border and not predominantly families from the al-Hol camp, where about 55,000 people associated with ISIS are still being held captive.

At the same time, it was the anniversary of the adoption of the law on the compensation of Yazidi victims of the genocide. Even though an authority has been established, the law has not yet been applied in practice. It is supposed to provide for compensation payments, medical and psychological assistance, help in finding relatives as well as their ransom and, if necessary, land distributions; however, so far there is no way people can apply for these aids. Economic problems and security concerns continue to deter many internally displaced persons in Iraq from returning home.

Impact of Russia's invasion of Ukraine

Iraq imports a significant proportion of its demand for wheat from Ukraine and the Russian Federation, with the bulk of imports coming from Ukraine. Even though the spike in oil prices is economically beneficial for Iraq's federal budget, there is grave concern about food security, which is why several cabinet meetings have been held and decisions taken. Controlled prices for domestically produced wheat have been reduced significantly to balance the market for the time being and to guarantee security of supply in the short term. The price of imported wheat as well as the quantity increased by about US\$ 50 per tonne within a week, the price of sunflower oil has doubled. Both are ingredients used in the bread that is popular in the region.

Lebanon

Impact of Russian invasion of Ukraine

A significant part of Lebanon's wheat and other food, 80% of which relies on food imports, as well as petrol for Lebanon, comes from the two warring states. Politicians and association representatives have urged people not to stockpile fuel or bread, saying that supplies were assured for at least another month or so in each case and that other sources were being considered. Long queues are once again forming in front of petrol stations and bakeries, after things had settled down somewhat recently.

Libya

Parliament swears in new government cabinet led by Fathi Bashagha

After the House of Representatives (HoR) in Tobruk, eastern Libya, announced the appointment of Fathi Bashagha as the new Prime Minister on 10.02.22, the HoR swore in a new government led by Bashagha on 03.03.22. According to local media, not all of the new ministers were able to attend the ceremony as three of them were reportedly abducted by armed militias and others were unable to travel to Tobruk in time due to the closure of the coastal road and airspace. The transfer of power from the incumbent Government of National Unity (GNU) to Bashagha's cabinet, as demanded by Parliament, was rejected by the Prime Minister of the GNU (cf. BN of 14.02.22 and 28.02.22).

Mali

Troops killed in attack on military base

According to information provided by the transitional government, a serious attack was carried out on a military base near the town of Mondoro, which lies in the Mopti region near the border with Burkina Faso on 04.03.22. At least 27 soldiers were reportedly killed and 33 others injured, some seriously. Seven soldiers are said to be still missing. In the subsequent pursuit, 70 terrorists were reportedly killed. So far, no one has claimed responsibility for the attack. The military base in Mondoro had already been the target of an attack in the past (cf. BN of 07.10.19).

Montenegro

Proposal to form a minority government controversial

According to media reports, the government of Prime Minister Zdravko Krivokapic (cf. BN of 07.02.22), which was deposed by a vote of no confidence on 04.02.22, will remain in office until a new government is elected. The domestic political crisis in the country has continued. According to President Milo Djukanovic, a slim majority of MPs (44 of the 81 seats), including those from the opposition Democratic Party of Socialists of Montenegro (DPS) and the "Black-White Bloc", which until now had been part of the governing coalition, had signed a proposal to form a minority government led by (former) Deputy Prime Minister Dritan Abazovic (Black-White). Abazovic intends to form a government without the participation of the DPS and the previous strongest governing party, the Democratic Front (DF). However, the required parliamentary vote failed due to the refusal of the parliamentary speaker Strahinja Bulajic of the DF to call such a vote. From his point of view, a minority government would

exacerbate the current crisis, which is why he only supports efforts to form a new government from three alliances that have been in power so far or to call new elections.

Nigeria

Niger State: military operations against criminal gangs

Around 200 members of local criminal gangs were killed during military operations carried out in Niger State between 27.02.22 and 02.03.22, according to media reports, which refer to official information from the authorities. The Nigerian Air Force and ground troops took part in the operations and 60 motorbikes, weapons and stolen goods were confiscated. The bandits who were killed belonged to several camps. The success was also due to the cooperation of community leaders and traditional leaders in the region. Two members of the security forces were killed. Niger State is Nigeria's largest state and lies in the west of the Middle Belt zone between northern and southern Nigeria. It has been hit several times recently by attacks on localities (cf. BN of 28.02.22).

Protests for women's rights

According to media reports, hundreds of members of several women's rights groups took to the streets of the capital Abuja in protest on 02.03.22, chanting and marching to the parliament building, calling for improved gender equality. The concrete reason for the demonstration was the rejection of a series of bills on 01.03.22. Among other things, these bills provide for special additional seats for women in Nigerian parliaments. Representatives of the NGOs ActionAid Nigeria, Women in Politics Forum (WIPF) and Women Advocates Research and Documentation Centre were also involved in the protest (WARDC).

Palestinian Autonomous Territories / Israel

East Jerusalem: Supreme Court suspends forced evictions in Sheikh Jarrah

Israel's Supreme Court ruled in favour of four Palestinian families in an eviction case on 01.03.22. The legal dispute (cf. BN of 08.11.21) and the threat of forced eviction of Palestinian families by Israeli security forces is considered to have been a major trigger of the eleven-day Gaza war in 2021 (cf. BN of 10.05.21 and 12.04.21).

The court decided to accept the main arguments of the plaintiff party and allow them to stay in their houses until the legal dispute over the ownership of the properties had been settled, which according to experts could take several more years. In the meantime, the Palestinian families will be allowed to remain living in the houses under a protected status; at a reduced annual rent, which would be received by the party to whom the ownership is ultimately attributed. The Supreme Court judges noted in their decision that the trial would be based on the "complex history of Jerusalem and the changes of power that have taken place here".

Republic of Moldova / Ukraine

Exodus from Ukraine

According to a statement issued by the Moldovan government on 06.03.22, more than 230,000 people from Ukraine have arrived in the Republic of Moldova since the Russian military invasion began, around 120,000 of whom have remained in Moldova. Media reports speak of long queues at the Moldovan-Ukrainian border crossings and say that while attempting to cross the border, Ukrainian men were detained by the Ukrainian border authorities. Due to general mobilisation, Ukrainian men between the ages of 18 and 60 are currently not allowed to leave the country. The Republic of Moldova has established emergency reception centres for the temporary accommodation of refugees near the towns of Palanca and Ocnita. Prime Minister Natalia Gavrilitia reiterated on 06.03.22 the need for further international humanitarian assistance to the Republic of Moldova to address the migration crisis. Previously, on 03.03.22, the Moldovan government had applied for EU membership.

Russian Federation

Intensified repression against domestic and foreign media

On 01.03.22, two of the country's last major independent media outlets, Ekho Moskvyy radio station and Dozhd online television station, suspended operations over their coverage of the war in Ukraine. The Prosecutor General's Office accused them of "deliberately spreading false information about the special military operation in Ukraine". The editor-in-chief and other employees of Dozhd said via Telegram that they had left Russia out of fear for their safety after receiving threats. In addition, according to press reports, the Russian media regulator is also blocking access to several Western news sites such as Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty and the social media Facebook and Twitter.

With the adoption of a new package of laws on 04.03.22, new criminal offences were introduced for the dissemination of alleged false information about the deployment of the Russian armed forces in general, their denigration and the call for sanctions against Russia. High fines or imprisonment of up to 15 years may be imposed. According to press reports, several Russian media, including one of the largest independent news portals, Znak, suspended their service immediately after the announcement. Other media, such as the newspaper Novaya Gazeta, stated that they would continue their work, but would no longer report on current events in Ukraine due to the new legal situation. Numerous foreign broadcasters, including the BBC, CNN and ARD/ZDF, have also closed their offices in Russia for the time being to protect staff from prosecution. Reporters Without Borders (RSF) sees the law as an attempt to eliminate independent media in Russia once and for all.

More arrests at anti-war rallies

According to OWD-Info, more than 4,800 demonstrators were arrested in 59 cities on 06.03.22 during renewed nationwide protests against the war in Ukraine, which government critic Alexei Navalny, among others, had called for. The NGO puts the total number of people detained since 24.02.22 at 13,388 (as of 07.03.22, 09:30 a.m.). A first opposition activist was sentenced to 30 days administrative detention by a district court in Moscow on 05.03.22 for attempting to organise an unauthorised rally, according to Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty.

Saudi Arabia

Death penalty for minors

On 03.03.2022, a Saudi Arabian man was sentenced to death for the second time in a retrial for a crime he allegedly committed when he was a minor. The defendant Abdullah al-Howaiti had been arrested in 2017 at the age of 14 for murder and armed robbery and was sentenced to death in 2019 by Tabuk Province Criminal Court. The Supreme Court had overturned the 2021 verdict on torture charges and ordered a retrial. Five other defendants were sentenced to 15 years imprisonment for alleged complicity. The accused stated that the interrogators had coerced their confessions by means of torture or the threat of torture. In addition, the judge allegedly ignored video footage showing that al-Howaiti was not at the crime scene at the time the crime was committed. Saudi Arabia announced in 2018 that minor offenders sentenced to death for "tazir crimes" (for which there are no set penalties) would instead receive a maximum sentence of ten years in prison, with the sentence at the discretion of the judge. However, the abolition of death sentences against minors does not apply to two other categories of offences that carry fixed penalties - "qisas offences", such as murder, and "hudud offences", which are considered violations of the rights of God, including adultery and apostasy.

Sudan

Economy and healthcare come increasingly under pressure

Since the military coup in October 2021, Sudan's economy has come under further pressure (cf. BN of 28.02.22). The military leadership's decision to increase prices and fees led to fuelled unrest and a led to a sharp rise in inflation. The exchange rate of the Sudanese pound reached new highs, especially in the parallel market. Against this backdrop, a Sudanese economic expert warned of an economic "impasse" that would end in a "dark and gloomy" economic situation if no concession was made.

The country's health sector is also coming under increasing pressure. Although the health sector has always been struggling, media reported that the sector is on the verge of collapse. Since the military coup, many healthcare workers have been removed and replaced by people from al-Bashir's time in power. This has affected both high-ranking posts and lower levels and is fuelling corruption. There are also bottlenecks and shortages of medicines and equipment. Patients are increasingly having to pay for materials such as gloves or anaesthetics for surgical procedures themselves, as hospitals no longer have sufficient supplies of the necessary medicines and materials. In addition, the military government raised the fees for healthcare on 19.02.22. This increased the cost of inpatient admissions, X-rays or malaria tests, for instance by 3,000 to 5,000 %. In addition, much-needed financial aid from the international community was frozen in protest against the coup, which the military government cited as justification for raising the fees.

Syria

Palmyra: 13 killed in attack on military van

According to state media reports, a military convoy was attacked on 06.03.22 while travelling through the sparsely populated region around Palmyra, reportedly killing 13 military personnel, including several officers and injuring 18 others.

Damascus: Israeli air strike reportedly kills civilians

The Syrian Ministry of Defence announced that fighter jets from Israel had fired on military targets near Damascus on 07.03.22, reportedly killing two civilians. This information has not yet been confirmed.

According to the pro-opposition Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, there were no reports of casualties. The attack was said to be the seventh since the beginning of the year and the first since the Russia attacked Ukraine. Israel depends on Moscow's support for military operations in Syria. According to media reports, the Israelis notify the Russian military leadership in Syria each time before attacks are flown in order to avoid accidents. In September 2018, a Russian plane was hit by Syrian anti-aircraft missiles. At the time, all 15 Russian soldiers on board were killed.

Tanzania

Opposition leader released from prison

After seven months in detention, Freeman Mbowe and three co-defendant members of the opposition Party for Democracy and Progress (CHADEMA) were released and the charges of terrorism financing and conspiracy against them were dropped (cf. BN of 26.07.21). According to reports, a meeting with President Suluhu Hassan took place shortly after Mbowe's dismissal. In February 2022, she already met exiled opposition member Tundu Lissu to advance talks with the opposition.

Turkey

Immunity of MP Semra Güzel lifted

On 01.03.22, the Turkish parliament lifted the parliamentary immunity of the MP Semra Güzel who is a member of the People's Democratic Party (HDP) on terrorism charges. Güzel was at the centre of a controversy after photos of her posing with now-deceased Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) member Volkan Bora at a PKK camp in Iraq in 2014, to whom she said she was engaged, were published in 2021.

Suspected members of the Gülen movement arrested

On 01.03.22, ninety-six suspects were arrested in nationwide operations against the Gülen movement. The General Prosecution Office stated that 19 people had been arrested as part of an investigation into a suspected network of the group under the command of the air force. The suspects include officers of various ranks. Their links to the Gülen movement were uncovered because of their telephone contacts with imams of the movement. In another investigation in Ankara, 14 suspects were identified and arrested through their use of an encrypted messaging app.

In a further Ankara-based investigation, 21 of 27 wanted suspects accused of cheating in military school exams were arrested. They allegedly stole questions and answers to an exam for the promotion of non-commissioned officers in the gendarmerie forces. The public prosecutor's office in Mersin also sought the arrest of 33 suspects, including 19 active-duty soldiers, as part of an investigation into military "infiltrators" of the Gülen movement. A total of 28 suspects were arrested during operations in Mersin, Ankara, Karaman, Bolu, Şanlıurfa and Tokat.

Ukraine / Russian Federation

Military invasion, continuation of fighting

The Russian military invasion of Ukraine, which began on 24.02.22, continues (cf. BN of 28.02.22). Starting from the northern and eastern borders of Ukraine as well as annexed Crimea, Russian forces have advanced further into the interior of the country, capturing the cities of Kherson and Berdyansk, among others, as well as large swathes of territory; numerous media report ongoing heavy shelling and destruction, especially in the cities of Kyiv, Kharkiv, Chernihiv, Mariupol, Sumy and Mikolayiv, which are surrounded by Russian ground troops. Despite repeated references by the Russian Federation to the exclusive destruction of military infrastructure, according to consistent media reports, the attacks are also increasingly targeting civilian persons and objects, such as residential buildings and medical facilities. The media report that at least 47 people were killed in artillery attacks carried out on residential areas in the city of Chernihiv on 04.03.22. According to information provided by Ukrainian military sources on 07.03.22, Russian forces are preparing to attack the capital Kyiv, whose suburbs have been under artillery fire for days. On 07.03.22, there was a deadly incident in the town of Irpin near Kyiv in which several civilians, including a family with children, were killed during an evacuation attempt, according to the local mayor. A fire broke out at the site of the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant after fighting around it on 03.03.22 and 04.03.22. According to media reports, emergency services managed to extinguish the fire. Russian forces captured the nuclear power plant on 04.03.22. The incident sparked international concern; according to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), there are currently no indications of increased radiation levels. After two rounds of negotiations so far, the parties to the conflict have agreed to create humanitarian corridors for contested areas; it has not yet been possible to enforce a ceasefire demanded by the Ukrainian side. In the port city of Mariupol, attempts to create humanitarian corridors failed after a short time on 05.03.22 and 06.03.22; the parties to the conflict are accusing each other of being responsible for the failure. The city is under continuous heavy artillery fire; according to numerous media reports, the civilian population in Mariupol is currently cut off from supplies of electricity, heating, medicine and food. On 06.03.22, Russian President Vladimir Putin reiterated demands for, among other things, the surrender of the Ukrainian armed forces, demilitarisation and recognition of the 2014 annexation of Crimea as conditions for the cessation of hostilities. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky has so far rejected these demands and has called on the population to continue resisting. Calls by Ukraine for the establishment of a no-fly zone have repeatedly been rejected by Western states. There are fears that the fighting will spread to areas not yet reached by Russian ground troops, such as the cities of Odessa and Dnipro.

Humanitarian situation, refugee movements

According to information provided by the UN on 06.03.22, more than 1.5 million people have already fled Ukraine, approximately one million of whom have fled to the neighbouring country of Poland. The UN calls this the fastest growing refugee movement in Europe since the Second World War. According to the International Red Cross, the humanitarian situation is deteriorating, especially in the embattled cities, which are increasingly cut off from food and medical supplies. On 04.03.22, the mayor of Kyiv called on owners of private pharmacies to open their shops as public pharmacies were overwhelmed. According to information provided by the UN on 06.03.22, at least 364 civilians have been killed and at least 769 injured so far, including dozens of children; however, the actual figures are likely to be higher. According to the Ukrainian presidential administration, several hundred thousand people from particularly embattled cities need immediate evacuation. The Russian military says that ceasefires and humanitarian corridors in the direction of Russia and Belarus are to be established for the cities of Kyiv, Kharkiv, Mariupol and Sumy from the morning of 07.03.22 onwards. Numerous countries have raised the issue of the humanitarian emergency in Ukraine and have promised to provide the relevant aid. According to media reports, a third round of negotiations between Ukraine and the Russian Federation is due to take place on 07.03.22.

Vietnam

Human rights activist arrested

On 01.03.22, a dissident and human rights activist was arrested in Ho Chi Minh City on the basis of Article 117 of the Penal Code. According to state media reports, books and materials containing subversive information were found at his house. The arrested man is a member of a local organisation that promotes democracy, among other things.

Yemen

Staff of Doctors Without Borders abducted

On 06.03.22, news leaked that two Doctors Without Borders staff members had been abducted in the east of Hadhramaut Governorate. According to reports, the abducted staff members come from Germany and Mexico. Security forces are holding al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) responsible for the kidnapping. AQAP is particularly present in the south and east of the country. In February 2022, five UN staff members were kidnapped, allegedly also by AQAP.

Arms embargo against the Houthis extended

On 28.02.22, the UN Security Council decided to extend the arms embargo against the entire Houthi movement at the request of the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The previous embargo only covered high-ranking Houthi politicians. The U.S. Treasury Department had already imposed sanctions against members of an illegal Houthi financial network on 23.02.22. The sanctions are seen as a direct response to the Houthis' repeated drone attacks on targets in the UAE.

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