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Briefing Notes

Group 62 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

16 December 2024

Afghanistan

Governance and persecution

On 11.12.24 the Taliban minister for refugees, Khalil Haqqani, and three other people were killed in a suicide attack on the grounds of the ministry of refugees in Kabul. Haqqani is an uncle of Sirajuddin Haqqani, the Taliban's interior minister, and a member of the Haqqani network, which has good links to Al Qaeda. Islamic State - Khorasan Province (ISPK) has claimed responsibility for the attack.

It was reported in the media on 12.12., 14.12 and 15.12.24 that the Taliban had publicly flogged a total of eight people in Paktia, Kunduz and Samangan provinces. Nationwide, since the beginning of November 2024 the Taliban have had 133 people, including 19 women, flogged for various offences.

The new report released by the UN Secretary-General on 06.12.24 with regard to the situation in Afghanistan finds that the armed opposition still poses no serious threat to the Taliban. In the period under review from August to October 2024, the report records 2,510 security incidents, representing a rise of around 40 % over the same period in the previous year. The numbers of casualties remain low, however. In the reporting period, 16 civilians (eight men, one woman and seven boys) were killed and 71 (57 men, seven women, six boys and one girl) injured. In addition, a total of 16 civilians (15 boys and one girl) were killed and 35 (nine men, four women, 19 boys and three girls) were injured by unexploded munitions. Contrary to the general amnesty announced by the Taliban, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA)

has documented at least five killings, 14 arbitrary arrests and four cases of torture and abuse of former government officials and former members of the Afghanistan security forces by the Taliban. The report also notes an increase in security incidents between Pakistani border soldiers and the Taliban.

The Taliban ministry of higher education announced on 11.12.24 that it had revoked the licences of eleven private colleges for breaching administrative and educational regulations. The ministry announced in a statement that it had established the "existence of bogus teachers and students, sham agreements and a lack of qualified administrative staff".¹

Humanitarian situation

According to the UN Secretary-General's new report on the situation in Afghanistan (see above), an estimated 23.7 million people in Afghanistan continue to find themselves in a critical humanitarian situation. Only 37.5 % of the total of around US\$ 3 billion targeted for the Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan 2024 had been contributed as per 11.11.24, however. While the Afghan economy is showing some signs of recovery, it continues to face problems such as unemployment, poverty and a lack of human capital. The AFN continues to be some 25.7 % stronger against the US dollar than in August 2021. In the first six months of the current fiscal year, which began on 22.03.24, public revenue totalled around US\$ 1.6 billion (approx. AFN 110.9 billion as per 06.12.24), representing a 10 % increase over the previous year.

It was reported in the media on 14.12.24 that some 50 homeless people and drug addicts had died of hunger or cold in the city of Zaranj (Nimruz province) in the previous month. There are said to be around 13,000 drug addicts, some 5,000 of whom are homeless, in the province, which has long been a key drug trafficking hub.²

Belarus

Government preparations for 2025 presidential election

In view of the forthcoming presidential election on 26.01.25, the Belarusian police are carrying out so-called "anti-riot" drills. According to official information, the police are to be trained in preventing "any manifestation of extremism and terrorism" and any "attempts to incite citizens to carry out illegal actions and breaches of public order." President Lukashenko has additionally threatened to shut down the internet in the event of any mass protests during or after the presidential election. The last election in 2020 gave rise to mass demonstrations which were sparked by accusations of manipulation.³

Pardons for political prisoners, action against political opposition figures

It was reported in the media on 20.11.24 that president Lukashenko had pardoned a further 32 political prisoners had been convicted on extremism charges. This sixth round of pardons in 2024 takes the total number of prisoners released to 178. Some 1,300 remain in Belarusian prisons on political grounds. Four years after the outbreak of mass protests against Lukashenko's authoritarian regime, legal proceedings against people involved in the protests are still ongoing. A number of proceedings are currently taking place before courts in Minsk against families who are accused of having taken part in the demonstrations in 2020. In addition, at least 200 supporters of Ukraine have received custodial sentences since the beginning of the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine, according to information from Viasna, a Belarusian NGO in exile. Viasna reports that prison terms of up to 25 years have been handed down on the basis of charges such as extremism or conspiracy against the state.⁴

Filtration camps

According to investigations by RFE/RL, a government institution in Belarus has been used by the Russian military as a "filtration camp" at which Ukrainian soldiers and civilians have been subjected to torture and other forms of mistreatment. The government-controlled facility near the town of Narowlya, close to the Ukrainian and Russian border in the south-east of the country, is reported to be one of several such locations at which the Russian Federation screened civilians after 24.02.22. Human rights activists have documented numerous cases of suspected torture and enforced deportation to the Russian Federation of Ukrainians who have passed through these facilities. The Russian Federation has set up such facilities both in occupied Ukrainian territories and in Belarus. Witnesses report that such instances of abuse have also taken place at the facility in Narowlya.⁵

Democratic Republic of the Congo

SPT calls for mechanism to prevent torture

In a press statement on 11.12.24, the UN Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture (SPT) called for urgent measures in the Democratic Republic of the Congo to prevent torture, in view of the inhumane prison conditions in the country. An SPT delegation undertook a fact-finding mission to the Democratic Republic of the Congo from 01.12. to 07.12.24, in the course of which it paid unannounced visits to a number of detention facilities, including two prisons, a number of police stations and cells at the Palace of Justice and conducted confidential interviews with inmates, prison officers, police officers and medical staff.

The head of the delegation stated that while the country had made initial progress in establishing a national prevention mechanism, fast implementation was now of the essence. He noted that the NPM was necessary in order to remedy the poor prison conditions which the delegation had observed and to prevent torture and mistreatment. Overcrowded cells which were totally unsuitable for detaining people for more than 48 hours had been witnessed not only at prisons but also at police stations and courts. He identified the systematic practice of holding defendants in pre-trial detention for too long as the main cause of the problem.

A study undertaken in the Democratic Republic of the Congo on behalf of Jeune Afrique to examine the prison conditions in the country in the wake of the fatal uprising and break-outs at Makala prison at the beginning of September 2024 (cf. BN of 09.09.24) has revealed that around 80 % of those in custody are still awaiting trial. Overcrowding and excessively long pre-trial detention are not the only factors contributing to the problematic prison conditions: The supply of fresh water, food and medical products is also reported to be inadequate. According to reports in the media, the director of the Tanganyika prison in Moba confirmed on 11.12.24 that the prison had been without drinking water for eleven months. He said the inmates were barely able to wash themselves and were reliant on help from the Red Cross or visitors, adding that this led to an increased risk of illness. The director stated that he had already approached the regional authorities, but no action had been forthcoming as yet.⁶

Ethiopia

Air strikes in Amhara

Approximately 50 civilians are reported to have been killed in a drone attack in Zibst, North Wollo Zone, at the end of November 2024. The attack targeted a vehicle in a busy market district which was carrying numerous market visitors. The Ethiopian government's heavy air raids against the Fano militia have been ongoing for over a year and repeatedly hit civilian targets. Information regarding the date of the attack varies between 19.11. and 28.11.24.⁷

Forced recruitment of minors in Oromia

Recent findings by the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission reveal serious human rights violations in Oromia. Minors, including eleven and fourteen year-olds, are reported to have been conscripted by regional militias. Forced recruitment is said to have taken place in Adama, Bishoftu, Jimma and Shahashemene, for example. According to the Commission's report, in some instances children are seized on their way to or from school and transported to recruitment centres. In addition, family members are said to have been coerced into paying between ETB 20,000 and 100,000 (approx. EUR 150 to 760 as per 10.12.24) to buy back their children's liberty.⁸

Georgia

Election of a new president

The former professional footballer and anti-Western candidate of the governing Georgian Dream party, Mikheil Kavelashvili, was elected as Georgia's new president on 14.12.24. The election took place by way of an elective assembly comprising MPs and regional representatives and thus for the first time not in the form of a direct general election. 224 of the elective assembly's 300 members reportedly voted for Kavelashvili, who was the sole candidate. The opposition boycotted the election in keeping with their position regarding the result of the parliamentary election (cf. BN of 02.11.24).

In the continuing protests against the government and its course, demonstrators have appeared playing with balls and showing red cards as a symbol of their disapproval. The incumbent pro-European president, Salome Zourabichvili, had previously stated that she did not intend to leave office without a rerun of the parliamentary election. It was reported on 03.12.24 that her petition to the constitutional court for the election to be declared null and void had been rejected, however.⁹

Ghana

Election result and minor disturbances in the aftermath of the election

On 09.12.24 the Ghanaian electoral commission announced the final result of the presidential elections which were held on 07.12.24 (cf. BN of 09.12.24). John Mahama of the National Democratic Congress (NDC) secured 56.55 % of the vote to win the election ahead of his most important rival, Mahamudu Bawumia, the vice-president and candidate of the governing New Patriotic Party (NPP). Bawumia took 41.01% of votes cast. The electoral commission reported that turnout was some 20 % lower than in the last elections in 2020, at only 60.9 %.

On 11.12.24 the incumbent president, Nana Akufo-Addo, and the future president, Mahama, met in Accra to plan a smooth transition of power. They also introduced the so-called Transition Team at the meeting. The establishment of the Transition Team was stipulated in the Presidential (Transition) Act of 2012, which specifies that the team must be comprised of members of the old government and members of the new president's camp and is to jointly organise the peaceful transition of power. Handover to the new president is planned for 07.01.25. Mahama has emphasized how important a peaceful transition of power is for Ghana, stressing that despite all the adversities facing the country at present, Ghana must nevertheless remain a beacon of democracy in Africa. While the elections largely went off smoothly, a number of minor disturbances did occur. According to reports in the media, the police arrested a total of 30 people on suspicion of perpetrating violence in the aftermath of the elections. It was apparently not possible to collect the ballot papers in nine constituencies because the counting centres were besieged by party members. This reportedly did not affect the election result in any way, however. In Kasoa (Central Region), civilians clashed violently in a disturbance on the day of the election, in the course of which one person was reportedly shot dead and one person was injured. The police are said to have arrested four suspects in connection with this incident.¹⁰

Guinea

Deadline for end of transition phase broken

It was reported in the media on 14.12.24 that government spokesman Ousmane Gaoual Diallo, with an eye to the target date of 31.12.24, had stated that the transitional charter (cf. BN of 11.10.21) did not stipulate a deadline for the return to a civilian system of government. The military junta effectively committed itself to this date in an undertaking towards the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) (cf. BN of 24.10.22). No date has been set for the constitutional referendum, however, which constitutes an essential step before democratic elections can be held. Prime minister Amadou (also referred to as Mamadou) Bah Oury had actually announced that the referendum at least would be held before the end of 2024 (cf. BN 25.03.24). He most recently conceded that the draft constitution allowed interim president Mamadi Doumbouya to run for presidential office, contrary to the transitional charter and his own pledges. In the light of these broken promises, Forces Vives, an association of civil society and opposition forces, has called on Guineans living in Europe to demonstrate in Paris on 28.12.24. It has been widely reported that numerous events are currently taking place throughout the country to prepare for Doumbouya's future candidacy. At a football tournament held in N'Zérékoré as part of these preparations, clashes between fans of the home team and of the opponents from Labé left 56 people dead, according to the latest official figures. NGOs presently estimate the death toll at around 150. The investigations have been criticised for a lack of transparency.¹¹

Haiti

Gang violence: 184 killed in Port-au-Prince

According to information from the UN, at least 184 people were killed in Wharf Jérémie, part of a deprived district in Cité Soleil, on 06.12. and 07.12.24. Most of the victims were over 60 years of age. Gang leader Monel (Mikano) Felix reportedly ordered the attacks after a voodoo priest alleged that older residents of the district had "bewitched" his child and were thus responsible for making the child ill. Some of the dead bodies were publicly burned. The Haitian government announced that it would be stepping up measures to bring those responsible to justice. It is estimated that around 85 % of Port-au-Prince is currently controlled by gangs. The armed groups are accused of arbitrary murders, gang rapes, kidnapping for ransoms and causing food shortages. In 2024 to date, more than 700,000 people have fled their homes in Haiti and over 5,000 have met violent deaths.

Meanwhile, the international airport in Port-au-Prince reopened for commercial flights on 11.12.24. The interim government has published a statement announcing that security at the airport has been strengthened and new patrols and checkpoints have been set up around the airport. In November the airport was closed for the second time this year on account of ongoing gang violence. The U.S. Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) has extended a ban on American airlines operating commercial flights and cargo flights to Port-au-Prince and other regions of Haiti until March 2025.¹²

Iran

Prison conditions: HRW report on denial of medical care

The human rights organisation HRW reported on 13.12.24 that a number of current cases confirm that the Iranian authorities are denying people in prison necessary medical care. The practice is reportedly particularly common with regard to inmates who are in custody for politically motivated reasons, in order to exert pressure on them. HRW cites two word-of-mouth sources in this connection who were asked about access to medical care in Tehran's Evin prison.

HRW asserts that various current cases which have also been mentioned in foreign media reports corroborate this assessment. Among those mentioned is the well-known imprisoned activist Varisheh Moradi, who has been sentenced to death (cf. BN of 18.11.24). Despite health problems after a hunger strike, Moradi was refused permission to be transferred to a hospital in November 2024.¹³

Civil rights activist with previous convictions sentenced to two years' imprisonment

According to information released by a Norway-based Kurdish human rights organisation on 11.12.24, a Kurdish-Iranian civil rights activist has been sentenced to two years' imprisonment, including one year on probation. The man was reportedly a board member of a non-governmental organisation, among other areas of activity. He was apparently charged with having established groups and gatherings which were directed against the country's national security.

The convicted man was previously handed down a ten-year prison term in 2023. This sentence was repealed by a court of appeal. In an earlier trial, the man was reportedly sentenced to one year in prison and additional punishments for disturbing public order. He was apparently also temporarily held in custody in 2019 and 2022.¹⁴

Kenya

Police deploy tear gas against demonstrators

According to reports in the press, Kenyan security forces deployed tear gas against hundreds of demonstrators who were protesting against gender-based violence and femicide in the capital, Nairobi, on 10.12.24. At least three people were reportedly arrested, including the director of Amnesty International Kenya. According to reports in the media, protests also occurred in the city of Mombasa and the town of Lodwar. In November 2024 president William Ruto made over US\$ 700,000 available for a campaign to end femicide. Gender-based violence has been on the rise in the country for a number of years. According to information from the National Police Service in Kenya, at least 97 femicides occurred between August and October 2024.

The Kenyan charity organisation "Gender Violence Recovery Centre" has reported that one in three Kenyan women have suffered abuse by men by the time they reach the age of 18. Studies show that the high level of gender-based violence is attributable to patriarchal views and inadequate legal protection.¹⁵

Lebanon

Ceasefire agreement: Israeli military withdraws from first town

On 11.12.24 the Israeli armed forces withdrew from the town of Al-Khiyam in southern Lebanon in accordance with the terms of the ceasefire agreement. Only one day later, the Israeli air force carried out an air strike on the town, allegedly targeting a Hezbollah fighter. The Lebanese health ministry reported one fatality.

On 14.12.24 one person died in a drone attack on Al-Khardali.

According to information from the Israeli military, Hezbollah arms caches and depots continue to be found on an almost daily basis. Under the terms of the ceasefire agreement, Hezbollah must not have any fighters or weapons south of the Litani river and Israel has been granted the right to remove or destroy these itself, if necessary.¹⁶

Niger

Dozens killed in attacks on villages

On 10.12. and 11.12.24 suspected members of jihadist groups killed around 100 members of the Nigerien army and around 50 civilians in the villages of Chatoumane and Libiri in the south-western region of Tillabéri, close to the border with Burkina Faso. According to reports in the media, these attacks were the most lethal since May 2024. Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) and the Al Qaeda group Jama'a Nusrat ul-Islam wa al-Muslimin (JNIM) are engaged in fighting over the Tillabéri region. No jihadist group has claimed responsibility for the attacks to date. Prior to these attacks, on 05.12.24 armed actors killed more than 20 people and injured a number of people in an attack on a public transport vehicle close to the town of Téra in the Tillabéri region. According to information from the NGO Armed Conflict Location and Event Data (ACLED), in 2024 to date more than 1,500 civilians and members of the military have been killed in attacks by armed groups in Niger. In 2023 as a whole the death toll stood at around 650.

Also on 11.12.24, according to reports in the media members of a previously unknown jihadist / terrorist group by the name of Lakurawa attacked a military base in the town of Mountseka in the Tahoua region. Members of the Nigerien security forces reportedly killed several of the Lakurawa attackers. The members of Lakurawa, who originate from herdsmen communities in Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso, originally supported local inhabitants in fighting armed groups who were operating in the region. Relations with the local population increasingly deteriorated when Lakurawa members began stealing cattle and attempted to enforce strict religious laws.¹⁷

Nigeria

Zamfara State: Dozens abducted

A gang of unknown armed actors raided the village of Kakin Dawa in the north-western state of Zamfara on 08.12.24 and abducted over 50 women and children. This emerges from media reports citing police information. Additional security forces were reportedly dispatched to the area in the aftermath of the incident.

Raids on villages and kidnapping for ransom money occur with a degree of regularity in the north-west of Nigeria. In Zamfara State alone, unknown actors killed a total of at least 20 people and kidnapped 110 on 14.01., 11.02. and 13.02.24. Similar attacks in which a total of at least 24 people were killed and over 250 abducted took place in the same state on 09.05., 10.05.24 and 14.07.24. According to reports in the media, gangs are also extorting money from local residents by other means, for example by demanding money from village communities for allowing access to their farmland (cf. BN of 13.05. and 29.07.24). A common feature of such acts of violence is that the perpetrators, whom the government describes as bandits or terrorists, largely remain unidentified.¹⁸

Pakistan

Punjab: Ahmadi killed in Rawalpindi

According to information from the Ahmadiyya community, two Ahmadi brothers were attacked in the city of Rawalpindi on 05.12.24 after having ignored previous threats and warnings that they should leave the city. One of the two brothers was killed by several blows of an axe to his torso. The attacker reportedly then fled the scene of the crime, making further threats as he left. The killed man was visiting the city from Rajanpur, where he and his family had also received threats. The brother who survived the attack in Rawalpindi is also said to have experienced hostility prior to the incident, including death threats. Only a few days before the attack, a religious assembly directed against Ahmadis reportedly took place close to where the crime occurred. The crime is seen as a direct result of the hate stirred up against the Ahmadis by fundamentalist preachers. The International Human Rights Committee has criticised the inadequate prosecution of hate crimes against Ahmadis, noting that hate campaigns against the Ahmadiyya community have increased throughout the country.¹⁹

Palestinian territories / Israel

Gaza Strip: Northern Gaza under siege; rising cost of basic foods

A large part of the north of the Gaza Strip remains effectively under siege. It is estimated that approx. 65,000 to 75,000 people are still located in this region.

Extremely high prices for basic foods, in particular flour, are reported from some parts of the Gaza Strip. Of the 19 bakeries which are normally provided with supplies by the UN, only four are currently working, and these are all located in Gaza City.²⁰

West Bank: Current developments

Since 05.12.24, the security forces of the Palestinian National Authority have been carrying out coordinated operations against armed Palestinian militias in the north of the West Bank, above all in Jenin. In the course of these operations, a 19 year-old Palestinian man was killed on 09.12.24.

On 11.12.24 a twelve year-old Israeli boy was killed in an attack on a bus. The suspected attacker gave himself up to the authorities on 12.12.24.

It was confirmed on 14.12.24 that the Palestinian security forces had killed Yazid Ja'ayseh, a high-ranking commander of the local Jenin Brigades.²¹

Republic of Moldova

State of emergency declared in face of impending gas shortages

A state of emergency was declared in the Republic of Moldova on 13.12.24 in view of the impending end to the supply of Russian gas via Ukraine. The situation arises as a result of Ukraine's announcement that it will stop the flow of Russian gas through Ukrainian territory when the transit contracts expire on 01.01.25. The national state of emergency is to apply for 60 days, beginning on 16.12.24. In 2022 the renegade region of Transnistria and Moldova's central government reached an agreement providing for the entire supply of Russian gas to be routed to a power station in Transnistria which is important for the economy of this region and which also supplies a large part of the energy for the areas of Moldova which are under the control of the central government. Transnistria declared its own economic state of emergency on 10.12.24. Moscow has made a continuation of the supply via alternative routes contingent on the settlement of outstanding debts. The declaration of a state of emergency enables the Moldovan government to react quickly and curb energy exports.²²

Somalia

Clans clash in Middle Shabelle / Hiiraan

It has been reported that at least 20 people, including women and children, have died in violent clashes between rival clans. A conflict appears to have broken out between members of the Hawadle clan and another clan in the village of Xalfooley on 29.11.24. No details of the circumstances relating to the incident are known.²³

Sudan

HRW documents war crimes in South Kordofan

It emerges from a report published by HRW on 10.12.24 that the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) and militant Arab militias perpetrated war crimes against civilians, including executions, rape and abductions, in South Kordofan state between December 2023 and March 2024. HRW has reported in the past on serious human rights violations by the RSF and allied militias in other parts of Sudan. Neither the UN nor the African Union appears to have taken any concrete steps to protect civilians, however.²⁴

Humanitarian situation

The International Rescue Committee (IRC) describes the situation in Sudan as the greatest humanitarian crisis worldwide. This emerges from reports in the media covering the publication of the IRC's "Emergency Watchlist

2025" on 10.12.24. 14.6 million people are reported to have been driven from their homes and almost 26 million people are said to be suffering from a substantial food deficit. According to the IRC, a famine which broke out at the Samsam camp in North Darfur in July 2024 after months under siege by the RSF has already reached extreme proportions (cf. BN of 05.08. and 12.08.24). In the face of the prevailing security situation, the health system is said to be on the verge of collapse and practically unable to treat any patients (cf. BN of 09.09.24). In October 2024 Doctors Without Borders was temporarily forced to suspend the treatment of malnourished children at the camp. The organisation's hospital was reportedly evacuated after the camp came under fire on 02.12.24.²⁵

Syria

Changeover of power; fate of many Assad loyalists uncertain

On 13.12.24 tens of thousands of people congregated at Umayyad Square, a roundabout close to the mosque of the same name in the centre of Damascus, to observe Friday prayers and celebrate the end of Assad's rule. The sermon at the Umayyad mosque was held by interim prime minister Al-Bashir. The leader of Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), Ahmad al-Sharaa, who has now abandoned his nom de guerre, Abu Mohammed al-Jolani, congratulated the people via a video link.

Al-Sharaa announced in a written statement on 11.12.24 that he would not grant pardons for anyone who had been involved in the torture or murder of prisoners under Assad's government. He undertook to find perpetrators who were still in the country and to request other countries to extradite perpetrators from their territories. The London-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR) reported on the same day about attacks by armed groups on people in residential districts which were known to be Assad strongholds. Homes were reportedly plundered and occupants intimidated. While prominent Assad supporters, such as his brother, Maher, or major general Al Mamlouk, have reportedly fled to Russia and Lebanon respectively, the whereabouts of many other leading figures from the toppled government remain unclear.

On 14.12.24 the Turkish foreign minister, Hakan Fidan, opened the Turkish embassy in Damascus, which had been closed since 2012.²⁶

North-east Syria: SDF withdraw from Manbij; raising of Syria's new flag

The Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) stated on 11.12.24 that it had consented to a ceasefire agreement brokered by the USA and Türkiye (cf. BN of 09.12.24), under which they are required to withdraw their forces from Manbij. This means that the city is now under the control of the Syrian National Army (SNA), an Islamist rebel organisation supported by Türkiye. Manbij had been controlled by the SDF for more than eight years, after it drove IS out of the city in August 2016. The SDF leadership has criticised the USA for failing to prevent the attacks on the Kurds by Türkiye and allied militia, pointing out that Manbij was liberated from IS with the help of the US military and that IS might be able to exploit any weakening of the SDF in the region. According to information from the USA, the SDF is currently still holding some 9,000 IS fighters captive at more than 90 detention centres spread over north-east Syria.

On 12.12.24 the Democratic Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (DAANES), the civilian counterpart to the SDF, stated that it had raised Syria's new flag on the buildings of all its institutions. In its statement, it committed itself to Syrian unity and its national identity. To date, DAANES had for years positioned itself as a third party between the Syrian government and the armed opposition. This symbolic act can be seen as manifesting a willingness to work together with the new rulers in Damascus.²⁷

Refugee movements

According to updated figures from the UN, 1.1 million people have become internally displaced as a result of the HTS offensive, in particular inhabitants of Aleppo, Idlib, Hama and Homs governorates. Refugee movements are observable above all in Idlib, Hama, Rif Dimashq, Aleppo and Tartus governorates. At the same time, some 5,000 people are reported to have left their emergency accommodation at camps for internally displaced people in order to return to their homes. The security situation is said to have improved most recently in the majority regions; only in north-east Syria does the UN describe the situation as volatile, due to major territorial and political changes.

The UN also reports that as per 13.12.24 just under 10,000 people had returned to Syria from Lebanon since 08.12.24. Tens of thousands of people reportedly returned to Lebanon from Syria during the same period (against

the backdrop of the ceasefire between Israel and Hezbollah). Around 1,000 Syrians are said to have fled to Iraq, including 800 on 11.12.24 alone.²⁸

Ukraine

Civilian casualties

According to information from the Ukrainian authorities, Russian attacks in the Donetsk and Kherson regions on 09.12.24 each killed one person. At least eleven people died in a Russian missile attack on the city of Zaporizhzhia on 10.12.24, in which the Ukrainian authorities allege that a hospital was hit. It was reported in the media on 14.12.24 that two people had been killed by Russian shelling in the Kherson region.²⁹

Course of the war

According to information from the Ukrainian military leadership, Russian troops are three kilometres from the strategically important logistics centre of Pokrovsk in the Donetsk region. Ukrainian military observers state that Ukrainian troops are in danger of being encircled to the south of the embattled city of Kurakhove (Donetsk region). The new commander of the Ukrainian ground troops, major general Mykhailo Drapatyi, is planning a "large-scale reorganisation" of his branch of the military, which is outnumbered in terms of personnel and weapons. The restructuring is to cover the training programmes as well as battlefield and logistics management and is to involve counter-corruption measures, the use of technology and a strengthening of the role of non-commissioned officers. In an interview on 12.12.24 the director of the Ukrainian president's office, Andriy Yermak, stated that Kyiv was not yet ready to enter into talks with the Russian side, as it did not dispose of the weapons, security guarantees and international status to which the country aspired. Prior to this, president Zelenskyy had openly considered the possibility of negotiating an end to the war. The Ukrainian government is open in principle to the potential deployment of a European peace-keeping force in the country to safeguard a possible treaty with Moscow.³⁰

Energy infrastructure

According to energy minister German Galushchenko, the Russian forces carried out a large-scale attack on Ukrainian energy installations throughout the country on the night of 12.12.24. President Zelenskyy has reported that 93 missiles and 200 drones were deployed in the attack and 81 missiles were shot down. Grid operator Ukrenerho has confirmed that the power supply was restricted all over the country. Blackouts were imposed in a number of regions as a precautionary measure to avoid grid overloads. The targets included energy facilities in western Ukraine and the military air base in Starokostyantyniv (Khmelnitskyi region).

The Federal Ministry for Economic Development and Cooperation has announced that the winter relief fund for Ukraine is to be increased by EUR 20 million to a total of EUR 90 million. The winter relief package also includes combined heat and power units, generators and repair equipment.

The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) reported on 10.12.24 that a drone attack had taken place on an official IAEA vehicle near to Zaporizhzhia nuclear power station. IAEA director Rafael Gross stated that this was a deliberate attack which was intended "to cause us damage or to intimidate us. "The IAEA specialists were not withdrawn, however. The two warring parties have accused each other of being responsible for the attack.³¹

Situation for Crimean Tatars

Against the backdrop of International Human Rights Day on 10.12.24, the Society for Threatened Peoples (STPI) spotlighted the situation of unlawfully imprisoned Crimean Tatars. According to the STPI, repression of the indigenous Crimean Tatars has increased continually since the peninsula was occupied by the Russians in 2014. Of a total of 218 people from Crimea who are being held in Russian prisons on ethnic, religious or political grounds, 132 are said to be Crimean Tatars. They are said to be serving long prison terms, in some cases of 15 to 20 years, in inhumane prison conditions. The STPI reports that the ethnic group now accounts for only 10 to 12 % of the total population on the peninsula.³²

Ukrainian court passes sentence for treason

It was reported in the media on 13.12.24 that a court in Kyiv had sentenced a Ukrainian woman to 14 years in prison for treason on charges of collaborating with the Russian Federation. She is said to have drafted a letter at the behest

of the Russian secret service which served the Kremlin's interests in justifying Russia's full-scale invasion on 24.02.22. Four days later, Russia's ambassador to the UN, Vasily Nebenzya, cited this letter in an address. According to information from the Ukrainian public prosecutor's office, the convicted woman wrote in the letter "that the Ukrainian people support the Russian Federation's so-called 'special operation' in the Ukraine, that looting, killings and larceny had begun in Ukraine and that politicians were openly calling for Russians to be killed."³³

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