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Briefing Notes

Group 62 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

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Afghanistan

Security situation: difficulties in China's cooperation with the Taliban

According to media reports issued on 22.01.23, China's Foreign Minister Qin Gang urged the Taliban Foreign Minister to ensure the safety of Chinese nationals in Afghanistan in a telephone conversation they had to mark the occasion of Chinese New Year. In recent weeks, repeated attacks have been carried out by the Islamic State of Khorasan Province (ISKP) on Chinese nationals in Afghanistan (cf. BN of 16.01.23). Previously, on 05.01.23, the Taliban had signed its first international contract for the extraction of oil in the northern Amu-Darya Basin with a subsidiary of the China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC). On 22.01.23, it was reported that Taliban authorities in Afghanistan had arrested five men, including two Chinese nationals, who were allegedly trying to smuggle an estimated 1,000 tonnes of lithium-bearing rock from the country to China via Pakistan.

Persecution events: public punishments, detentions

According to media reports, public punishments were held at a football stadium in Kandahar province on 17.01.23. For the first time in their tenure, the Taliban chopped off the hands of four men accused of robbery. Five others were flogged. On the same day, a girl and a boy were flogged in Badakhshan province on charges of being in a premarital relationship. On 16.01.23, according to journalists of the Afghan press medium Hasht-e Subh living in exile, a student was arrested by the Taliban in the city of Ghazni after he criticised the closing of universities to women. On 17.01.23, a list circulated on social media with the names of 13 employees of the former security forces whom the Taliban want to arrest. The Taliban have not confirmed the authenticity of the list. On 18.01.23, according to journalists of the Afghan press medium Hasht-e Subh living in exile, a member of a former special forces unit died in a prison in Paktia province, presumably from the consequences of torture meted out by the Taliban. On 17.01.23, fifteen civilians were reportedly arrested in Panjshir province. The very same day, a man arrested by the Taliban in Panjshir province on charges of collaborating with the National Resistance Front (NRF) died in hospital as a result of torture he suffered. On 17.01.23, the owner of a public bath in Herat was arrested by the Taliban after he opened the bath to women and children who were unable to wash at home due to disruption in the water supply. The Taliban had banned public baths for women in November 2022.

Humanitarian situation: cold snap causing many deaths

Afghanistan is currently experiencing an uncharacteristic cold snap. Temperatures have dropped to -30 degrees Celsius in some places (for instance, in Ghor province). According to a report issued by Al-Jazeera on 18.01.23, around 70 persons have died, and 70,000 livestock have perished in the freezing temperatures so far. In the provinces of Badakhshan, Samangan, Jowzjan, Paktia, Ghazni, Faryab and Sar-e Pol, at least 57 people have reportedly frozen to death because they were unable to heat their homes during the extreme cold spell. Some families report that they have to decide whether to spend what little money they have on heating or food. The casualties consist mainly of women, children and drug addicts. Due to these circumstances, the Taliban in some

locations have allowed NGOs in the healthcare sector to hire female helpers again for a short time (cf. BN of 02.01.23).

Algeria

Human rights league dissolved by authorities

Media reported on 22.01.23 that the Ligue Algérienne pour la Défense des Droits de l'Homme (LADDH) (Algerian League for the Defence of Human Rights) was dissolved without its knowledge by the authorities during a trial. The League had not been informed about this trial either.

The dissolution came after the Ministry of the Interior lodged a complaint with the Administrative Court of Algiers on 04.05.22; the court ruled in favour of the complaint on 29.06.22.

Bangladesh / Myanmar

HRW on conditions at Rohingya refugee camps; UNHCR data on Rohingya boat people

Human Rights Watch (HRW) reports on extortion, harassment and arbitrary arrests of Rohingya refugees by the Armed Police Battalion (APBn). This special police unit is responsible for the refugee camps where nearly one million Rohingyas are living. According to a report published by HRW on 17.01.23, safety at the camps has deteriorated steadily since 2020. Attacks on Rohingyas by the APBn in Cox's Bazar occur repeatedly. At least 16 cases of severe abuse by security forces are mentioned in the report. Incidents of extortion are also reported. APBn security forces allegedly demanded 10,000-40,000 taka (US\$100-400) to avoid arrest, and 50,000-100,000 taka (\$500-1,000) for the release of a detained family member. A police spokesperson denied the statements in the report.

Rohingya refugees are fleeing in increasing numbers not just the conditions at refugee camps in Bangladesh, they also continue to flee their homeland Myanmar. According to UNHCR data, more than 3,500 Rohingyas attempted to reach the southern countries of Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia by boat in 2022. In the aftermath, 348 Rohingyas lost their lives at sea.

Benin

Pro-government parties win parliamentary election

Two parties supporting the policies of President Patrice Talon won 81 out of 109 parliamentary seats in the parliamentary elections held on 08.01.23, according to media reports. The parties in question are the Union Progressiste le Renouveau (UPR) (Progressive Union for Renewal) and the Bloc Republicain (BR) (Republican Bloc), which, according to the electoral commission, won 37.56 % and 29.17 % of the votes respectively. The opposition party Les Démocrates (The Democrats), which is linked to President Talon's predecessor and rival Thomas Boni Yayi, came in at 24.02 % and will enter parliament with 28 MPs. All other contesting parties failed to clear the 10 % hurdle. Turnout is said to have been around 38 %. The peaceful parliamentary election was also seen by many as a test of democracy, as several opposition parties that had been excluded from or had boycotted previous elections took part again. The 2019 parliamentary elections sparked deadly violence, a massive military operation on the streets and dozens of arrests. The election held on 08.01.23 also saw the application of a new electoral law that makes it mandatory to reserve one parliamentary seat for a woman in each constituency, thus guaranteeing the election of at least 24 women MPs.

Burkina Faso

Abducted women and children released

The women and children abducted in the province of Soum, in the north of Burkina Faso, on 12.01.23 and 13.01.23 have been released, according to various media reports. Sixty-six women and young children were abducted by