



Briefing Notes

Group 62 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

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Afghanistan

New report on the situation of women in Afghanistan

On 20.06.23, UN Special Rapporteur Richard Bennett presented his new joint report with the UN Working Group on Discrimination against Women and Girls on the situation of women and girls in Afghanistan at the 53rd session of the Human Rights Council. The report highlights that the Taliban's decrees and policies have excluded women from public life and stresses that the discriminatory practices and extreme violence against women and girls in Afghanistan are totally unacceptable and may amount to crimes against humanity. The Taliban have called the report a propaganda campaign that does not reflect reality.

UN Security Council: discussion of the situation in Afghanistan

On 21.06.23, the UN Security Council discussed the situation in Afghanistan. The main point of criticism was the 'gender apartheid' imposed by the Taliban. There was disagreement among the participants over the continuation of sanctions and the conditions for humanitarian aid. The Taliban's disregard for human rights, particularly of women and girls, was also criticised at a meeting of the UN Human Rights Council on 19.06.23.

Persecution situation

On 19.06.23, it became known that a bodyguard of the former chief executive of the government and chairman of the National Reconciliation Council, Abdullah Abdullah, and his brother were arrested by the Taliban. Both had worked for the security forces before the Taliban took power and are originally from Panjshir province. On 20.06.23, the Taliban arrested the prosecutor of a military court of the former government in Parvan province. Journalist Reza Shahir was released on 19.06.23 after being held in detention for two days. He was allegedly tortured by the Taliban during his detention. The background of his arrest is unclear.

In Sar-e Pul province, Taliban fighters killed a village elder on 21.06.23. The Taliban confirmed the incident and the arrest of a perpetrator. It was said to have been a personal conflict.

According to an unconfirmed Twitter message by Naqibullah Faiq, the former provincial governor under the republic, there have been 22 suicides in Faryab province within the last month, 17 of them of women. The reasons are poverty, unemployment, and forced marriages.

Government leadership

On 20.06.23, the second official public execution took place since the Taliban took power. The man had been found guilty of the murder of five people and was shot in front of an audience of about 2,000 people in a mosque in the town of Sultan Ghassi Baba in Laghman province.

On 20.06.23 it was reported that Meta, the parent company of WhatsApp, had suspended or temporarily disabled numerous WhatsApp accounts belonging to Taliban officials and soldiers. Meta's restrictions on the Taliban are due to US sanctions that make it a criminal offence to provide services to the group.

Algeria

Journalist sentenced to prison

According to press reports on 20.06.23, journalist Ihsane El Kadi has been sentenced to seven years in prison. The founder of Radio M and the news website Maghreb Émergent had received money from his daughter, who lives in the UK, to pay staff salaries and running costs. This was classified by the authorities as foreign financing, which has been banned since April 2023 (cf. BN of 03.04.23 and 24.04.23).

Central African Republic

Fierce clashes between non-state actors in Haut-Mbomou

On 20.06.23, clashes in the town of Mboki in eastern Haut-Mbomou province claimed the lives of numerous combatants and civilians. Some media outlets report a total of up to 44 people killed and others injured. The local militia Azandé Ani Kpi Gbé attacked the rebel group Unité pour la paix en Centrafrique (UPC), as it had previously done in the village of Bambouti (cf. BN of 08.05.23). Azandé Ani Kpi Gbé accuses the UPC of fighting against the Zandé ethnic group. The UPC, on the other hand, accuses the local militia of committing crimes against the Muslim population and the Peulh ethnic group. The Azandé Ani Kpi Gbé have the support of local politicians. There are few state authorities in the region. Citing the mayor of Zémio it was reported that 5,000 civilians have been forced to flee from Mboki to the town of Zémio (also in Haut-Mbomou) as a result of the clashes, which have probably been going on for some time.

Ethiopia

Hundreds starve to death in Tigray - call for resumption of aid deliveries

Humanitarian and church groups in Ethiopia have called for the resumption of aid deliveries. It is estimated that nearly 600 people have died of hunger in the past three months in the regional state of Tigray. At the beginning of June 2023, the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) had announced the temporary suspension of food aid to Ethiopia after investigations revealed that aid supplies were being misappropriated and sold on markets. However, no suspects have been identified. Members of the security forces are suspected. Local authorities say that since the end of April 2023, no regular food aid has arrived in Tigray. On 20.06.23, the WFP announced that it would do everything in its power to ensure that humanitarian aid reaches those in need.

Tigray has been suffering from food shortages for more than two years due to the armed conflict in the region. The Ethiopian government had been accused of using hunger as a weapon by imposing a de facto blockade on Tigray. Following the signing of the Cessation of Hostilities (CoH) agreement concluded in November 2022, aid began to reach the region again.

Dead and injured after Amharic militia attack

On 16.06.23, eight civilians were killed and another 13 injured in an attack by Amharic militias (Fano) on a village in Kiremu district in the East Wollega zone of the western Oromia Regional State, according to the authorities. 15 people are missing. The attackers also reportedly took 3,000 cattle.

Fano has resisted the Ethiopian federal government's call of April 2023 to integrate all regional special units into the state police and the national army and to disarm the militias. Since then, there have been repeated confrontations between Fano and the security forces (cf. BN of 24.04.23).

The Gambia

Criticism of detention conditions; lengthy pre-trial detention procedures

According to media reports, a report by the parliamentary committee on human rights pointed to problematic conditions in the police facilities and prisons visited in the country. Already in October 2022, the committee chair had criticised the detention conditions as unacceptable (cf. BN of 11.10.22).

The committee spoke of ‘abominable and unhygienic conditions’ in some places of detention and criticised other ‘anomalies’, without giving further details. Ventilation, hygiene, and sanitary conditions were inadequate in most of the detention cells in the police stations. In addition, most places of detention lacked adequate food supplies for detainees, with police and prison staff contributing to the food supply of the detainees.

Cases of prolonged pre-trial detention continued to be a problem, as the committee noted. In Janjanbureh and Mile 2 prisons individuals were held who were awaiting sentencing for several years. The committee mentioned the case of a pre-trial detainee who had been awaiting trial for more than 14 years. Of the total prison population of 71 in Janjanbureh, almost half (30) were held in pre-trial detention. The chairman of the committee had previously highlighted the very high number of pre-trial detainees in the prisons (cf. BN of 11.10.22).

Ghana

18,000 refugees received

The number of refugees in Ghana has increased to about 18,000 following the influx of Burkina Faso nationals fleeing violence in the country, the chairman of the Ghana Refugee Council (GRB) stated in Accra on 20.06.23 on the occasion of this year's World Refugee Day. About 10,000 of the refugees have been registered, including around 3,200 nationals of Burkina Faso. The rest come from some 30 other countries, including Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Afghanistan, Sudan, Democratic Republic of Congo, Syria, Togo, and Liberia. The government has approved a non-citizen identity card for refugees to facilitate their participation in socio-economic activities.

Guatemala

General elections: controversial exclusion of candidates, problematic situations of the new government

General elections took place on 25.06.23. They are held every four years and include the election of the country's president and members of parliament. Official results are expected soon. The presidential election is likely to require a run-off to determine the winner.

Ahead of the elections, several candidates were disqualified in highly controversial decisions by the Supreme Electoral Tribunal (TSE). According to media reports, there were also demonstrations and widespread criticism of the inclusion of Zury Ríos Sosa, a candidate considered to be on the far right, as a blood relative of the former dictator General Ríos Montt (1982-1983), who is constitutionally barred from running for political office.

The current president Alejandro Giammattei is constitutionally barred from running for a second term. During his time in office, international observers regularly criticised the increasing institutional uniformity and restrictions on democracy. In particular, the situation of press freedom has deteriorated significantly. For example, the government-critical newspaper El Periódico ceased publication in May 2023 in the face of repression and criminalisation. Its founder José Rubén Zamora Marroquín was sentenced to six years in prison on 15.06.23 for alleged money laundering in a controversial court case. Several members of the judiciary, particularly those involved in anti-corruption investigations, have also left the country due to criminalisation and threats, and others have been imprisoned. Guatemala was ranked 150th out of 180 countries in Transparency International's annual Corruption Perceptions Index 2022.

Honduras

Prison riot: at least 46 dead in women's prison

On 20.06.23, at least 46 women were killed in a prison riot at the Centro Femenino de Adaptacion Social women's prison in Támara during violent armed attacks by members of Mara 18 on members of the rival gang MS-13.

Iran

Death penalty: execution after many years in prison for murder

Media reports say that on 21.06.23, a prisoner was executed in the central prison of Sanandaj (Kordestan province). According to Kurdish human rights organisations, the man was accused of killing a member of the Revolutionary Guards (IRGC) in 2011. He had been in custody since then and had allegedly confessed under duress. On the evening of 20.06.23, several people protested outside the prison against the imminent execution. Iran has reportedly seen an increase in the number of death sentences carried out this year (cf. BN 08.05.23 and 15.05.23).

Religious minorities: condemnation of a Baha'i believer

According to media reports, a 26-year-old member of the Baha'i religion was sentenced on 21.06.23 to five years in prison and banned from leaving the country for two years, and his personal belongings were permanently confiscated. He was accused of spreading propaganda against the system and for the Baha'i religion.

Alternative sentences for hijab violations

Foreign media report the sentencing of a woman to 270 hours of unpaid community service for violating the Muslim dress codes. The work consists of cleaning public places and facilities. The woman had originally been sentenced to two months' imprisonment, which was later reduced.

A student from Tehran was reportedly banned from studying for two semesters for violating the Islamic dress code. The sentences imposed can be considered alternative punishments. Under Iranian criminal law (Art. 638 of the penal code), hijab violations can be punished with up to two months' imprisonment or a fine. A draft law, which has not yet been passed, provides for warnings for first-time offenders or fines in repeated cases, including the freezing of bank accounts.

Announcements by judiciary officials

Media report that the deputy head of the judiciary announced at a national judiciary conference that Iranian citizens abroad would not face arrest at the airport if they returned to Iran. This reportedly includes those facing legal proceedings. However, it was not specified to which cases this would apply. The aim of these announcements is probably to encourage Iranian investors to return to the country.

At the conference, the head of the judiciary, Ezhei, announced new figures for the pardoning of people arrested during the nationwide protests from September 2022 onwards. Just before the Persian New Year (Nowruz) in March 2023, some 98,000 people were released and pardoned, instead of the 22,000 as previously announced. These statements by representatives of the judiciary cannot be verified.

Iraq

Violence against women: husband kills wife and sister-in-law

On 19.06.23, a 19-year-old man allegedly shot dead his 20-year-old wife and seriously injured her 16-year-old sister. The incident took place at the family home of the two sisters in Erbil. The sister died a day later from her injuries. The victims' father reported that his daughter had expressed fear for her life during their four-month marriage. The suspected perpetrator is in custody. Cases of (lethal) gender-based violence are common throughout Iraq, including in the Kurdish region.

Tishreen protests 2019: life sentence for senior security official

On 25.06.23, the Dhi Qar Criminal Court sentenced Omar Nazar to life imprisonment for his responsibility in the deaths of 30 protesters and the injury of over 200 people. The court found that Nazar had given the order to fire live ammunition at protesters blocking a road in Nasiriya in November 2019. Iraq has seen ongoing mass protests since October 2019 against corruption, the economic situation, unemployment, foreign intervention, and other issues.

Turkish air strike in Dohuk

On 24.06.23, the Turkish air force bombed the mountainous region of Metina (Dohuk province), reportedly causing no civilian casualties. The area is a restricted zone due to the conflict between the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and the Turkish military.

Iraq / Iran

Conflict between Komala factions

On 22.06.23, a conflict between the Shorshger and Zahmatkeshan factions of the Iranian Kurdish Komala in the Zirgwez region (Sulaimaniyya province/Iraq) escalated after a failed reunification attempt on 21.06.23. Two Zahmatkeshan fighters were killed, and Shorshger and Zahmatkeshan blamed each other for the escalation. The Komala is divided into at least three branches; Shorshger and Zahmatkeshan announced in November 2022 that they would reunite after 15 years.

Kenya

Several killed in armed attacks

On 25.06.23, five civilians were killed and many houses and properties destroyed in the villages of Juhudi and Salama (Lamu County) on the border with Somalia. The police said it was terrorist attack. Al-Shabaab is suspected to be behind the assault.

Kosovo

Police arrest suspects after clashes with KFOR and journalists

Recent media reports say that Kosovo police have detained another suspect in connection with the clashes with Kosovo Force (KFOR) soldiers in northern Kosovo at the end of May 2023, following two earlier arrests. According to a police officer, the suspect is a Kosovo Serb who was allegedly involved in the violent clashes between Serb demonstrators and KFOR in the Serb-majority municipality of Zvečan on 29.05.23 which took place against the background of protests against the appointment of Albanian mayors after the local elections (cf. BN of 24.04.23). Dozens of KFOR soldiers and many Serb civilians were injured (cf. BN of 05.06.23). The police has also reported that three more Kosovo Serbs have been arrested for attacking journalists. The Kosovo Association of Journalists also registered 30 attacks on journalists during the riots in Zvečan and Leposavic.

Lebanon

Economic situation

The economic situation continues to spark protests and demonstrations across the country. On 23.06.23, an exceptionally large crowd gathered in front of the central bank building in Beirut. Demonstrators demanded the lifting of capital controls, which prevent most Lebanese from accessing their savings. An international arrest warrant was issued for Lebanon's central bank chief Riad Salameh, but Lebanon has refused to extradite him. Demonstrations against the banking sector now regularly result in banks getting vandalised.

On the same day, the US and the UN began paying a monthly salary of USD 100 to some 70,000 members of the Lebanese armed forces. Salaries have long been insufficient to cover the cost of living due to inflation in recent years. There are a number of aid programmes aimed at stabilising the country's armed forces. Most prices in Lebanon are now quoted in US dollars, as the Lebanese lira has depreciated too much to be used as a functional currency. The programme is initially scheduled to run for six months.

On 22.06.23, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) announced that without short-term funding, the agency's approximately 700 schools and 140 health centres in Lebanon would have to cease operations from around September 2023.

Mali

Constitutional referendum

On 18.06.23, Mali voted on a new constitution. The referendum is seen as a first step towards the presidential elections scheduled for February 2024. Voter turnout was reportedly 39.4 percent. Ahead of the referendum, it was expected that the vast majority would vote 'yes', as critics of the military government live mainly in northern and central Mali, where elections could not be held for security reasons. According to the electoral authority, 1,121 out of 24,416 polling stations across the country were inaccessible. On 24.06.23, the electoral authority announced the results. 97.06 percent of those who took part in the referendum voted to replace the 1992 constitution with a new one that centralises the state and increases the power of the president and the armed forces.

Nigeria

Plateau State: more than a dozen people killed in intercommunal violence

At least 16 people were killed in an outbreak of inter-communal violence in the central Nigerian Plateau State on 20.06.23. In one of the two incidents, unidentified gunmen attacked a local farmers' self-defence group in the Rayom area and killed six of its members, media reported citing official military statements of 22.06 and 23.06.23. In the other violent incident, a total of ten civilians were killed in simultaneous attacks by unknown individuals on several communities in Mangu Local Government Area (LGA). Buildings were also set ablaze. Around 200 people have reportedly been killed in the region since May 2023 in conflicts between farming communities belonging to the Berom ethnic group and non-settled (herdsmen) communities of the Fulani ethnic group.

It should be noted that outbreaks of intercommunal violence in central Nigeria and elsewhere often result in mutual killings, and the motivation and specific concrete trigger for a particular violent event are often impossible to pinpoint. It may be the result of unresolved conflicts over land, grazing and water rights, or the desire for revenge for previous acts of violence, or simmering ethnic rivalries. The fact that the non-settlers involved are usually Muslims and the settlers often Christians adds to the volatility of the situation (cf. BN of 22.05.23). The lack of effective state law enforcement in the region also encourages the emergence of criminal gangs that carry out deadly attacks on small communities, sometimes with the aim of kidnapping people for ransom. This situation, sometimes referred to as the 'Plateau crisis', is one of the most obvious security challenges the country is currently facing, if only because of the relatively high number of deaths.

Military rescues 33 kidnapped in northern Nigeria

In the first half of June 2023, the Nigerian military said it had eliminated a total of 42 bandits, terrorists, and other criminals and freed 33 kidnapped civilians in several operations in the north-west and north-central regions. Nearly 100 suspected criminals were also arrested by security forces in the same regions. This is according to a media report dated 15.06.23. Military success stories of this and similar kind are not uncommon (cf. BN of 05.09.22, 06.02.23, 20.03.23 and 24.04.23).

Pakistan

Blasphemy charges

From January to May 2023, Eurasia Review documented 57 blasphemy charges across the country, including 28 in Punjab province, 16 in Sindh, eight in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and five in the Pakistan-administered part of Kashmir. Most of the cases have targeted religious minorities. Recently, two Christians were charged with blasphemy in Lahore. Last week, a court in Bahawalpur in southern Punjab sentenced a Christian to death for blasphemy.

TTP creates shadow province in Balochistan

Last week, the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) announced the creation of the shadow province of Kalat-Makran in south-west Balochistan. The aim is to control almost half of the territory of Balochistan province. In 2022, the TTP appears to have already established a shadow province in northern Balochistan.

AI criticises treatment of Afghan refugees

On the occasion of World Refugee Day, Amnesty International (AI) criticised the treatment of Afghan refugees by the Pakistani authorities. In particular, the arbitrary arrests must stop, AI said. Human rights organisations have also criticised the Pakistani government's treatment of the tribal population living along the border with Afghanistan. There are regular exchanges of fire, and Afghan airspace is invaded by drones.

Palestinian Autonomous Territories / Israel

West Bank: 16 Palestinians and four Israelis killed

On 19.06.23, seven Palestinians, including a 15-year-old girl, were killed in Jenin during a military raid that lasted about eleven hours. More than 90 Palestinians were also wounded, as well as eight Israeli soldiers. The evacuation of the armed Israeli soldiers involved Israeli military helicopters, which were also fired upon. According to media reports, this was the first such air support operation since around 2005.

On 20.06.23, armed Hamas gunmen killed several Israelis, including a 17-year-old, in an attack near the settlement of Eli. The two assailants were shot dead. Hundreds of Israeli settlers then stormed the Palestinian village of Turmus Ayya, setting fire to cars and buildings. The mayor of the village said that more than 30 houses and 60 cars were partially or completely destroyed. Six Palestinians were wounded. Palestinian emergency services confirmed the death of one Palestinian. A few days later, Israeli security forces arrested three settlers on suspicion of involvement in mass disturbances in Palestinian villages.

A few hours after the clashes in Turmus Ayya, three Palestinians were killed in the first Israeli drone strike on a West Bank target since 2006. The military said it had identified several militants in a car who had previously been suspected of carrying out several attacks against Israelis. The armed group Islamic Jihad in Palestine said that two of those killed were its members, while the third apparently belonged to the al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades, the armed wing of Fatah.

On 23.06.23, a Palestinian died from injuries sustained in clashes with the Israeli military in Nablus.

On 24.06.23, a Palestinian opened fire at the Israeli Qalandiya checkpoint near Jerusalem. The military personnel present shot and killed him. At the same time, there were again mass movements of Israeli settlers in several Palestinian localities, who threw stones, set fire to houses and also used firearms.

Israel: LGBTIQ person killed

On 09.06.23, an 18-year-old woman from a majority Druze community in northern Israel was shot dead. According to media reports, her death is believed to be related to her family's reaction to her sexual identity. She had previously received several death threats from her brothers and filed a police report against two of them in 2020. After her brothers spent several months in prison and an official process of reconciliation was initiated with her family, she fled again and went into a shelter. She later moved in with her sister, where she filed a final police report against her brothers; shortly afterwards, she was murdered. No suspects have been officially named so far. According to media reports, the murdered woman is the 99th victim of violence in Arab communities in Israel, which is a relatively high number compared to Jewish communities (cf. BN of 19.06.23).

Republic of Moldova

Şor party declared unconstitutional

In a ruling on 19.06.23, the Moldovan constitutional court declared the oppositional and pro-Russian Şor party of expatriate oligarch Ilan Şor unconstitutional and dissolved it with immediate effect. The party was seen as a key driver of the anti-government protests that have been taking place since the autumn of 2022, in the course of which protesters appear to have been paid by the party for taking part. Its leader Ilan Şor was sentenced in absentia to 15 years in prison by a Moldovan appeals court in April 2023 on charges of fraud and money laundering (cf. BN of 17.04.23). According to the constitutional court, the elected MPs of the Şor Party would be allowed to continue to exercise their mandates as independent deputies without the right to join other parliamentary factions. Representatives of the Şor Party announced their intention to challenge the decision at the European Court of Human Rights.

Russian Federation

Wagner Group revolt

On the morning of 24.06.23 members of the private paramilitary organisation 'Wagner Group' led by Yevgeny Prigozhin took control of central facilities of the Russian military in the city of Rostov-on-Don. This followed a protracted power struggle between the head of the mercenary group and defence minister Shoigu and, as unconfirmed reports say, attacks by the regular armed forces on a Wagner field camp. During the day, Wagner seized further military installations in the Rostov and Voronezh oblasts and, according to international press reports, advanced largely unhindered with several thousand fighters towards Moscow as far as the Lipetsk oblast with the declared aim of overthrowing the military leadership around defence minister Shoigu and chief of general staff Gerasimov. In response, troops were massed in the capital, checkpoints were set up and the anti-terror regime was declared, allowing security forces extensive surveillance of communications, checks on people and restrictions on movement. Roadblocks were set up in several southern oblasts and people were told not to leave their homes. With the mediation of Belarusian President Lukashenko, Prigozhin agreed to withdraw on the evening of 24.06.23, presumably due to a lack of expected support from the military and power elite. According to the authorities, the withdrawal was largely complete by 26.06.23. In return, the government assured the mercenaries involved in the uprising that they would not be punished and that Prigozhin himself would be free to leave for Belarus.

Russian military bloggers say that during the 24-hour uprising, Wagner shot down seven air force helicopters and planes, killing between 13 and more than 20 military personnel, although the figures vary in different reports. In the village of Elizavetovka in Voronezh oblast, 19 residential buildings were damaged in one of the rare direct exchanges of fire between Russian soldiers and mercenaries, according to the district administration. In another unspecified clash with residents in Rostov-on-Don, two of the residents were reportedly detained by Wagner members. The anti-terror regime in Moscow was lifted on 26.06.23, mayor Sobyenin said.

Senegal

Authorities ban several demonstrations and rallies

According to media reports, the prefect of Dakar has banned several demonstrations planned between 23.06. and 25.06.23, which were called for by the recently formed heterogeneous opposition movement Mouvement des forces vives du Sénégal - F24 (cf. BN of 24.04.23), the opposition coalition Yewwi Askan Wi (YAW) and the press group Walfadjiri. The reason given was the risk of disturbing public security, 'infiltration' and obstructing the free movement of people and goods. The demonstrations were again directed against the possible candidacy of incumbent Macky Sall for a third term as president, the continued de facto house arrest of opposition leader Ousmane Sonko and the temporary suspension of the private broadcaster Walf TV. The Walfadjiri press group had also planned to organise a protest march against the new closure of the channel (cf. BN of 12.06.23). On 25.06.23, security forces reportedly used tear gas to disperse a banned YAW demonstration near Sonko's house in Dakar. Unanimous media reports say that at least four YAW deputies, all members of Sonko's party Patriotes africains du Sénégal pour le travail, l'éthique et la fraternité (PASTEF), were taken into police custody.

On 21.06.23, police forces dispersed a demonstration by students from the Cheikh Anta Diop University in front of the student union in Dakar. The reasons for the demonstration are not known.

Also in the Matam region, several demonstrations and rallies organised by PASTEF have recently been banned by the authorities, citing a lack of staff. PASTEF has criticised the blanket bans on demonstrations.

Recently, the UN Human Rights Office expressed concern at the continuing restrictions on freedom of expression and demonstration since the deadliest riots in years (cf. BN of 19.06.23).

Deadly riots: Progress of criminal trials against demonstrators in Dakar

A media outlet has reported on the ongoing criminal trials of demonstrators arrested during the deadly riots following the sentencing of opposition leader Sonko in Dakar (cf. BN of 05.06.23 and 12.06.23). According to a statement by the public prosecutor's office on 13.06.23, a total of 410 people were arrested in Dakar alone for violating the legislation regulating demonstrations. With the exception of underage people and those accused of minor offences, demonstrators would be prosecuted to the 'full extent of the law', a prosecutor in Dakar said. A lawyer said that most of those arrested were charged with endangering state security, inciting sedition and other

offences, and were taken in custody. Amnesty International's Senegal director Seydi Gassama expressed concern that more detainees would be sent to the already overcrowded prisons.

Sierra Leone

Presidential, parliamentary, and local elections without dreaded violence; clashes

Contrary to fears, the presidential, parliamentary, and local elections on 24.06.23 took place in a tense but largely calm atmosphere with an apparently high voter turnout. However, there were reports of isolated incidents of violence and attacks by supporters of political parties. The opposition All People's Congress (APC) party of Samura Kamara, who is considered the main challenger to incumbent president Julius Maada Bio, repeated accusations of vote rigging (cf. BN of 19.06.23). Press reports confirmed irregularities at some polling stations such as delays and late arrival of documents. No official results have yet been announced by the electoral authority. International election observers have criticised the lack of transparency in the vote count. Both Kamara's APC and Bio's ruling Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP) have claimed victory, citing their own figures.

Media report that on 25.06.23, security forces surrounded the APC party headquarters in Freetown, where large numbers of APC supporters had gathered to celebrate. Tear gas and live ammunition were used. The APC reported one death, which has not yet been independently confirmed, and Kamara said he was the victim of an assassination attempt while holding a press conference. In a statement, police justified their action by saying that passers-by were harassed by APC supporters who had marched through Freetown proclaiming their victory.

On 21.06.23 police used excessive force and live ammunition to disperse an APC demonstration at the party's headquarters against electoral fraud. According to the APC, two people were killed. The police denied any deaths, but last reported dozens of arrests. Press reports say that otherwise, the election campaign was largely peaceful for a long time, but in some places the final phase was marred by intimidation, confrontation, and even violent clashes between APC and SLPP supporters in their respective strongholds.

Somalia

ATMIS troop withdrawal begins

The African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS) has begun to withdraw troops in accordance with the Somali Transition Plan (STP) calling for the withdrawal of 2,000 troops by the end of June 2023. The first military base in Haji Ali (Middle Shabelle region), which was used by Burundian forces, will be handed over to the Somali national army.

Attack on military training camp

According to officials, seven recruits were killed and at least 18 injured when two explosives-laden cars detonated outside a military training camp on 21.06.23 in the town of Bardhere (Gedo region). Al-Shabaab has claimed responsibility for the attack.

Violent clashes outside Puntland parliament

Violent clashes broke out between regional forces and opposition militias outside the Puntland parliament in Garoowe on 20.06.23, during and after the parliament debated constitutional amendments, including the introduction of a system of 'one man, one vote' system. Opposition groups accuse President Said Abdullahi Deni of trying to extend his term or help ensure that the January 2024 elections go in his favour. At least 26 people, among them civilians, were killed and more than 30 injured in the fighting. On 21.06.23, both armed factions agreed to a ceasefire. As a result, they reportedly left the streets, and shops reopened. In response to the clashes, Said Abdullahi Deni reshuffled his cabinet.

More than 30 people abducted by al-Shabaab

On 17.06.23, al-Shabaab reportedly abducted more than 30 people, mainly clan elders and children, in Daru Nicma village (Middle Shabelle) which was recently liberated by the Somali national army. There is no further information on the whereabouts of the abductees.

Ongoing conflict in Las Anod

According to the latest UN figures, at least 36 civilians have been killed and more than 272 injured in the violent conflict in Las Anod (Somaliland), which has been ongoing since January 2023 (cf. BN of 13.02.23, 27.02.23, 06.03.23 and 24.04.23). In addition, between 154,000 and 203,000 civilians are reported to have been displaced. Somaliland forces reportedly attacked Dhulbahante militia positions near Las Anod between 19.06 and 25.06.23 but were repulsed. Casualties were reported on both sides.

Sudan

Efforts to maintain the ceasefire

Although the agreed ceasefire from 18.06. to 21.06.23 (cf. BN of 19.06.23) was largely observed with a few exceptions, heavy fighting broke out between the Sudanese Army (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) shortly before the deadline expired on 21.06.23 at 06:00 hrs. Fighting was reportedly concentrated around the capital Khartoum and the surrounding towns of Omdurman and Bahri. Air strikes, artillery fire and ground fighting were reported. The SAF and RSF blamed each other for the outbreak of fighting and the resulting breach of the ceasefire. In the course of the ongoing fighting, RSF forces gained the upper hand and were able to occupy and hold key points, including a large part of the presidential palace complex, the main oil terminal in the capital area and the headquarters of the heavily armed central reserve police.

General situation and continuing fighting

In addition to new and ongoing fighting in and around the capital, further fighting was reported in several towns in South Kordofan. In Dalanj, which is currently under the control of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North (SPLM-N) led by Abdelaziz al-Hilu, clashes with the SAF took place despite the ceasefire agreement. There have also been repeated attacks, looting and assaults by criminal and armed gangs and groups.

Fighting also broke out in Kadugli, the capital of South Kordofan state, from 22.06.23 onwards. Several media outlets have reported that SAF members and an unspecified rebel group were involved in the fighting.

Fresh fighting between the SAF and RSF also took place in Nyala, South Darfur, and Al-Fashir, North Darfur. After the clashes between the SAF and RSF in Nyala reportedly subsided in intensity, gunmen in civilian clothes attacked the town's second largest market ('people's market') and looted the local stalls and shops. Although both actors have bases in the area, neither SAF nor RSF forces intervened to prevent the looting of the market. With the city's main market already looted and partially burnt down, the 'people's market' was the best fallback option for trade and supplies to the city.

The capital of West Darfur, El-Geneina, has also been the scene of fighting for the past three weeks. According to media reports, at least 5,000 people have been killed and more than 8,000 injured so far. Citing eyewitness accounts and statements by organisations working on the ground, several media outlets have reported a pattern of ethnic cleansing and compared it to the genocide in Rwanda. The NGO Doctors Without Borders also speaks of an increasing ethnic dimension to the fighting in the Darfur region.

Syria

Rukban: US military brings aid directly for the first time

An international daily newspaper reports that a major US aid shipment reached the residents of the Rukban refugee camp through official channels for the first time on 24.06.23, after the US military stationed at a nearby base flew in wheat seeds, irrigation equipment, and school supplies for the more than 1,000 children living in the camp.

Rukban is close to the Jordanian border and lies on the highway between Damascus and Baghdad. An improvised shelter was built there from 2014, reportedly housing up to 70,000 people at one point, after the US military established a base in nearby al-Tanf in 2016 to fight IS in the region. The restricted area also offered civil war refugees protection from the threat of persecution by the Syrian government and other parties to the conflict. An international aid organisation estimates that only around 8,000 people are currently living in Rukban.

Since 2018, the Syrian government has denied UN cross-border aid deliveries from Jordan and Iraq and has generally described the refugee camp's residents as terrorists. In al-Tanf, the US military is training local forces for the fight against IS, among other things.

Until the recent US aid deliveries, which were initiated by a Syrian-American aid organisation, people relied on a smuggling economy to survive.

Qamishli: civilians killed in Turkish drone strike

According to a statement by the Kurdish-led Autonomous Administration of Northern and Eastern Syria (AANES), the co-chair of the Qamishli city council, her deputy and the vehicle's driver were killed by a Turkish military drone strike on 20.06.23 when their car was hit by a missile near the city. A fourth person, also a member of the administration, was reportedly injured.

Türkiye

Arrests during Pride parade

At least 50 people were arrested by police during the annual Pride parade in Istanbul on 25.06.23. Ahead of the once again banned Pride march, police had barricaded access to both Istiklal Avenue, the regular meeting point for Pride marches, and the central Taksim Square. Roads in the area were also blocked, and public transport in the area was stopped. To avoid the roadblocks, hundreds of people carrying rainbow and transgender flags gathered in Mistik Park in the Sisli district instead. They chanted slogans while the organisers read out a Pride Week statement. The demonstration was violently dispersed by police. At least one person suffered head injuries, Amnesty International said.

In the coastal city of Izmir, the country's third largest city, police arrested at least 44 people on 25.06.23 after the authorities banned the Pride march.

Tunisia

Investigation into insulting the president

According to press reports, the journalist and radio presenter Zied El Heni was arrested on 20.06.23 after a judge ordered him to be remanded in custody ahead of his trial on charges of insulting President Kaïs Saïed. He was released two days later, but the case remains under investigation. Freedom of expression in Tunisia has been increasingly restricted since 25.07.21 as part of the restructuring of the state.

Politician remains in custody

According to media reports, Tunisia's anti-terrorism judicial unit initially ordered the release of the politician Chaïma Issa on 23.06.23, before the public prosecutor's office appealed the decision. She belongs to the National Salvation Front (Front de Salut National) and is one of a number of opposition figures who were imprisoned in February 2023 on suspicion of conspiring against state security (cf. BN of 13.02. and 20.02.23).

Ukraine

Humanitarian situation and civilian victims

The Russian armed forces and associated groups have reportedly been placed on the UN's 'list of shame', which includes states and organisations the UN accuses of violating children's rights in conflicts. 136 children were killed and 518 others maimed by Russian forces in Ukraine last year, and 480 Russian attacks on hospitals and schools were recorded. Ukrainian forces were blamed by the UN for 80 child deaths and 212 attacks on hospitals and schools. Since the begin of the Russian invasion, at least 9,083 civilians have died as a result of the war on the territory of Ukraine, and a further 15,779 people have been recorded as injured, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) said on 18.06.23. In May 2023, the NGO Action on Armed Violence recorded 260 incidents involving the use of explosive weapons, with a total of 798 civilians killed or injured in Ukraine, most of them in the war-torn areas of Donetsk (225), Kherson (195) and Dnipropetrovsk (127). The UN

Special Rapporteur on Torture said on 15.06.23 that evidence and testimonies point to the deliberate use of torture of civilians and prisoners of war by Russian military personnel, including the use of electric shocks, mummification, beatings, and mock executions.

War events

Explosions and air strikes were reported from the Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhzhya, Odessa, Sumy, Kherson, and Kiev regions on 25.06.23 and in the early hours of 26.06.23, according to Ukrainian media reports. On 26.06.23 the Ukrainian general staff said that 36 engagements with Russian forces were recorded the previous day along the frontline in Donetsk oblast. A rocket attack on a residential building in the capital Kiev on 24.06.23 killed at least five civilians, according to local authorities; search and rescue operations were completed late on 25.06.23, the Ukrainian state emergency medical service reported.

Venezuela

Deaths in violent clashes in border areas

The NGO FundaRedes stated on 21.06.23 that in the first five months of 2023 it had registered more than 85 violent clashes between non-state armed groups and various units of the state security forces at national or local level. At least 119 people were reportedly killed in the states of Amazonas, Apure, Bolívar, Falcón, Táchira and Zulia, covered by the study. Almost half of all security incidents (40) and persons killed (54) were recorded in the state of Zulia.

Freedom of assembly and association: demonstrations in May 2023

The Venezuelan Observatory of Social Conflict (OVCS) registered more than 600 protests in May 2023, of which more than 85 percent were for more economic, social, cultural, and environmental rights. After more than a quarter, protests mainly related to the demand for better salaries and working conditions. Protests are also continuing over restrictions on basic state services such as electricity, water and gas. In total, OVCS recorded the suppression of 14 demonstrations by state security forces.

Yemen

Measles cases on the rise

Doctors without Borders has reported a dramatic increase in measles cases, including severe cases, in the Houthi-controlled governorate of Hajjah. This is due to poor nutrition, especially among young children, as well as Yemen's very limited functioning health system and the Houthis' anti-vaccination stance. For 2022, the UN has reported around 22,000 cases of measles in Yemen, including 161 deaths, as well as increases in diphtheria and whooping cough.

First flight to Saudi Arabia

On 17.06.23, the first flight since 2016 took off to Saudi Arabia from Sanaa. A total of five flights will take Yemeni pilgrims to Jeddah to perform the Hajj pilgrimage to Mecca. The flight route will reportedly not be operated regularly for the time being.