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Group 62 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

Briefing Notes

28 October 2019

Ethiopia

Dozens killed in protests in Ethiopia

Latest reports state that at least 67 people have been killed and more than 200 injured in anti-government protests in the capital Addis Ababa and the surrounding region. Amnesty International criticised police for shooting at demonstrators with live ammunition. However, the dead apparently included five members of the security forces, who had been killed by thrown stones. The police stated that 19 demonstrators had been killed by the security forces. The others had died during conflicts between followers of Prime Minister Abiy and anti-government demonstrators.

The conflicts broke out during a march protesting an alleged police action against Oromo activists and the media entrepreneur Jawar Mohammed. Jawar claimed the government had ordered the withdrawal of his bodyguards, leading him to fear for his life. Reuters reported that more than a thousand Oromo, for the most part youthful, had gathered in front of his house and chanted “Down with Abiy.” Copies of Abiy’s book “Medemer” were also burnt during the protests. The book had been published and distributed throughout the country shortly after Abiy had been promised Nobel Peace Prize two weeks before. Unlike recent protests, this new wave does not have any ethnic background. Both Abiy and Jawar are members of Ethiopia’s largest national group of the Oromo.

Jawar, a US citizen born in Ethiopia and founder of the independent Oromia Media Network, had only returned from exile to his homeland in mid-2018 and had supported Prime Minister Abiy’s reform plans. However, Jawar, whose Facebook page has approximately 1.75 million followers, had become increasingly critical. This led Abiy to warn the media entrepreneur against statements promoting continued unrest. On 25.10.19, Jawar announced his intention to enter the parliamentary elections planned for 2020 against Abiy.

Afghanistan

Attacks and fighting

Attacks and fighting also occurred between the Afghan security forces and rebels last week. A suicide attack in Jalalabad (Nangarhar, east) on 25.10.19 is worth emphasising in which at least 18 people were killed or injured, including six children. Government statements indicated special forces of the Afghan security forces had been the target of the attack. Three soldiers and two civilians were killed with 13 additional people, including six children, suffering injuries. The Taliban claimed responsibility. According to it, eleven soldiers were killed and dozens injured.

In addition, a clash occurred between Afghan and Pakistani armed forces in the eastern province Kunar, in which civilians were also victims. Afghan sources claimed Pakistani soldiers encroached 300 to 400 m into Do Kalam in the Nari district and attempted to set up a military post.

Algeria

Presidential elections

A total of 23 candidates have qualified for the presidential elections scheduled for 12.12.19. These include several representatives of the old regime under Bouteflika. Activists of various orientations criticised the election as far too early, since the former opposition had hardly had any opportunity to create support structures and the existing structures favoured precisely the supporters of the former president and his dominant elite. Consequently, there was considerable doubt that the course of the election would be free and fair.

Burundi

Rebels killed

On 22.10.19 security forces killed at least 14 members of the Burundi rebel group, Résistance pour un État de Droit au Burundi (RED) – Tabara, who had forced their way into the Musigati district (Bubanza province) from their haven in the neighbouring DR Congo. They are thought to have been planning an attack. It was not clear whether members of the security forces had been killed. Four reporters conducting investigations on the spot on the same day were arrested together with their driver. They were charged with subverting the authority of the state on 26.10.19.

China

Hong Kong: Protests

A demonstration for solidarity with citizens, journalists and Muslims took place on 27.10.19. The aim was to draw attention to police treatment of these groups during previous protests. The demonstration referred to an incident on 20.10.19. The official version claimed police had accidentally directed a water canon with blue-dyed water at a mosque in the Kowloon district. Violent confrontations with the police occurred in connection with the demonstration. The former deployed water cannon, tear gas and rubber bullets. Several people were arrested.

On 26.10.19 doctors and nursing staff members demonstrated peacefully against disproportional violence by the police vis-à-vis demonstrators. Hundreds of demonstrators and police have received medical treatment since the protests began in June 2019.

Hong Kong: Amendment withdrawn

As Chief Executive Carrie Lam had already announced in September 2019 (cf. BN 09.09.19), the planned amendments of the Extradition Law were formally withdrawn on 23.10.19. The occasion for the legal amendments was a Taiwanese citizen arrested in Hong Kong on suspicion of murder, who in the absence of an extradition agreement could not be deported to Taiwan. The man served a prison sentence for money laundering until 23.10.19 in Hong Kong. He is now said to be ready to face justice in Taiwan.

Journalist arrested

As only became known about a week later, the journalist Sophia Huang was arrested on 17.10.19 in Guangzhou. The well-known #MeToo activist was accused of “picking quarrels and provoking trouble” – an accusation frequently levelled at government critics. The occasion was apparently her commitment to Hong Kong’s protest movement. Human Rights Watch claims an increasing number of people in China who had expressed support for the Hong Kong protests have recently been subjected to government repression.

EU human rights prize for arrested Uighurs

The arrested economist Ilham Tohti has received the 2019 Sakharov prize awarded by the EU parliament. As stated by the EU parliament president David Sassoli on 24.10.19, Tohti had made a great contribution to understanding between Uighurs and Han Chinese. The Uighur Tohti was sentenced to life imprisonment in 2014 for separatism, among other things. The respected academic examined the living conditions of the Uighurs in Xinjiang and was regarded as a mediator between the cultures. He criticised the discrimination of the Uighurs on a website he set up.

Guinea

Mass protests in Conakry

Tens of thousands of people protested on 24.10.19 in the capital Conakry against a third term for the 81-year old president Alpha Conde. Thousands of security force members were deployed, with the protest marches passing off peacefully. At least nine people were killed during protests against an extension of the term in office of the president in the previous week with many others being injured. Conde has ruled the country for almost ten years and has called for a referendum for a third term in office. His mandate will end in December 2020.

India

Kashmir: Municipal council elections

Local elections for the municipal council chairpersons took place on 24.10.19 in Kashmir during the continued isolation of the region by the Indian military. The former northernmost federal state of India will be officially divided into the two Union territories Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) and Ladakh on 31.10.19. Only municipal council members were entitled to vote. According to unofficial sources, independent candidates won in 217 municipalities and in 81 the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the governing party in India. For security reasons, most of the candidates and thousands of council members have been living in hotels for months in Srinagar, the region's capital. In the run-up, local parties called for a boycott of what they regard as undemocratic elections. In an address on 27.10.19, the Pakistani prime minister called on New Delhi to hold a referendum in the Kashmir valley.

India/Pakistan

Punjab: Travel facilitated for Sikh pilgrims

An agreement has been signed with Pakistan to facilitate travel for Indian Sikh pilgrims, who can now visit one of their shrines in Kartarpour Sahib in Pakistan without a visa (cf. BN of 16.09.19).

Iran

Baha'i arrested

According to the Farsi language news portal Human Rights Activists News Agency (HRANA), Mitra Forsatipour, a member of the Baha'i, was arrested on 21.10.19 in Gilavand, close to Teheran. The security forces reportedly searched her flat and seized her private laptop, camera and mobile telephone. Forsatipour was then said to have been brought to the Teheran Evin prison. She has been accused of "activities against national security". Three other Baha'i had already been arrested before in the city of Shiraz. The public prosecutor accused them of having disturbed the Arba'een festival of mourning sacred to Shi'ites (the Arba'een festival ends the 40-day period of mourning for the Shia Imam Hussein), since they had been busy organising a Baha'i ceremony.

In an interview given to the Farsi service of the Deutsche Welle, the journalist Isabel Schayani, who lives in Germany, said the wave of arrests might be related to the impending 200th birthday of Bahá'u'lláh, the founder of the Baha'i religion, on 12 November.

Protests and unrest

On 21.10.19, employees of the "AzarAb" company crippled operations with a strike. They demanded the immediate release of 21 colleagues arrested on 19.10.19. The police reportedly despatched special forces. Previously, hundreds of employees of the factory in the city of the Arak, located about 280 km south-west of Teheran, had blocked rail traffic between the north and south of the country. They had been protesting for 13 days on account of wages that had been unpaid since June. Special forces of the police broke up the blockade. Several people were severely injured on this occasion and had to be taken to hospital. At least 21 people were arrested. AzarAb Industries is an Iranian company with over 2,500 employees, which builds power stations, petrochemical plants and refineries for sugar, oil and gas. Employees of AzarAb and the Heavy Equipment

Production Company (HEPCO), the biggest heavy machinery producer in the Middle East, have repeatedly protested against their companies' mismanagement in the last two years. HEPCO has a workforce of approximately 1,500.

Prison sentence confirmed

In July of this year, the Islamic Revolutionary Court sentenced the author and satirist Kiumars Marzban, who had been arrested on 26.08.18 in Teheran, to eleven years in prison for collaboration with a hostile state, defamation of government officials and propaganda against the Islamic state. An appeal court in Teheran has now confirmed this verdict. Apart from Marzban, two journalists were also sentenced to multi-year prison sentences in recent weeks. Iran is in place 170 out of 180 countries in the press freedom ranking of Reporters Without Borders.

UNO expert condemns execution of minors

The UNO Special Rapporteur on human rights in Iran, Javaid Rehman, has criticised the human rights situation in Iran. Iran is repeatedly subject to international criticism for its arbitrary justice, especially with regard to the death penalty and human rights violations. According to Rehman, seven minors were executed in 2018 alone, with dozens more currently on death row. The corresponding verdicts were executed although the Human Rights Convention forbids people under 18 being executed.

Iraq

Continuing mass protests in Baghdad and southern provinces

The protests announced for 25.10.19 are continuing. This is the second wave of protests this month (cf. BN of 07.10.19). Local reports state pupils and students in Baghdad and other cities have also been joining the protests to an increased extent since 27.10.19.

Among other things, the demonstrators' demands included calls to topple the existing political system (*mu-hassassa*), depose the ruling political elite and reform the election law.

Demonstrators set fire to at least 50 government and party buildings as well as militia offices. According to Human Rights Watch, persons unknown opened fire on demonstrators attempting to storm militia offices. Security forces used tear gas/-canisters, rubber bullets and stun grenades among other things to break up the demonstrations. Anti-terror units were sent to Baghdad and Nasriyah among other locations to protect government buildings and end the demonstrations.

Reporting on the spot remains difficult (cf. BN of 07.10.19). On 27.10.19, the Iraqi Observatory for Human Rights published the names of 13 activists arrested in Nasriyah.

Investigation results and balance sheet of mass protests

The Iraqi government published the results of the investigations into the dead and injured during previous protests on 22.10.19 (cf. BN of 07.10.19). According to the investigations, 157 people (including eight security force members) were killed and over 3,000 people injured between 01.10.19 and 09.10.19. The most frequent causes of injury and death were shots to the head or chest. The official reports did not take up the use of snipers and damage to TV stations (cf. BN of 07.10.19).

According to the Iraqi Observatory for Human Rights, another 73 people died, with over 3,500 being injured, between 25.10.19 and 27.10.19.

Autonomous region Kurdistan Iraq/Syria

The IOM reported that due to the latest military operations in Syria during the period from 14.-27.10.19 about 12,000 people had fled to Iraq via various border crossings. UN sources estimate approximately 75% of the registered refugees to be women and children. The majority of the refugees were accommodated in the Bardarash refugee camp (Dohuk province). According to the UN, between 900 and 1200 people arrive daily at the Bardarash camp, which will reach its capacity (max. 11,000 people) next week. Those with relatives in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) are to be gradually released from the camp to their relatives. Kurdish media reported that the construction of new refugee camps is to be tackled in view of the influx of refugees.

Yemen

Fighting

Fighting was reported between various conflict parties in several areas of Yemen in the previous week. This included fighting between pro-government forces and southern separatist militia in the Abyan governorate as well as fighting between pro-government units and Houthi rebels in the Saada governorate. In addition, five civilians, including two children, are said to have been killed during an air strike on 21.10.19.

Agreement between Yemeni government and independence fighters

The independence fighters of the Southern Transitional Council (STC) and the internationally recognised government of Yemen have reached a power sharing agreement. As the media reported on 25.10.19, the STC will receive several ministries while in return the government is to return to Aden. After days of fighting against government troops, the STC's conquests included the presidential palace in Aden (cf. BN of 12.08.19).

The agreement was preceded by talks in the Saudi Arabian city of Jeddah. An STC representative declared that Yemen's president Abedrabbo Mansur Hadi and the head of the STC, Aidarus al-Zubaidi, were expected in Riyadh to sign the agreement. President Hadi is living there in exile.

Lebanon

Protests ongoing

On 27.10.19, Lebanese citizens formed a symbolic 175 km long human chain from Tripoli in the north to Tyre in the south of the country. Despite promises of reform by the Prime Minister Saad Hariri on 21.10.19, the protests are continuing (cf. BN of 21.10.19). During the mostly peaceful protests, there were isolated incidents of rioting between Hezbollah supporters and other demonstrators.

Lebanon/Iraq

Lebanese protest effects on Iran

The current protest demonstrations in Lebanon were also of concern to the regime in Teheran. The expanded influence of Iran in the region is based on groups like the Shi'ite Hezbollah in particular. It presented itself for a long time in Lebanon as a counterweight to its corrupt rulers. Their religious leaders, above all Sheik Hassan Nasrallah, were regarded as incorruptible. But Hezbollah has been appointing ministers for a long time.

Libya

Attacks on medical personnel documented by UNISMIL

According to a report of 25.10.19, UNISMIL has documented 58 attacks on medical personnel in Libya. UNISMIL emphasised that it had not passed on the coordinates of field hospitals to one of the warring parties, nor did it possess them.

Mozambique

President Nyusi wins elections

The official results of the elections of 15.10.19, as announced by the National Elections Commission (CNE) on 27.10.19, claim State President Felipe Nyusi from the governing party Frelimo clearly won the presidential election with about 73 % of the votes in front of his main competitor Osuffo Momade from the biggest opposition party with 22%. Daviz Simango from the third biggest party MDM received 4%. In the parliamentary elections, the parties Frelimo, Renamo and MDM received 184, 60 and 6 seats respectively. Frelimo also won the majority in all of the parliaments of the ten provinces of Mozambique and as a result provides the provincial governors. For the first time, these will be named by the majority party of each provincial parliament and no longer as before by the central government. Renamo and MDM did not recognise the election results. The head

of the EU Election Observation Mission termed the election process an unfair competition in an atmosphere of violence and intimidation. Frelimo rejected accusations of manipulations.

Pakistan

Investigations at the University of Balochistan

University personnel are being investigated at the university in Quetta (University of Balochistan) on account of blackmail or coercion. Students have allegedly been blackmailed or coerced for at least four years with picture material recorded by surveillance cameras. University members and officials had told the for the most part female victims they had recordings showing male and female students together and threatened to send these to the families. Most kept silent or left the university out of fear of the potential family consequences. Extra-marital relationships can have consequences within the family up to so-called honour killings, especially in rural areas. Balochistan is one of the least developed regions in Pakistan. Only a quarter of women and about half the men in the provinces can read and write.

The university campus simultaneously serves as the base for the paramilitary Frontier Corps units, which are in addition active in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province to provide official protection for the Afghan border. Students living on the campus have to submit to regular security checks. Monitoring technology is possibly also deployed on the campus to prevent student political activism. Revelation of the incidents triggered student protests in the biggest cities of the country and in the capital Islamabad.

Somalia

Fighting

Fighting was reported at various locations last week between al-Shabaab, the national security forces and AMISOM, including in the village Daqalmow near the city of Dhobley (Lower Juba region) and in the cities Bu'ale and Jamame (Middle Juba region).

Attacks

A clan elder was killed in each of the cities of Afgooye and Kismayo on 20.10.19. To date, no one has claimed responsibility for the murders.

Al-Shabaab claimed to have killed an UN employee and a government employee on 24.10.19 in the Waberi district, Mogadishu.

Internal refugees

According to a declaration of the UN migration authority IOM of 22.10.19, a total of 2.6 million people in Somalia had been displaced. The Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) stated that so far in this year alone 300,000 people had been forced to leave their home region due to lack of security, flooding or drought.

The NRC declared that the uncertain security situation made aid deliveries to rural areas virtually impossible and that people therefore moved to overfilled camps in urban areas in order to receive aid there. The UN has applied for 1.08 billion dollars in aid for 2019, which makes the crisis in Somalia one of the biggest in the world. However, up to now only 62% of the appeals have been financed.

The absence of rain in Somalia has resulted in the worst harvest since 2011. The supply of food for about 5.4 million people is uncertain. By contrast, the two biggest rivers in Somalia, the Juba and Shebelle, are now flooded after the most recent rain. As a result, over 70,000 people had to leave the severely affected city of Beledweyne.

Syria

IS leader Baghdadi killed

US special forces killed the leader of the IS terror militia Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi in the night of 27.10.19. The raid occurred in the town of Barisha in Idlib province, not far from the Turkish border. Experts had actually suspected the refuge of the self-styled caliph to be in the Syrian-Iraqi border region, the supposed stronghold of IS. By contrast, north-west Idlib is dominated by various groups close to al-Qaeda, which for a long time

competed with IS and actively combated it. However, following the territorial defeat of IS in the east of Syria, a number of its fighters had come to Idlib. Reconciliation may also have occurred with groups close to al-Qaeda. Furthermore, Barisha is regarded as a smuggling area, where many IS fighters are supposed to have crossed the Turkish-Syrian border in the past.

Experts believe IS adapted its organisational structure years ago to ensure that it could in future remain operational even without centralised leadership.

SDF withdraws from border area

The Kurdish-dominated Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) declared on 27.10.19 that they had withdrawn to 30 km from the Turkish border. The withdrawal followed a Turkish-Russian agreement of 22.10.19, according to which on Turkish insistence the area affected had to be cleared of Kurdish militia by Syrian border guards and Russian military police by 29.10.19. Syrian state media confirmed the withdrawal of the SDF units. From 29.10.19, Turkish and Russian forces are to patrol a 10 km wide strip along the Turkish border on Syrian territory.

Clashes still occurred between the Syrian and Turkish armies on 27.10.19 near to the city of Ras al-Ain. The Turkish defence ministry only confirmed clashes with the Kurdish YPG militia in which one Turkish soldier and five others were said to have been injured.

Tanzania

Four life sentences for mutilation of an albino man

A court in Sumbawanga in the southern highlands of Tanzania condemned four defendants to life imprisonment on 23.10.19 after they hacked off the arm of a person with albinism. The public prosecutor stated that the perpetrators from the town of Mamba in the Mlele district wanted to sell the arm to a witch doctor for six million shillings (about 2,350 euros).

Background

In Tanzania, albinos, including children, are repeatedly the victims of serious violence up to and including murder. Body parts of albinos are regarded as good luck charms, especially among the fishers and mineworkers of the Lake Victoria regions. Fishers weave albino hair into their nets to haul the biggest possible catch onto land while gold and diamond miners sprinkle powder made from albino skin in their tunnels to increase their finds. Shop owners believe that an albino hand buried in front of the entrance of a business attracts new customers. For unknown reasons, a disproportional number of albinos live in Tanzania: whereas in Europe only one in 20,000 people are born without pigment, this is one in 3,000 in Tanzania.

Belarus

Accused sentenced to death

On 25.10.19 a court in the Belarusian city of Brest found the 47-year old Viktor Syarhel and his co-defendant, the 26-year old Natallya Kolb, guilty of having murdered the eight-month old daughter of Kolb in October of last year. Syarhel has now been sentenced to death and Kolb to 25 years in prison, the maximum sentence for women in Belarus.

Syarhel is the third person sentenced to death this year in Belarus, after the 50-year old Viktor Paulau received the death penalty in July 2019 for murdering two old women in December 2018. The 36-year old Alyaksandr Asipovich was sentenced to death in January 2019 for allegedly killing two girls. Belarus is the only European country in which the death penalty is still imposed and executed.