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Briefing Notes

Group 62 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

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Afghanistan

Security situation

According to its own statements, the Afghanistan Freedom Front (AFF) killed a Taliban commander and wounded four other fighters in Baghlan Province on 20.09.23. On 24.09.23, the AFF attacked a Taliban prison in Mazar-e Sharif. One Taliban fighter was reportedly killed during this attack.

Persecution situation

A report published by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) on 20.09.23 examines the prison conditions under the Taliban between January 2022 and July 2023. During this period, UNAMA was able to document 1,600 human rights violations committed by the Taliban in detention centres. Women were affected in 11% of the cases. In addition to the hitherto known torture methods, such as electric shocks and beatings, the Taliban also use waterboarding. The report also documents how detainees are forced to make confessions, are not allowed to contact the outside world and their families are not informed about the arrests. The Taliban denied the allegations.

On 19.09.23, the Taliban arrested women's rights activist Neda Parwarni along with her husband and four-year-old son.

A former soldier was found dead after being arrested by the Taliban in the city of Kandahar on 15.09.23, according to a report on 19.09.23. Reportedly, he had been threatened by the Taliban earlier and tried to leave the country. According to a report on 19.09.23, a former army officer was found stabbed to death. Eyewitnesses said, he had been arrested by the Taliban before. However, the exact circumstances are unclear. On 20.09.23, the Taliban arrested a former soldier in Takhar province. They had rounded up all the people of his village and questioned them individually.

On 21.09.23, the Taliban seized parts of the equipment of a television and a radio station in Daikuni province. The background is unclear.

Economic and humanitarian situation

According to the report of 22.09.23, the Asian Development Bank and the EU have pledged a total of almost USD 550 million for humanitarian aid in Afghanistan.

A report dated 24.09.23 cites both testimonies and documents as evidence that the Taliban are deliberately diverting humanitarian aid from the Hazara-majority Daikundi province to Pashtun-majority provinces such as Ghazni and Uruzgan. It is also said that aid organisations have been prevented from doing their work in Daikundi.

Armenia / Azerbaijan

Military action of the Azerbaijani army in Nagorno-Karabakh

On 19.09.23 Azerbaijan launched a military operation to conquer the Nagorno-Karabakh region. Only one day later, the Karabakh Armenians surrendered. On 23.09.23, the Azerbaijani army confirmed the beginning of the disarmament of pro-Armenian fighters in Nagorno-Karabakh. Many Armenians accuse their traditional protecting power, Russia, of abandoning them. Russia had deployed a peacekeeping force of around 2,000 troops on the ground since the six-week war between Armenia and Azerbaijan in autumn 2020. Since the outset of Russia's war of aggression on Ukraine on 24.02.22, President Putin has depended on Azerbaijani President Aliyev and his ally, Turkish President Erdoğan, to circumvent Western sanctions. During the brief fighting last week, more than 200 people died and around 400 others were injured, according to Armenian sources.

As early as December 2022, Azerbaijan had blocked the only connecting road from Armenia to Nagorno-Karabakh, the so-called Lachin Corridor, and in July 2023 also stopped the transport of humanitarian aid, causing a serious crisis in terms of food and medical supplies in Nagorno-Karabakh.

In retrospect, this can be seen as a preparatory measure by Azerbaijan to break the resistance of the Karabakh Armenians and de facto reintegrate Nagorno-Karabakh into Azerbaijan. The region belongs to Azerbaijan under international law but is inhabited almost exclusively by Armenians. It has been contested between the two former Soviet republics for decades and occupied by Armenia since 1994. The remaining official 120,000 inhabitants of this region must expect to leave their former homeland and find refuge in the Republic of Armenia. The Armenian government under Prime Minister Pashinyan has already announced that it will take in tens of thousands of people from Nagorno-Karabakh at short notice. By now about 3,000 refugees have already arrived.

Protests against Prime Minister Pashinyan in Yerevan

In the Armenian capital Yerevan, massive protests, clashes with the police and numerous arrests took place after the quick surrender of the Nagorno-Karabakh political leadership. Thousands of protesters demanded the resignation of Prime Minister Pashinyan. They accused him of treason, of being too soft on Azerbaijan and demanded the resumption of military support for Nagorno-Karabakh. The protests continue. Opposition representatives said they were considering initiating impeachment proceedings in parliament. In contrast, Prime Minister Pashinyan, who was democratically elected in January 2019, is trying to resist the nationalist-influenced protests and prevent further deaths in the dispute over Nagorno-Karabakh. In military terms, Armenia is clearly inferior to Azerbaijan and can no longer rely on the support of the Russian leadership.

Benin

Extremists and criminal business in the north

The border dispute between Benin and Burkina Faso over the Kourou-Koualou area in Benin's far north-west (cf. BN of 22.05.23), frustrations over measures to protect Benin's national parks and a variety of illegal activities in northern Benin have created local vacuums that violent extremists are now exploiting to recruit and mobilise logistical, operational and financial resources. This follows from a detailed 28-page report published by the Institute for Security Studies (ISS) in June 2023. The report focuses on the links between violent extremism and illegal activities in the region. In particular, it highlights interactions between extremist aspirations and the following activities in Benin's north: fuel smuggling, drug and arms trafficking, poaching, illegal gold panning and extortion.

Central African Republic

Bozizé sentenced to hard labour for life

The former president and coordinator of the rebel alliance Coalition des patriotes pour le changement (CPC) François Bozizé was sentenced to life imprisonment by a court of first instance in Bangui on 21.09.23. According to media reports, he, two of his sons and 20 other defendants were sentenced in absentia on charges of conspiracy and rebellion. Among those convicted are other leaders of CPC groups, including Ali Darassa of the rebel group

Unité pour la Paix en Centrafrique (UPC). All of them received the same sentence. According to a media report, Bozizé, who is currently staying in Guinea-Bissau (cf. BN of 06.03.23), does not accept the verdict, which he describes as "grotesque and contrived", and calls for an inclusive national dialogue.

Ethiopia

UN reports serious human rights violations in Tigray

Despite the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement (CoH) signed in the regional state of Tigray in November 2022, the International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia (ICHREE) reports that serious human rights violations are still taking place (cf. BN of 07.11.22). Its report lists sexual violence, killings, arbitrary detentions, looting and expulsions and cites the Amharic Fano militia and the Eritrean Defence Forces (EDF) as primary responsible actors. The Ethiopian government had not lived up to its obligation to protect the population, had failed to urge Eritrea to withdraw its troops and to punish the crimes committed in the conflict, the commission says. There is a culture of impunity that encourages the risk of further atrocities. In its report published on 18.09.23, the commission, which the UN Human Rights Council established in December 2021, warned that the conflict could spread to neighbouring regions and threaten the country's stability. It said it was concerned about the recent increase in violence in Oromia and Amhara, Ethiopia's two most populous regions. In both regional states, civilians continue to be arbitrarily arrested and abused. Furthermore, security forces are responsible for extrajudicial executions, it is said. In addition, the need for humanitarian aid is growing, a situation made more complex by the influx of refugees from Sudan.

The Gambia

Assassination of police officers: Arrest and indictment of two UDP members, journalist arrested

According to media reports, the campaign manager of the main opposition United Democratic Party (UDP), Momodou Sabally, was interrogated by the police on 15.09.23, subsequently arrested and detained for several days. The same applies to UDP member and most recently democratically elected Brikama Area Council (BAC) member Sheriffo Sonko, who had gone on hunger strike in protest against his detention. Both were investigated for Facebook posts. On 19.09.23, they were charged of threatening public officials, but later released on bail and with conditions. Sabally reportedly wrote an opinion piece critical of the Gambian Police Special Operations Unit (PIU). This appeared just days before a deadly attack on police officers on 12.09.23 near the capital Banjul. The government classified this attack, in which two police officers were killed and another seriously injured, as a terrorist attack. The main suspect has since confessed to being a former member of the Senegalese Movement of Democratic Forces in Casamance (MFDC). Sabally denied the allegations and continued to reaffirm his anti-government commitment. Sabally had already been arrested under controversial circumstances and detained for a long time without formal proceedings at the end of 2022 for allegedly foiled coup plans (cf. BN of 02.01.23).

UDP party leader Ousainou Darboe has criticised the recent arrests as politically motivated. He also condemned the intensifying police crackdown on the UDP, reminiscent of the Jammeh era. UDP supporters who wanted to visit Sabally were harassed and physically assaulted by the police, he said. One UDP supporter reported that he was pulled out of his car, beaten and detained for 20 hours. Although he is an asthmatic, he was denied access to necessary medication.

The Gambian government spokesperson's statements on the assassination of the police officers caused criticism in some parts of civil society and opposition circles. The criticism related to his statement that the main suspect was a contract killer, working for the BAC as a security guard who had been present at the court hearing of the BAC chairman in the criminal court. The criminal proceedings against the BAC chairperson were recently criticised as being partially politically motivated (cf. BN of 11.09.23).

On 20.09.23, the journalist Bakary Mankajang was arrested. Before his arrest, he wrote on Facebook that the reason for his police summons was probably related to his trip to Jululung (Casamance) – the place of arrest of the main suspect of the attack on the police officers. According to Mankajang, he conducted interviews with eyewitnesses of the arrest there.

Ghana

Arrests during several days of protests over economic crisis

On 21.09.23, police officers from the Ghana Police Service in Accra arrested 49 protesters at the announced Occupy Jubilee House demonstration (namely #OccupyJubileeHouse). According to media reports, hundreds of people followed a call by the group Democracy Hub to meet at a bus station and then proceeded to Jubilee House, the seat of the Ghanaian government. In front of the seat of government, Democracy Hub intended to protest against the high cost of living, economic mismanagement and corruption problems in the government, the reports said. Ghana is currently facing its worst economic crisis in years (cf. BN of 17.07.23). However, the police stopped the protest march on the way and bussed the 49 arrested people to the regional police headquarters.

On the two following days, hundreds of people gathered again to continue the protests under the supervision of riot police.

According to Democracy Hub, the group had previously notified the authorities of the protests planned from 21.09 to 23.09.23. The Ghana Police Service had then appealed to the court to obtain an injunction against the protest and justified the subsequent arrests on the grounds of non-compliance with this injunction.

Democracy Hub, on the other hand, says it did not receive a court order to this effect in the run-up to the planned protests.

Several national organisations and parties, including Amnesty International Ghana and the major opposition party National Democratic Congress (NDC), condemn the arrests and alleged police violence and brutality.

At a meeting between police and Democracy Hub leaders on 22.09.23, the authorities said they had no reports of police violence in their files on the demonstration and would require evidence from the public to launch possible investigations.

In a statement released on 24.09.23 by the Ghana Police Service, the Deputy Commissioner of Police apologized. He said the Ghana Police Service had in the past provided security for protesters and wanted to continue to do so within the law and promote a democratic environment.

Indonesia

Prison sentence for blasphemy allegations

On 19.09.23, a court in the Indonesian city of Palembang on Sumatra sentenced a Muslim female influencer to two years in prison and an additional fine of the equivalent of more than EUR 15,000 for "inciting hatred". In a video posted on social media in March 2023, she had spoken an Islamic prayer formula and then eaten a piece of roasted pig skin. Following strong criticism, she was arrested in July 2023.

The island state of Indonesia is the country with the largest Muslim population in the world. Around 87 % of the people are Muslim, predominantly Sunni. The country's strict blasphemy laws are internationally controversial, as they are used to undermine the country's reputation for tolerance and diversity, some critical voices say. According to AI, the laws have been abused several times in the past to suppress minorities and dissenters.

Iran

Parliament votes to implement stricter Islamic dress code

According to media reports on 20.09.23, a new bill on hijab and chastity rules was passed by a majority of 152 out of 290 MPs in parliament. However, the law still needs to be ratified by the Guardian Council to finally come into force.

The draft law provides for a wider range of penalties for violations of Islamic rules, which can range from interim arrests to fines and deprivation of civil rights to imprisonment (cf. BN of 31.07.23). Accordingly, the dissemination and promotion of nudity, immorality, hijab violations or inappropriate clothing in public, in social media or in foreign media are considered violations. In future, punishments are to be extended to business operators who, for example, offer services to women although these entail violating the headscarf obligation. In addition, the law is to be used to enforce a more extensive separation of the genders. An extension of the responsibilities of security authorities

for monitoring and enforcing the dress code is also envisaged. Human rights organisations consider the bill a massive attack on women's rights in Iran.

Death sentence imposed on Tajik national after attack on pilgrimage site

According to media reports on 21.09.23, a Tajik national was sentenced to death as the alleged main perpetrator of the attack on the Shah Cheragh pilgrimage site in Shiraz (cf. BN of 14.08.23).

Two people were killed and seven others were injured in the attack on 13.08.23. The local head of the judiciary in Fars province stated that the convicted man had links to IS and was considered to bear most of the responsibility for the attack. He was charged with enmity against God (Persian: moharebeh), corruption on earth (efsad-e fi'l-'arz) and conspiracy against national security. He was sentenced to death on two counts.

Detention conditions: Prisoner dies in custody due to delayed medical treatment

According to media reports on 25.09.23, a 63-year-old detainee died in Tehran's Evin Prison due to inadequate medical care. The prisoner had been returned to the prison after being transferred to hospital despite health problems. The prison authorities had refused to admit the man to hospital despite judicial authorisation. The prisoner had been imprisoned for financial offences and held both Iranian and US citizenship.

Iraq

Attack on airport in Sulaymaniyah

On 18.09.23, an airport about 50 km east of Sulaymaniyya was attacked. This airport had previously been used by a special unit of the Kurdish security apparatus. Three people were killed, all of them members of the Kurdish security forces. Several Turkish and Iranian drones had been sighted in the region, but at this time there is no official statement on who committed the attack.

Turkish introduced as additional official language in Kirkuk

On 21.09.23, the Kirkuk administration announced that Turkish would be introduced as an additional official language in the region. Kirkuk is home to a large minority of Turkish speaking Turkmens. The Iraqi constitution allows for the introduction of Syrian and Turkish as official languages in regions where the respective minorities constitute a sufficiently large share of the population. The decision was originally made in 2008.

Kosovo

Police officer killed by gunmen in northern Kosovo

According to media reports, the government in Priština announced in a press conference that one police officer had been killed and another wounded in the course of an exchange of fire near the town of Mitrovica in northern Kosovo on 24.09.23. The reports also say that Kosovar police said they were attacked with weapons, including heavy weapons, such as hand grenades and bazookas, when they approached a roadblock consisting of two trucks to make a check near the village of Banjska, not far from the Serbian border. According to a statement by Prime Minister Albin Kurti, the attack was carried out by a group of 30 armed and masked persons from the organised crime sector, acting with "political, financial and logistical support from Serbia". Following the exchange of fire, the heavily armed group also surrounded a Serbian Orthodox monastery in Banjska. According to the speaker of the Serbian parliament, Vladimir Orlic, Kurti was too quick to blame Serbs for the attack. In the municipality of Zvečan near Mitrovica in the north of Kosovo, which is inhabited by a majority of Kosovo Serbs, tensions have already been mounting since June 2023 (cf. BN of 05.06.23).

Lebanon

Gunfire at Shebaa Farms

On 23.09.23, Lebanese and Israeli forces exchanged of smoke grenade fire in the Shebaa Farms area. Both sides accuse each other of crossing the respective demarcation line. Both sides agree that a Lebanese construction vehicle

was carrying out works under Lebanese escort, but they could not agree on whose side of the demarcation line this took place. No one was injured.

The Shebaa Farms area is a 28 km² strip of land disputed between Lebanon, Israel and Syria and currently uninhabited. It is repeatedly the scene of skirmishes, especially between Hezbollah and Israel.

Libya

Protest after floods in Derna

After severe flooding following heavy rains and the resulting bursting of two dams in eastern Libya on 10.09.23, mostly affecting the city of Derna and leaving almost 4,000 dead and more than 10,000 missing, hundreds of protesters demonstrated against the authorities in the eastern Libyan city on 18.09.23. They accused the local authorities of failing to warn the local population adequately and of having neglected the maintenance of the dams for several years.

Mozambique

Attack on civilians in Cabo Delgado

On 15.09.23, at least eleven civilians were reportedly killed by Islamist insurgents in the district of Mocímboa da Praia (Cabo Delgado region). The insurgents reportedly targeted and killed Christian villagers and destroyed houses and property. Religiously motivated attacks of this kind are reported time and again. Other sources also reported sexual exploitation and forced conversions of Christian women by the insurgents. Since the outbreak of the conflict in Cabo Delgado in 2017, more than one million people have been displaced and nearly 4,800 people - including more than 2,000 civilians - have been killed.

Myanmar

Security situation

One person was injured in an air-strike by the Myanmar Army on a school in Yinmarbin (Sagaing Region) on 10.09.23. On 19.09.23, military junta troops killed seven civilians in Katha (Sagaing) after coming under fire from local resistance groups (People's Defence Forces, PDF). In Shwegu (Kachin State), locals found the body of a civilian who had previously been arrested by junta soldiers on 19.09.23. Already on 13.09.23, a civilian died during interrogation by military personnel in Mogaung (Kachin). During the raid of a village in Palaw (Thanintharyi region), junta troops arrested around 130 civilians and killed four of them. Another person died in artillery attacks on the same village. Fighting between Junta troops and the Ta'ang National Liberation Army in Muse (Shan State) has displaced around 1,200 civilians since 17.09.23, killing at least three and injuring five. On 21.09.23, fighting broke out between Kachin Independence Army units and local PDF in Sumprabum and Hpakant (Kachin). According to Radio Free Asia Burmese, 462 civilians were killed by air and artillery attacks from January to August 2023 nationwide, including 280 in Sagaing, and at least 812 others were injured. According to analyses by a UN fact-finding group, the military has flown more air strikes since April 2023 that focused on attacking civilian structures.

Nigeria

Delta State: Release of persons arrested at alleged "gay wedding"

According to media reports, on 19.09.23, a court in the southern state of Delta released 69 people on bail who had been arrested on 29.08.23 as participants in an event called a "gay wedding" near the city of Warri. According to the Nigerian police, this was one of the largest arrest operations of this kind made as yet (cf. BN of 04.09.23). According to the lawyer of the released prisoners, the bail set per person was NGN 500,000 (about EUR 600, as of 25.09.23). The court did not consider the alleged offence to be a capital offence. Human rights organisations, such as Human Rights Watch, expressed concern about the public presentation of the suspects in the media. In Nigeria, homosexuality is widely seen as morally unacceptable and taboo in public opinion. In 2014, the country introduced

an anti-homosexuality law that sanctions certain behaviour, including and especially the holding of so-called gay weddings. Already in the past, there have been arrests at events which the security forces considered to be gay weddings (cf. BN of 02.01.23). According to media reports, police in Lagos had taken action against 47 men under said law in 2019. The court did not pursue the case any further at the time because the law enforcement authorities had failed to name witnesses (cf. BN of 02.11.20). On 08.12.19, 26 young men dressed as women had been arrested in Kano State. They had been admonished and then handed over to their parents (cf. BN of 16.12.19), according to the reports. 19 persons arrested on 18.12.22 in Kano State who allegedly wanted to celebrate the marriage of a homosexual couple were, according to media reports, not punished but received counselling (cf. BN of 02.01.23).

Imo State: Attack on security forces

According to media reports on 19.09.23, unknown armed actors killed at least five members of Nigerian security forces in an attack on a community in Ehime Mbano Local Government Area (LGA) in Imo State. According to the authorities, violent supporters of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) independence movement, which has been banned since 2017, were responsible for these acts. IPOB denies the accusations. Deadly attacks against security forces are not uncommon in south-eastern Nigeria (cf. BN of 27.02.23). The aim of IPOB and its armed wing Eastern Security Network (ESN) is to detach Nigeria's south-east from the nation state as a whole (cf. BN of 06.03.23). Observers of the security situation in the region point out that violent groups with no direct connection to independence efforts are active there as well (cf. BN of 31.07.23).

Zamfara State: Abductions of several female students

Armed actors abducted at least 30 people, including about 24 female students from three hostels of the Federal University Gusau (FUG) in north-western Zamfara State on 22.09/23. Members of the Nigerian army rescued about six people and killed at least five of the kidnappers, according to media reports. This is the first mass kidnapping of students since President Bola Ahmed Tinubu took office in May 2023. Kidnappings for ransom are not uncommon in northern Nigeria (cf. BN of 17.07.23, 31.07.23, 07.08.23 and 28.08.23).

Palestinian Territories / Israel

Israeli air strikes on targets in the Gaza Strip

From 22.09. to 24.09.23, the Israeli army carried out a series of air-strikes against Hamas positions in the Gaza Strip after some Palestinian protesters on the Israeli border with Gaza hurled firebombs and explosive material into Israel.

According to Palestinian health authorities, the Israeli army fired on the protesters, wounding 28 people. Three Hamas military posts were hit by the air-strikes, according to the Israeli army. Reportedly, no one was killed in the attacks in the Gaza Strip. The unrest in Gaza has heightened tensions in recent weeks, prompting the Israeli government to deny entry to Israel to thousands of Palestinian workers from the impoverished region.

UN Report on the Displacement of Palestinian Population and Settler Violence

According to a UN report published on 21.09.23, more than 1,100 Palestinians were displaced in the occupied West Bank in 2022 due to violence by Israeli settlers. Compared to previous years, these numbers are unprecedented, the UN said.

The report documents about three incidents per day in the West Bank related to Israeli settlers. According to the report, this is the highest daily average since 2006. As a result of the violence, five Palestinian communities were completely evicted, half of the residents were displaced from six communities, and a quarter of the population was displaced from another seven communities, the report says. According to the report, the affected population lives mostly from livestock and agriculture. Almost all communities are said to have reported that pastoralists and farmers were limited in their activities after Israeli settlers cut off access to their grazing land. According to the UN Coordination for Humanitarian Aid in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, the UN has recorded unprecedented levels of settler violence against the Palestinian population this year.

Senegal

CIVICUS Monitor: Civic space obstructed

The CIVICUS Monitor has placed Senegal on its watch list of countries where civil liberties are rapidly declining due to the imprisonment of dissenters and media workers and the use of lethal force against protesters, according to media reports on 21.09.23. In the run-up to the presidential elections scheduled for February 2024, repression against dissent has intensified, attacks against the political opposition escalated and violations of civic space were said to have multiplied. The ratings of the online platform CIVICUS Monitor are based on a five-point scale: open, restricted, obstructed, repressed and closed. The CIVICUS Monitor currently rates civil society space in Senegal as impaired. CIVICUS calls on the government to allow peaceful protests, freedom of expression and democratic participation.

On 21.09.23, the prefect of Dakar banned the meeting of the civil society collective for the release of political prisoners (Collectif pour la Libération des Détenus Politiques, COLIDEP) planned for 22.09.23. According to media reports, the reasons for the ban are the danger of disturbing public order and obstructing the free movement of people and goods. Bans on demonstrations against opposition and civil society groups have not been uncommon in Senegal for months (cf. BN of 11.09.23 and 18.09.23). Most recently, the prefect of Dakar issued another ban on demonstrations against the heterogeneous opposition movement Mouvement des forces vives du Sénégal (F24). This was the sixth ban on F24 within a few months (cf. BN 24.04.23, 24.07.23 and 18.09.23).

Banned party PASTEF sues in courts of law

Lawyers for Senegalese opposition politician Ousmane Sonko have filed at least two lawsuits with the Supreme Court of Senegal and the Court of Justice of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), according to media reports on 19.09.2023. They intend to challenge the dissolution of the opposition party PASTEF on 31.07.23 and to restore the party's political rights in view of the presidential elections scheduled for February 2024 (cf. BN of 07.08.23). The violation of the right to a fair trial, freedom of association and freedom of assembly were among the human rights violations presented to ECOWAS by Sonko's lawyers. ECOWAS is also to decide whether or not the removal of candidate Ousmane Sonko from the electoral roll is lawful with regard to his participation in the presidential elections (cf. BN of 21.08.23).

Somalia

Beledweyne checkpoint bombed

At least 21 people were killed and 52 injured in a bomb attack on a government checkpoint in Beledweyne (Hiraan region) on 23.09.23 when a truck loaded with explosives exploded. Buildings near the blast were destroyed. The Hiraan region is at the centre of the military offensive against al-Shabaab (cf. BN of 10.10.22, 23.01.23, 17.04.23 and 28.08.23). So far, no one has claimed responsibility for the attack.

Suspension of EU food aid due to misuse of aid supplies

On 19.09.23, the EU announced that funding for the World Food Programme (WFP) would be temporarily suspended after a UN investigation, classified as "strictly confidential" and first published by media company Devex on 18.09.23, revealed widespread theft and misuse of aid. Landowners, local authorities, members of the security forces and humanitarian workers are alleged to have been involved. The announcement said that aid would be restored as soon as WFP met additional conditions, such as vetting partner organisations on the ground.

Sudan

Ongoing struggles

According to media reports of 21.09.23, fighting around the headquarters of the Sudanese army (SAF) in Khartoum has continued for more than five days (cf. BN of 18.09.23). Fighting also continues in the surrounding districts. Other reports describe rampant looting in several districts of Omdurman, Khartoum's sister city. According to these reports, masked persons in uniforms of the paramilitary militia Rapid Support Forces (RSF) rode on motorbikes

through the affected neighbourhoods last week and looted flats and houses of the population fleeing the fighting. The alleged RSF soldiers also threatened violence and death if residents tried to resist.

Humanitarian situation

According to media reports, malaria and dengue fever cases are on the rise in North Darfur and other regions due to heavy rains, inadequate medical care and poor hygiene conditions. Hospitals in the town of El Fasher (North Darfur) are currently reporting more than 100 cases of malaria daily. The heavy rains have created large pools of stagnant water where the conditions for the spreading of mosquitoes are ideal. Since the closure of one of the city's largest hospitals, the teaching hospital El Fasher, due to the fighting and its later conversion into a military facility, the health facilities and hospitals that are currently still open are heavily overloaded. Further cases of malaria, as well as dengue fever, have been reported in Um Rawaba (North Kordofan) and the eastern Sudanese regional capital of El Gedaref (Al Qadarif).

Syria

North-west Syria: Aid delivery via Bab al-Hawa for the first time in two months

On 19.09.23, the first UN aid delivery was made through the Turkish-Syrian Bab al-Hawa border crossing into Idlib governorate after the UN Security Council-authorized use of the crossing expired in July 2023. Already in August, the opening of the crossing had been agreed with the Syrian government. In the past, 85 % of the relief supplies were brought to the Syria's north-western areas through this crossing. The first 17 UN trucks since July 2023 (cf. BN of 17.07.23) were able to reach the areas via this route again. They brought medicine, medical supplies and food.

North-west Syria: Dead and injured in Syrian army attacks

According to media reports, Syrian government forces attacked several localities in Aleppo and Idlib governorates on 24.09.23.

The day before, two civilians were reportedly killed and two others seriously wounded in a similar attack on a refugee camp in Idlib after the bombing of the camp caused a fire.

Tunisia

Cartoonist briefly arrested

According to media reports, the cartoonist Tawfik Omrane was taken into custody on charges of insult on 21.09.23 and interrogated for several hours. One day later, the cartoonist was released, but he will have to appear in court on 25.09.23.

Omrane, who is also known for his caricatures of President Kais Saïed, had published caricatures of head of government Ahmed Hachani on social media at the beginning of August 2023, criticising his choice for the post of head of government.

Ukraine

Civilian victims of war

The missile strike in the city centre of Kostyantynivka (Donetsk oblast), which according to recent reports claimed the lives of at least 17 people and injured more than 30 others on 06.09.23 (cf. BN of 11.09.23), may have been caused by a misguided Ukrainian missile, according to media reports.

In Russian attacks on the night of 19.09.23, one person died in Lviv when civilian warehouses some of which were storing humanitarian supplies, were hit and collapsed. In Kherson, an attack hit a trolley bus, killing a policeman and injuring one or two people. Reports on 24.09.23 said that attacks on residential areas in Beryslav District left two or three people dead and several injured in the Ukrainian-controlled part of Kherson Oblast. In Kupyansk (Kharkiv Oblast), Russian shelling killed at least three people on 19.09.23, and five according to later information, while rescue workers searched for more victims. In each case, the information is from local sources. In a wave of attacks targeting at least six towns in different parts of the country, a total of two civilians were reportedly killed

and at least 21 injured on 21.09.23, ten of them in Cherkassy alone. A Russian attack on the front-line town of Kurakhove (Donetsk oblast) injured 13 civilians, according to local reports on 21.09.23. On 22.09.23, another (also see below) attack on Kremenchuk (Poltava oblast) was reported, killing one person and injuring more than 50, according to new information.

Development of the war effort

On 20.09.23 it was reported that an oil refinery in Kremenchuk (Poltava oblast) had to stop production after a Russian attack. Energy infrastructure was also the target of what was reported to be the largest wave of Russian attacks since 15.08.23 on 21.09.23, as a result of which power was reportedly lost in parts of Kiev, Zhytomyr, Dnipropetrovsk, Rivne and Kharkiv regions. Meanwhile, the safety situation at the Zaporizhzhya nuclear power plant has improved somewhat, according to the head of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), an agency report said.

The Russian army has stepped up its fight for the islands in the Dnipro River (Kherson oblast), reports say citing British military experts. The part of Kherson oblast on the left of the lower course of the Dnipro is under Russian control, the part on the right of the Dnipro is again under Ukraine's control after the counter-offensive in autumn 2022. There have been repeated reports of attacks or attempted attacks by the Ukrainian side on military facilities on the occupied Crimean Peninsula, including a successful one on the headquarters of the Russian Black Sea Fleet in Sevastopol. According to Ukrainian sources, nine people were killed and 16 injured, including two generals; the Russian side had reported one soldier missing. Reports from the fronts remain unchanged: in some places the Ukrainian side (Zaporizhzhya region, around Robotyne; Donetsk region, around Bakhmut), in some places the Russian side (around Kupyansk and Lyman, Kharkiv and Luhansk oblasts) is making advances, but without making any major territorial gains. On 24.09.23, however, Ukraine claimed a breach of the Russian defence lines at the village of Verbove near Robotyne.

Exchange of Deput Ministers of Defence

According to media reports, on 18.09.23 the government dismissed the six deputy defence ministers, including Hanna Maliar, the deputy defence minister, who often publicly presented the events on the front-line (cf. BN of 03.07.23 and 17.03.23). The new defence minister, Rustem Umjerov, only took office on 06.09.23 (cf. BN of 11.09.23). The first deputy defence minister, Oleksandr Pavlyuk, who has been in office since 14.02.23, is apparently not affected by the current change in the ministry's leadership.

Venezuela

Fourth Report of the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission

On 20.09.23, the fourth report of the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela was presented. This report for the UN Human Rights Council is based on 256 interviews and group discussions and takes a close look at 43 new cases in the period between 01.01.20 and 31.08.23. The first part of the report mainly deals with various forms and manifestations of state repression. Repression continues, for example in the form of enforced disappearances, arbitrary detentions or cruel inhuman treatment or torture, which particularly affects opposition members or persons perceived as such, the report finds. The number of such cases has decreased slightly since 2021, though. However, in addition thereto, other forms of repression are gaining ground which serve to undermine civil liberties, for example by restricting freedom of the press, freedom of expression, freedom of assembly and association and political participation. In this context, in addition to threats and intimidation, there were reports of surveillance, defamation, criminalisation or political disqualification of individuals (human rights defenders, trade union representatives, media and political activists) or civil society organisations critical of the government or voicing criticism. However, there are indications that such mechanisms are increasingly being used selectively to set examples. In some cases, also the involvement of colectivos in physical assaults or threats was noted. In addition, the report points to four violent homicides in 2022 involving two media workers, an indigenous leader and a socio-political leader. However, it could not be conclusively determined whether these cases were related to state repression, the report said.

The major theme the report's second part examines the police unit DAET (Dirección de Acciones Estratégicas y Táctica), which was newly founded in July 2022, in more detail. The report said that the experts had good reasons

to assume that the DAET is basically continuing the roles and activities of the meanwhile disbanded police unit FAES (Fuerzas de Acciones Especiales), which had been heavily criticised in the past for human rights violations, including extra-judicial killings. At the same time DAET is employing many of the former FAES members.

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