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Group 22 - Information Centre Asylum and Migration

Briefing Notes

3 March 2014

Afghanistan

Health care situation

According to a report of the humanitarian organisation “Doctors without Borders” many Afghans do not have access to sufficient quality health care services. A survey among 800 patients in hospitals in the provinces of Kabul, Kunduz, Khost and Helmand has shown that many health care institutions do not work properly. More than half of the respondents said that they could not reach the nearest health care institution or could not have been treated there properly. They said that they had to cover a great distance where they had been exposed to risks such as fighting, mines, time-consuming checkpoints or other threats.

Pakistan

Attack in Islamabad

On 3 March 2014, several suicide attackers intruded into a court complex in the capital, threw hand grenades and opened fire, killing at least eleven people and wounded more than 30. The Taliban said that they were not responsible for the attack. The attack was made in a highly guarded part of the capital. This has been the severest attack since the explosion in front of the Marriott Hotel in autumn 2008.

New ID cards for Afghan refugees

Pakistan started to hand out new “Proof of Registration” cards to the approximately 1.6 million registered Afghan refugees. These cards will be valid by the end of 2015 and serve as proof for legal residence in the country. In a first period of time by June 2014 all expired cards will be replaced. Then, from July 2014 on new cards will be issued and given to the approximately 150,000 children who have been born in the past five years. In addition, birth certificates will be issued and given to another 330,000 young people under the age of 18.

Offensive against the Taliban

The offensive of the Pakistani armed forces against the Taliban in North Waziristan (see BN dated 24 February 2014) was still persisting last week. A number of air attacks reportedly killed more than 120 alleged Taliban. There are no reports about civilian victims. Thousands of people have in the meantime left the region. Tribal members speak of almost 50,000 people. Official sources say that the internally displaced persons shall be accommodated in the refugee camps of Bannu and Dera Ismail Khan in case of any further military operations. On 1 March 2014 the Taliban announced a one-sided one-month ceasefire. For the time being, the Pakistani armed forces continued their attacks onto extremists after another attack on 1 March 2014 on a vaccination team in Khyber Pakhtoonkwa province had killed ten police officers and wounded eleven. On 2 March 2014 the government announced the discontinuation of all air raids as a reaction onto the Taliban’s proposal.

Further attacks

On 23 February 2014, the explosion of a roadside bomb in Balochistan province (Dera Bugti district) killed a woman and seven other people. Since years, this district has been the scene of acts of violence and bomb attacks.

Iraq

Security situation

In February 2014, according to Iraq Body Count, 930 civilians were killed. 1,076 civilians lost their lives in January and 40 in March (as of 1 March 2014).

According to UNAMI, 564 civilians were killed in February 2014 and 1,179 were wounded. In addition, 139 members of the Iraqi security forces were killed and 202 were wounded. These numbers do not include the number of victims in Anbar province.

The province hit hardest was Baghdad with 239 people killed and 551 people wounded, followed by Salahaddin (121 fatalities, 235 wounded), Ninive (94 fatalities, 133 wounded), Babil (53 fatalities, 131 wounded) and Diyala (39 fatalities, 96 wounded).

According to the news agency AFP, at least 744 people were killed in February. Reportedly, the number of victims had decreased in contrast to January with 991 fatalities. According to the Iraqi government, reportedly 790 people - civilians and members of the security forces - were killed. The provinces hit hardest were according to AFP Baghdad, Anbar, Salahaddin, Diyala, Kirkuk and Ninive.

Syria

175 Islamist rebels die

On 26 February 2014, public Syrian media announced that 175 Islamist rebels – almost exclusively Jordanians and Saudi Arabians who reportedly had been members of the Jabhat al-Nusra and/or the Liwa al-Islam – were killed east of Damascus in the east Ghouta region under the leadership of the Lebanese Hezbollah militia. The organisation Syrian Observatory for Human Rights in London confirmed that at least 70 rebels had died, 89 others were reportedly missed in action. For the time being, a total number of 140,000 people have reportedly been killed in this civil war, in clashes among the opposition groups alone 3,300 people have been killed since the beginning of the year 2014.

Relatives of opposition Geneva peace talk team arrested

As the USA said on 27 February 2014, the Syrian president Mr Bashar al-Assad ordered the arrest of relatives of opposition politicians who had participated in the Geneva peace talks. The Syrian leadership said that the opposition delegates are terrorists and their assets were seized. Mr Ahmed Tomeh whom the Syrian National Coalition for Opposition and Revolutionary Forces elected Prime minister of the Syrian government in exile in September 2013, confirmed that it is common practice to arrest family members of opposition politicians and he reported of the execution of the son of the opposition politician Mr Fayez as Sarrah a few weeks ago by “henchmen of the regime”.

Syrian National Council will return to the opposition Syrian National Coalition

On 28 February 2014, the opposition's Syrian National Council (SNC) declared that it will return to the National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces which it had left on 20 January 2014 because they had taken part in the Geneva peace talks. They said that the reason for the return was the fact that the aims of the Syrian population had not been reached in the negotiations.

Lebanon

Areas under fire by Syrian regime and rebels

On 28 February 2014, the Shiite village of Birtal, a Hezbollah stronghold, and an area in the vicinity of the Sunni populated village of Aarsal where many rebels and refugees from Syria have found shelter, came under fire from the Syrian air force and the rebels. The background for this attack is reportedly an offensive of the Syrian armed forces and the Shiite Lebanese Hezbollah militia onto the Syrian town of Jabrud near the border. The public Lebanese news agency reported that fighters of the Syrian opposition group Jabhat al-Nusra have executed two Syrian supporters of the Syrian regime near Aarsal.

Iran

Minister for education intends to relax internet censorship

The government plans to relax the internet censorship. The rules shall be adapted and updated said Minister for education Mr Janati according to a report of the news agency IRNA. According to the report, about 70% of Tehran's population is equipped with rooftop dishes and watches foreign television programmes although this is forbidden. According to this, millions of citizens in the capital would violate the internet law every day. This is an absurd situation and should be corrected, said Mr Janati. In Iran, thousands of websites are blocked because they are deemed to be "non-Islamic", among them sites such as Twitter and Facebook. Access is only possible via technical detours. So far, any relaxation attempts failed due to *[the resistance]* of the clerics and the conservative opposition. In Iran, a committee of 13 members decides which web contents may be accessed and which not. According to Mr Janati's words, six ministers who are committee members have come out in favour of the idea that "we can no longer isolate ourselves from the world".

Turkey

Shut-down of Gulen private schools

In the night of 1 March 2014 Turkey's parliament passed a government bill with a large majority (226 MPs in favour of the bill and 22 against it) to shut down the private schools belonging to the organisation of the Islamic preacher Mr Fethullah Gulen who lives in the USA. According to this bill, the approximately 4,000 preparatory schools must close by 1 September 2015. Prior to the vote in the parliamentary debate, the MPs scuffled in parliament.

Education is a central element of the Gulen movement which runs numerous schools, preparatory schools and student's homes in approximately 140 countries, some of them in Germany as well.

Egypt

Government resigns

On 24 February 2014, the interim government surprisingly resigned. This was reportedly the answer of Egypt's cabinet under Prime minister Mr Hazem al-Beblawy which the Egyptian population has regarded as ineffective owing to the continuing economic crisis, to strikes in the past few weeks which also affected numerous authorities. Some observers also think, however that the resignation was made in order to prepare a run for president by the chief of the armed forces, Mr Abdel Fatah al-Sisi. According to this, Mr Sisi had in time dissociated himself from the inefficient interim government in which he himself was the defence minister.

On 25 February 2014, interim president Mr Adly Mansur appointed Mr Ibrahim Mahlab, a former intimate friend of Mr Hosni Mubarak as new Prime minister.

Offensive of the armed forces on Sinai Peninsula

On 27 February 2014, Egyptian armed forces took action with several thousand soldiers against a stronghold of Islamists in the north of Sinai. At least six extremists died, whereas one of them reportedly was a member of the Ansar Beit al-Makdis (an organisation associated with the al-Qaida). The security forces arrested 14 suspects of terror in raids near the provincial capital of Al-Arish.

Libya

Gunmen storm interim parliament

On 2 March 2014 armed protesters attacked in Tripoli the parliament building. According to official reports, two MPs were wounded by shots. The attackers requested the breakup of the interim parliament which was set up in summer 2012 for an initial period of 18 months. At the beginning of February 2014, the MPs voted for a renewal of office by December although large sections of the population had been against this because they said that parliament has not been successful in bringing peace to the country.

Nigeria

Dozens of pupils killed in attack on boarding school

In the night of 24 to 25 February 2014 more than 50 presumed members of the militant Islamist organisation Boko Haram attacked the “Federal Government College” in the small town of Buni Yadi, Gujiba Local Government Area in the north-east federal state of Yobe. The largest part of the school complex was burnt down. Official sources say that 29 pupils were killed; a hospital official spoke of 59 fatalities. The attackers either shot the pupils dead or stabbed them with knives or they were burned to ashes in their dormitories which the Boko Haram had locked up. Reportedly, no young girls were among the bodies. Reportedly, the Boko Haram had sent them home with the order to marry and to give up “western education”. Some sources say that 16 girls, pupils in the boarding school, have been kidnapped.

Fatalities in terror attacks on population

On 1 March 2014 around 6 p.m., a car bomb exploded on a crowded market near the airport in the urban district of Ajilari in Maiduguri, the capital of the federal state of Borno in the north-east. Approximately 15 minutes later, a second car bomb exploded at the same place, taking those as victims who were giving first aid to the people wounded by the first car bomb. More than 50 people were killed in total, among them many children and almost 60 were wounded.

At almost the same time in Borno, dozens of armed attackers in military uniforms attacked the village of Mainok, some 50 km north of the town of Maiduguri, with cars and motorbikes. They fired anti-tank weapons and shot around them with Kalashnikovs. At least 39 people were killed and the village was completely destroyed.

In the night of 26 to 27 February 2014 in the federal state of Adamawa in the north-east of the country, presumed members of the Boko-Haram first attacked with 13 pickup trucks the village of Kirchinga on the border to Cameroon. When the villagers were fleeing to the neighbouring town of Shuwa, they were followed by the terrorists. Soldiers on checkpoint also fled when the attackers approached. The village of Michika in the same area was also attacked by the Boko Haram. The attack caused a total death toll of 37.

The Boko Haram is held responsible for all these attacks. According to Amnesty International on 28 February 2014, since the beginning of the year more 600 people have died in attacks for which in most cases the Boko Haram is held responsible. On 27 February 2014, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) declared that in the three north-eastern federal states of Borno, Yobe and Adamawa in the period from May 2013 (imposition of the state of emergency in the three federal states) until the end of 2013 approximately 290,000 people – among them 51 per cent children – have fled within the country in order to escape the attacks of the Boko Haram.

Somalia

Car bomb attack in Mogadishu

A car bomb attack in front of a café near the headquarters of the Somali security forces in Mogadishu on 27 February 2014 took the lives of at least twelve people, eight were wounded. There were civilians, members of the security forces and intelligence officers among the dead. The al-Shabaab has taken responsibility for the attack.

Threat of hunger crisis

The UN warns against a new hunger crisis in Somalia. Reportedly, two million people do not have enough food; about 50,000 children are threatened of starving to death. The UN is still expecting money from the international community. They reportedly have only received four per cent of the 930 million US\$ which have been planned as an aid for Somalia this year. At present, the situation is comparable to the preliminary phase of the hunger crisis in 2011. At that time the UN said that 260,000 people died of the consequences of malnutrition.

Central African Republic

Christian militia kill Muslims

In the south-west of the country Christian militiamen have reportedly killed more than 100 Muslims. Massacres have reportedly been made at two different places, said Central African journalists under reference to eyewitnesses. However, the killing still goes on at present in the woods of the remote region.

Reportedly, militiamen of the so-called Anti-Balaka militia (“against the machetes”) killed Muslims in the built-up area of Guen. The victims are reportedly displaced persons who had escaped to Guen in order to get away from the violence in the surrounding villages.

Media reports said that about 800 Muslims were looking for shelter in the Catholic Church and the imam’s house. However, the militiamen have reportedly intruded, taken their victims and shot them dead one after another.

In the forest near Guen, militiamen killed more than 50 Muslims who had hidden there, as a local journalist reported to the [*Protestant news agency*] “Evangelischer Pressedienst”.

Uganda

President signs criminal law against homosexuality

On 24 February 2014, President Yoweri Museveni put into effect a law for the stricter sentencing of homosexual acts.

In severe cases, homosexual acts can be prosecuted with life sentence. Such acts are for example repeated sexual intercourse among homosexual grown-ups as well as homosexual acts with minors or HIV positive people. A homosexual crime committed for the first time will be prosecuted with up to 14 years of imprisonment.

The human rights organisation Amnesty International said that the law is a “gigantic step backwards” for Uganda. Its passing means that “hatred and discrimination against lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transgender people and intersexual people” would be institutionalised.

Capital punishment will not be made because of international criticism. One day after this strict anti-homosexual act came into force a Ugandan newspaper published a list with 200 well-known alleged homosexuals.

Bosnia-Herzegovina

“Bosnian Spring”

Following the riots of 7 February 2014, the situation has calmed down (see BN dated 10 February 2014). However, there are still protests against the grievances. The protests have led to first political consequences. The governments of the cantons of Tuzla and Zenica as well as the Prime minister of Sarajevo have retreated. So-called “citizen forums” have been founded in Tuzla and other cities of the federation (Sarajevo, Mostar and Zenica). Every citizen can come to such a forum and submit his requests. In the end, there will be a vote on the requests and these will be then – if required – handed over to politics. First successes have already been reached. In this context, continued payments to resigned members of the government have been abolished and the workers of five enterprises in Tuzla will receive a health insurance for one month. The list

of open requests is still long: Re-organisation of the job offices, revision of privatisations made in the past, reconstruction of the industrial sector, judicial reforms and the fight against corruption.

Background

The main problem is the reconstruction of the state. This state has been separated into the Serbian Republic (Republika Srpska – RS) and the Muslim-Croat Federation (Federation of Bosnia-Herzegovina with its subdivision into ten cantons) since the Dayton Peace Agreement of 1995. There is a weak central government at the top. Both parts of the country have blocked each other for years. The international community's efforts for reducing the complicated and inefficient structures of power have so far been without any success. The state with its population of approximately four million is governed by three presidents, eleven prime ministers and eleven governments with a total of far more than 100 ministers; the public service is made up of a little under 200,000 employees. These structures were intended to support the interests of the ethnic and religious diversity of Orthodox Serbs, Bosnian Muslims and Catholic Croats; in contrast however, they in the last consequence promote nationalism, favouritism and corruption.

Ukraine

Situation on Crimea

The situation is still tense. Soldiers in battle dress uniform without any national emblems have controlled several airports as well as the centre of the Crimea capital of Simferopol since the weekend. On 2 March 2014, Russian units reportedly surrounded two military bases on Crimea. Reports said that about one thousand soldiers in Perevalne near Sevastopol have prevented the Ukrainian soldiers based there to leave their basis; the Ukrainians themselves have reportedly refused to give up the basis. Reportedly, Ukrainian marines have entrenched themselves in the spa town of Feodosia. Eyewitnesses said that Russian armed forces were standing around the basis and that they wanted to persuade the approximately 400 marines located there to put their weapons down. In the evening of 2 March 2014, the chief of the Ukrainian marines Mr Denis Beresovsky who has been appointed only recently, joined the pro-Russian forces on Crimea. He swears to protect the lives of the population on Crimea, said Mr Beresovsky in the presence of the pro-Moscow head of government on Crimea, Mr Sergei Aksyonov. The interim government in Kiev has instituted proceedings for high treason against him. In the afternoon of the same day, the interim government has communicated that the Ukrainian navy with its ten warships is still loyal to Kiev. The new pro-Russian leaders on Crimea have the idea of Crimea as a future independent state. This was communicated by the head of the Crimean parliament Mr Vladimir Konstantinov. People protested in several towns of the Black Sea peninsula against the government in Kiev. The Crimea government had asked Russia for protection against violent Ukrainian nationalists and extremists; on 1 March 2014, the Russian parliament has voted in favour of a military operation in the neighbouring country.

In answer to the decision of the Russian parliament, Ukraine put their armed forces in full readiness to combat; on 2 March 2014 it called up their reservists. However, this order is not to be interpreted as a general mobilisation. The interim government is trying to adopt all measures necessary in order to keep peace and order. On 2 March 2014 on Maidan square in the city centre of the capital of Kiev, approximately 50,000 pro western protesters gathered and shouted: "We will not give up!"

In the morning of 3 March 2014, Ukrainian border troops reported on the concentration of armoured vehicles on the Russian coast opposite of Crimea. In addition, Russia blocks the mobile communications network in parts of Crimea.

Russian Federation

Crisis in Ukraine aggravates to an international conflict

The threatening of a Russian military operation on Crimea has rushed the relationship between Russia and the West into a severe crisis. On 2 March 2014, US President Mr Barack Obama threatened that invading Ukraine will mean "to pay a heavy price" for Kremlin chief Mr Vladimir Putin. The planned G-8 summit in June 2014 in the Russian town of Sochi is on the brink. US Secretary of state Mr Kerry warned that Russia could also be excluded from the group of the G-8 countries.

Several years of imprisonment for government opponents

In the so-called Bolotnaya criminal proceedings, the public prosecution has called for prison sentences between five and six years for the eight accused persons. The female judge saw evidence for the fact that the seven men and one woman had significantly participated in violent clashes against police forces in Moscow on 6 May 2012. At that time, protests against a third term of office of the Russian President Vladimir Putin had escalated. Government critics said however that violence during this protest on Bolotnaya square in Moscow was initiated by the police. The defence attorneys had pleaded for acquittal for want of evidence.

On 24 February 2014, the court in Moscow decided on the sentences. Seven of the eight accused were sentenced to imprisonment between two years and three years and seven months. The female accused was released on probation. Amnesty International said that the convicts are political prisoners. Even before the judge had announced the sentences, hundreds of people gathered in front of the court building. At least 200 Kremlin critics were arrested. Among them was also the well-known opposition politician Mr Alexei Navalny. During protests against alleged judicial arbitrariness Ms Nadeshda Tolokonnikova and Maria Alyochina of the group Pussy Riot which also criticises the Kremlin were also arrested. In the evening of 24 February 2014, again hundreds of protesters gathered near the Kremlin in order to show annoyance on the process. The police said that 70 people were arrested owing to “breach of the peace”; the human rights group “Ovdinfo” however, spoke of more than 300 people arrested.

Background

Observers of the proceedings think that the proceedings are a signal to Mr Putin’s opponents that he is not willing to accept any opposition against his rule. Some people said prior to the proceedings that they fear an especially severe judgment in view of the situation in Ukraine. With this, the authorities would make it clear that they will react to the riots with hardest measures. During the violently dispersed protests against President Putin in May 2012 a total of approximately 400 people were arrested. Criminal proceedings have been taken up against 29 of them. Three of them were sentenced to imprisonment last year.

India

Telangana is a new federal state

The Indian lower chamber voted in favour of the creation of a new federal state. Telangana shall be created by separating from Andhra Pradesh in the south-east of the sub-continent; this shall then be the 29th federal state of India. The IT metropolis of Hyderabad shall serve as the capital for both federal states for up to ten years. This decision has been accompanied by heavy commotion in parliament.

The people in the north of Andhra Pradesh have requested the separation for more than half a century because they thought that their region is discriminated against. Critics accuse the government that the separation is a method in order to increase their chance for more seats in parliament in the parliamentary election in May 2014. The bill still needs the consent of the upper chamber and the President’s signature.



Sri Lanka

Government refuses investigations of war crimes

Sri Lanka has refused any UN investigations into alleged human rights violations during the civil war. The United Nations do not recognise what Sri Lanka itself does for the rehabilitation, said the government in Colombo on 25 February 2014. The previous day, the UN Special Commissioner Ms Navi Pillay had declared in a draft for the Human Rights Council that domestic work on rehabilitation has failed to reach its aim. So far, the Council has asked Sri Lanka twice through a resolution to start investigations on the civil war. It will convene again in March. There are expectations that the USA will hand in a resolution with the request of an international action.

In 2009 the Sri Lankan armed forces had won the victory over the rebel organisation LTTE (“Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam”) which wanted to create its own state in the north of the island. Human rights defenders accuse the government troops that they had thrown bombs on civilians and hospitals in this

operation. There are also accusations against the LTTE that they had recruited child soldiers and that they had abused civilians as human protective shields.

China

Attack in Kunming with high death toll

More than ten armed men with knives attacked on 1 March 2014 passengers at random in the railway station in Kunming (capital of Yunnan province). In this attack, at least 29 people were killed and more than 140 were wounded. The police shot at least four of the attackers dead, the others are reportedly on the run; one woman attacker was reportedly arrested. The authorities said that this was a terror act of Uighur separatists from the Uighur Autonomous Region Xinjiang. For the time being, nobody has taken responsibility for the attack.

Xinjiang: Activist on trial

It became known on 25 February 2014 that the university professor and Uighur activist Mr Ilham Tohti is officially on trial owing to separatism in Ürümqi. In case of a prosecution, he faces ten years of imprisonment up to life sentence or even capital punishment. Mr Tohti has been in prison since 15 January 2014 (see BN dated 20 January 2014) as well as four of eight of his students who had been arrested the same day. As it became known last week, official proceedings have also been opened for two of the arrested students together with another student who had been arrested on 17 January 2014. They are accused of separatism and/or the disclosure state secrets.