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Briefing Notes

Group 62 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

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Afghanistan

Security situation

According to a report issued by journalists of the Afghan press medium Hasht-e Subh living in exile, the Pakistani military flew airstrikes against positions of the Pakistani Taliban (Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan, TTP) in Afghanistan's Nangarhar province on 05.01.23. Neither the Pakistani government nor the Taliban have made any comment to date. On the same day, fighting reportedly erupted between Pakistani border guards and the Taliban at the Torkham border crossing. Pakistani soldiers reportedly shot and killed an Afghan civilian. According to media reports issued on 05.01.23, the Taliban launched a concerted operation to excavate Islamic State of Khorasan Province (ISKP) hideouts in the capital Kabul and Nimruz province. Eight ISKP members were killed, and nine others were arrested. They are believed to have been involved in, among other things, the attack carried out on the military section of Kabul airport 01.01.23 (cf. BN of 02.01.23). The ISKP claimed responsibility for this attack on 02.01.23.

Government business and persecution events

According to a report issued by journalists of the Afghan press medium Hasht-e Subh living in exile 05.01.23, the Taliban arrested, tortured and then publicly hanged a former member of the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces (ANDSF) in Baghlan province. This was reportedly an act of retaliation. According to a BBC report published on 16.12.22, the Taliban changed the historic name of the town of Charikar in Parwan province to "Imam Abu Hanifah". Various observers see this as a deliberate attempt undertaken by the Taliban to minimise Persian influence in Afghanistan. Imam Abu Hanifah was a jurist in the 8th century and the founder of the Sunni Hanafi school of law, which the Taliban follow.

According to a media report issued by journalists of the Afghan press medium Hasht-e Subh living in exile on 07.01.23, the Taliban Ministry for the Propagation of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice of Afghanistan in Zabul province has banned the display and hanging up of images of living creatures. This ban reportedly includes hanging up photos of Taliban leaders. It has advised that noncompliance will be subject to severe punishment. According to a media report issued in the Afghan newspaper Hasht-e Subh on 03.01.23, the Taliban arrested a young man in Ghor province for making comments on Facebook in which he criticised the ban the Taliban have imposed on women attending university.

Algeria

Action launched against LGBTIQ colours

On 03.01.23, according to various media reports, the Ministry of Commerce, together with the nine regional directorates and the 58 wilayas (districts) of the country, launched what is described as a national awareness campaign against the use of LGBTIQ colours. These are products that have the colours of the rainbow on them and

are considered to undermine the religion and moral values of Algerian society. This action is scheduled to last until 10.01.23.

Bangladesh

Rohingya singled out to be killed in Cox's Bazar

On 07.01.23 and 08.01.23, two Rohingya were killed at refugee camps in Cox's Bazar within a twelve-hour period. Those killed were camp leaders. In both cases, the perpetrators sought out the victims at their homes with the intention of killing them.

Bolivia

Arrest of opposition politician Camacho, protests with violent clashes continue

The right-wing conservative opposition politician and governor of the state of Santa Cruz, Luis Fernando Camacho, was arrested on 28.12.22. He is accused of terrorism and playing a leading role in the protests against former leftist president Evo Morales and his removal from power in November 2019. In this context, the former Interim President Jeanine Áñez had already been sentenced to 10 years in prison in June 2022. For weeks, people in Santa Cruz, led by Camacho, took to the streets to protest against the delay of a census that was expected to give the province higher tax revenues as well as more parliamentary seats. Camacho's arrest has fuelled tensions with the leftist government led by Luis Arce, and clashes have broken out between Camacho's supporters and state security forces. The local prosecutor's office and other buildings were set on fire by protestors who set up road blockades and blocked access to the airport. Camacho was sentenced to four months of pre-trial detention for terrorism in connection with the alleged coup d'état in 2019. According to authorities, he had previously failed to meet several subpoenas from the prosecutor's office to testify. At the same time, he is under investigation for leading a 36-day strike in October and November 2022 that left at least four people dead and also led to violent clashes. At least 42 persons have been arrested in the latest violent protests so far, and demonstrations for Camacho's release have continued into early January 2023.

Brazil

Attack on government building in Brasília

On 08.01.23, supporters of former President Jair Bolsonaro stormed the Three Powers Plaza, Praça dos Três Poderes, in the capital Brasília, and invaded the Congress building, the Supreme Court and the seat of government, Palácio do Planalto. They smashed windows, destroyed furniture and artworks and stormed meeting rooms and offices. The attacks were streamed live on Instagram and Facebook. Video footage also shows one policeman on horseback being physically assaulted. Many intruders wore the colours yellow and green, waved the Brazilian flag and banners demanding, among other things, that the army intervene in favour of the former president. Security forces managed to bring the buildings back under control after a number of hours. The military police advanced on Praça dos Três Poderes using policemen on horseback and armoured vehicles, special forces proceeded to use tear gas while helicopters circled over the government buildings. Justice Minister Flavio Dino announced that around 230 suspects had been arrested so far, while Governor Ibaneis Rocha put the number at 400. Days before the attacks, numerous Bolsonaro supporters had set up camp in front of military barracks. On 08.01.23 and 09.01.23, about 4,000 more supporters of the former president arrived in Brasília by bus and marched freely to the government district. After criticising the security forces, Rocha fired the capital's security chief, Anderson Torres. President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, who was on an official trip to the state of Sao Paulo at the time of the attack, ordered by decree that the federal government assume responsibility for public security in the capital for the time being. Former President Bolsonaro, who is currently in the U.S., condemned the riots on Twitter several hours after the attack. Bolsonaro had called on his supporters to fight President Lula following his election defeat on 30.10.22. However, he rejected the President's accusations that he had encouraged the riots.

Colombia

Ceasefire with ELN suspended

The government suspended a ceasefire with the guerrilla group Ejército de Liberación Nacional (ELN) (National Liberation Army) on 04.02.23. Previously, members of the rebel group had denied that they had already agreed to a mutually binding ceasefire. Colombia's President Gustavo Petro announced in December 2022 that his government had agreed to a ceasefire with several armed groups, including the ELN, that would extend until the end of June 2023 (cf. BN of 02.01.23). Interior Minister Hernando Alfonso Prada announced that the ceasefire would be discussed at the next round of peace talks scheduled to be held in Mexico on 23.01.23 and has urged the ELN to commit to a ceasefire in the meantime.

Côte d'Ivoire

Ivorian troops pardoned

The 49 Ivorian soldiers who had been sentenced to 20 years in prison or were handed the death sentence by the Mali judiciary on 30.12.22 following a two-day trial (cf. BN of 02.01.23) have been pardoned. The Malian government had accused them of being mercenaries and had detained them since 07.10.22. Junta leader and interim president Assimi Goïta fully revoked their sentences by decree of 06.01.23. The 46 soldiers still in custody were allowed to return to Côte d'Ivoire on 07.01.23. Togo's President Faure Gnassingbé is said to have campaigned for the pardon in Bamako on 04.01.23.

According to related media coverage, Mali's junta had elevated the matter to a demonstration of the country's sovereignty, by its own account a cardinal principle, which had manifested itself in its policies toward France, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and even the UN blue helmet mission MINUSMA. According to reports, relations between Mali and Côte d'Ivoire, which the junta had accused of being a driving force behind ECOWAS' sanctions following the military coups, have also suffered further as a result of the affair. The President of Côte d'Ivoire, Alassane Ouattara, announced a normalisation of relations with the "brother country" Mali after the Ivorian soldiers returned home.

DR Congo

Maniema: human rights defenders threatened for activism; prison conditions in Kalima central prison

A national human rights defender told UN information radio Okapi that he had been temporarily detained, threatened with death, and mistreated by police officers on 04.01.23 for seeking information to approve visits to Kalima Central Prison (Maniema Province) that he says generally have to be paid for. Okapi reported on the conditions of detention at Kalima Central Prison in early 2022, which are characterised by inadequate food, drinking water and healthcare, among other things.

Lomami: ANR arrest and detain two editors-in-chief of radio station for critical programme content

According to media reports, two editors-in-chief of the private local radio station Shilo FM were arrested and detained by the domestic intelligence service (ANR) in Lubao (Lomami province) on 05.01.23 on charges of defamation. According to the Observatory for Freedom of the Press in Africa (Olpa), the defamation charges are related to a statement broadcast by Crispin Lumami Tshite of Shilo FM on 04.01.23, chairperson of the local civil society. Tshite had reported the existence of an unofficial detention site at the headquarters of the local ANR director, where a woman had allegedly been held for two days. The NGO Fondation Bill Clinton Pour La Paix (Bill Clinton Foundation for Peace) reported in late August 2022 that unofficial detention facilities operated by the ANR in the past, where individuals were placed in incommunicado detention and subjected to particularly harsh detention conditions and physical abuse, continued to operate and were full of detained individuals despite the closure order issued by President Félix Tshisekedi after he took office (cf. BN of 29.08.22).

Ongoing recruitment and deployment of child soldiers in the conflict-ridden provinces

According to Okapi, the Action Group for the Demobilisation and Reintegration of Child Soldiers (GADERES) criticised the ongoing recruitment and deployment of child soldiers by non-state actors in the eastern Kivu

provinces and Ituri province on 04.01.23. The chairperson of GADERES, citing child protection organisations, accused the rebel group Mouvement 23-Mars (M23), which remains active in North Kivu, of having started recruiting children as soldiers in July 2022 in the territories of Rutshuru, Lubero, Walikale and Masisi. He says the ethnic-based factions of the militia Coopérative de développement du Congo (CODECO) (Cooperative for Development of the Congo), operating in Ituri, the militia Zaïre and the Force de défense contre la balkanisation du Congo (FDBC) (Defence Forces against balkanisation of the Congo) are also using child soldiers, as are the self-defence group Twigwanaho who claim to represent the Banyamulenge and who operate in parts of South Kivu.

Ituri, Mahagi territory: fighting between CODECO and Zaïre with serious consequences for the civilian population

According to comprehensive media reports, the ongoing armed hostilities between the rival CODECO and Zaïre militias in areas of Mahagi Territory (Ituri) adjacent to Djugu Territory (Ituri), which reportedly erupted in mid-November 2022, include punitive and retaliatory actions against the local civilian population. According to press reports issued in recent weeks, there have been repeated deaths among the civilian population. On 03.01.23, the LORI association accused the Zaïre militia of killing an estimated 64 civilians in the Walendu Watsi and Tatsi areas in the past five months alone. Since fighting broke out, several thousand houses have reportedly been burned to the ground, and by the beginning of January 2023, more than 50,000 persons, whose situation is described as precarious, had been internally displaced.

Ethiopia

Army launches new offensive against Oromo militia

The Ethiopian National Defence Forces (ENDF) announced on 03.01.2023 that it will be launching a renewed military operation against the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA-Shane) in southern Oromia. They say several villages that have been under OLA control for years have already been liberated. The Oromia regional state government has also threatened OLA with an "organized law enforcement operation". The coordinated action by the security forces will focus on the zones of West and East Guji and Borana.

Although some Ethiopian members of parliament have called for a peace deal similar to the agreement reached with the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) in November 2022 to be struck with OLA, pointing out that OLA which is classified as a terrorist organisation has shown a basic willingness to talk, Oromia's leaders have already announced that they are not willing to negotiate with the militant organisation.

In recent weeks, the intensity of fighting in Oromia has increased with government forces, the OLA-Shane (cf. BN of 15.11.22), and regional militias becoming involved. Human rights violations such as indiscriminate killings, displacements, destruction, and looting have been reported by all the parties involved (cf. BN of 15.11.22, 12.12.22 and 19.12.22).

The Gambia

New details on foiled coup attempts, further arrests and initial charges

According to the government, two civilians and a police sub-inspector were charged with "conspiracy to commit a crime" and "failure to report treason" and have been remanded in custody in connection with plans for a coup d'état allegedly foiled on 20.12.23 (cf. BN of 02.01.23). The defendants face life imprisonment under Article 36 of the Gambian Criminal Code (CC) if convicted of "failure to report treason," an offence that does not qualify for release on bail. According to the government, seven soldiers being held in pre-trial detention and one soldier who remains on the run have been charged with high treason under Article 35 of the Criminal Code. This offence is not eligible for bail. The investigation launched by the prosecution against Momodou Sabally, current campaign manager of the main opposition United Democratic Party (UDP), has been suspended in the meantime. Sabally was detained for nearly two weeks under controversial circumstances and without charge (cf. BN of 02.01.23), and rumours have been circulating in the media that he will be charged with sedition in connection with the alleged coup plans. The government recently shared more details about the coup plans that were allegedly foiled, including that the suspected coup plotters were planning to take senior government officials and cabinet members hostage in a bid to prevent foreign intervention.

India

Kashmir: suspected rebel attacks

On 02.01.23, two children were killed and at least five other civilians were injured in an explosion that occurred in Dhangri in Rajouri district of Indian Kashmir a day after two armed men had reportedly indiscriminately opened fire at three houses in Dhangri. According to police, four civilians were killed and at least five persons were injured in that incident. Police are blaming armed rebels for both the attacks. The incidents occurred near the highly militarised Line of Control (LoC) that runs through Kashmir, dividing Kashmir between India and Pakistan. Dhangri is a Hindu-majority village, and all the victims were Hindus. Protests erupted in Dhangri in the wake of the episodes.

Iran

Two activists executed

Two activists were hanged on 07.02.23. Both had been accused of being involved in the death of a member of the Basij militia during the protests. The execution sparked outrage both nationally and internationally. Demonstrations and mass arrests of opponents of the regime continue unabated.

Demonstrations mark third anniversary of the death of Qasem Soleimani

The third anniversary of **Qasem Soleimani, the former head of Iran's Revolutionary Guard** fell on 03.01.23. As in previous years, large protests involving the regime's supporters demanded and promised revenge for his death. This year, his death has once again sparked anti-regime protests. Images of Qasem Soleimani were burned in public or showed him covered in blood. Protestors chanted, blaming him and his strategy aimed at expanding Iran's military and geopolitical weight in the region for instability, the deaths of Syrian civilians and war crimes. Protestors also addressed the regime's extensive foreign policy activities and the significant costs associated with them, considering the social hardship the country is facing.

Iraq

Incident in Sulaymaniyah

On 30.12.22, an incident occurred in Sulaymaniyah, Kurdistan, in connection with a biker event. A 17-year-old girl, reportedly an Iranian national, was chased by a mob because of her "unchaste" clothing and was kicked and injured by several men. One man who tried to defend her was reportedly stabbed, although he survived the attack. The incident came to public attention when video footage was uploaded. Kurdish police arrested 16 persons involved and seized large numbers of knives and swords. The incident is being universally described as unacceptable.

Firearms legislation in Kurdistan

On 03.01.22, the Kurdish Ministry of the Interior called for the registration of privately owned firearms. In 2022, the Weapons Law 2 had granted a transitional period that will expire in July 2023. After that, unregistered weapons will be considered to be illegal. Registration is intended to reduce the considerable gun violence in the private sector, especially in the context of family feuds and honour killings.

Kosovo

Shots fired at Serbs

According to media reports issued on 06.01.23, a Kosovo Albanian off-duty member of the Kosovo Security Force shot and wounded two Kosovo Serbs from his car in the village of Gotovuša/Gotovushë. One of the victims is a minor. The injured were hospitalised but their lives are reportedly no longer in danger. Police arrested the perpetrator, who is suspected of attempted murder. The incident has reignited tensions between Kosovo and Serbia, following unrest in late 2022 (cf. BN of 12.12.22).

Lebanon

Clashes erupt in Kahlde

On 03.01.23, clashes broke out between security forces and members of the Ghosn family during an arrest in Kahlde. Gunfire exchanges and other acts of violence took place between the Ghosn and Nawfal families in the region. The arrest was likely related to an attack carried out on some shops owned by the rival family.

Power supply

According to various Lebanese media, the power supply has now entered a particularly critical phase. Although large parts of the country are only being provided with one to two hours of electricity, the current situation indicates that fuel supplies are expected to run out within two weeks. There is currently no clearance for the short-term loans needed to purchase fuel from several tankers cruising offshore. The background is a political dispute between the Interim President Najib Azmi Mikati and the Free Patriotic Movement. It is apparently unclear how the necessary exemption might be legally implemented without being prevented by the latter.

Irish blue helmet soldier killed

On 06.01.23, the prosecution filed charges against seven defendants charged with the deadly shooting of a UN convoy on 14.12.22 (cf. BN of 19.12.22). Of the seven defendants, only one is currently being held in detention having been handed over to the army by Hezbollah which controls the region where the incident took place.

Libya

Another mass grave unearthed in Sirte

On 01.01.23, authorities announced they had found another mass grave containing 18 bodies in the coastal city of Sirte. Like the mass grave discovered back in October 2022 (cf. BN of 10.10.22), the 18 bodies are believed to be related to ISIS' rule in Sirte which lasted from August 2015 to December 2016.

Violent clashes erupt in Al-Ajailat

On 03.01.23, violent clashes reportedly erupted in the western Libyan city of Al-Ajailat. People were ordered to stand back from windows and doors and not to leave their homes. No details are known yet about potential casualties or what people and groups were involved in the fighting.

Mali

Two simultaneous terror attacks near Bamako

On the evening of 02.01.23, two simultaneous terrorist attacks were carried out by armed assailants riding on motorcycles in the Koulikoro region. According to media reports, partly citing a communiqué issued by the Ministry of Security, two employees of a Civil Security Forces post in Markacoungo, about 80 km east of Bamako, and three civilians were killed in the attacks. A customs officer of the same station and an employee of a unit of the Nature Protection Authority located next to it were killed in the other attack carried out on a toll station in Kassela, about 30 km east of the capital, which the Ministry of Security did not mention. Tolls are collected in Kassela for those entering the capital. The al-Qaeda affiliated Group in Support of Islam and Muslims (JNIM) has claimed responsibility for both attacks.

Both Kassela (Kati district) and Markacoungo (Dioila district) are located along the important road connecting Bamako and Ségou in the southwestern part of the country, which, according to reports, is comparatively rarely affected by terrorist attacks. However, an attack had already been carried out on a checkpoint along the same road between the two locations affected this time in mid-July 2022 (cf. BN of 18.07.22) and an attack was carried out on Kati military base on 22.07.22 (cf. BN of 01.08.22). According to a media report, these attacks indicate that jihadist terror is closing in on Bamako which has not experienced any attacks since 2016.

Mexico

Drug war: son of "El Chapo" arrested and subsequent escalation of violence

On 05.01.22, Ovidio Guzmán López (a.k.a. El Ratón), a son of jailed drug lord Joaquín Guzmán (a.k.a. El Chapo), was arrested outside the Sinaloa state capital of Culiacán as part of a military and police operation. According to Minister of Defence Luis Crescencio Sandoval, at least 25 persons were killed in clashes that subsequently erupted between members of his sub-group of the Sinaloa cartel Los Chapitos, and members of the state security forces, 10 of whom were military personnel and 19 individuals who are suspected members of the cartel. In addition, 35 military personnel were injured, and 21 suspected cartel members were arrested. According to media reports, civilians were also injured and suspected cartel members in Culiacán and other Sinaloa cities engaged in revenge activities in the 24 hours following the arrest, including shootings, burning roadblocks, stealing more than 250 personal vehicles, assaulting journalists and storming Culiacán airport. Schools, public buildings and airports were temporarily closed, and people were asked to shelter in their homes. Ovidio Guzmán will remain in the Altiplano maximum security prison for the time being. An immediate extradition to the U.S. was suspended by a federal judge on 06.01.22.

Nineteen killed in prison attack; leader of Los Mexicles killed

Following an armed raid on a prison in Ciudad Juárez, in the northern state of Chihuahua on 01.01.2013, in which 19 people were killed and some 30 inmates escaped, another seven people, including two police officers, were killed during the search for the escaped prisoners on 02.01.2013. In addition, Ernesto Alberto Piñón de la Cruz, alias El Neto, a leader of the Los Mexicles criminal group, which serves as the armed arm of the Sinaloa cartel, was fatally wounded in clashes that erupted during his arrest on 05.01.22.

Montenegro

Government crisis: early elections increasingly likely

According to media reports, early parliamentary elections in Montenegro are becoming increasingly likely after talks to form a new government within the current parliamentary majority collapsed again on 04.01.23. Parliament's proposal of 29.12.22 to elect ex-diplomat Miodrag Lekic as the new prime minister (cf. BN of 07.11.22 and 15.11.22) was rejected by the ruling civic movement United Reform Action (URA) led by Prime Minister Dritan Abazovic, who is now only in office as prime minister-designate, as well as by the Socialist National People's Party (SNP), as sufficiently transparent plans for a new cabinet structure had not been presented. The efforts made by the members of the government majority since the collapse of the Dritan Abazovic's government in August 2022 (cf. BN of 22.08.22 and 05.09.22) to form a government without calling new elections thus remained unsuccessful. According to a press release issued by Democratic Front (DF) deputy and party leader Andrija Mandic, the first step would be to elect new judges for the Constitutional Court (cf. BN of 07.11.22). Then Parliament Speaker Danijela Djurovic and President Milo Djukanovic should agree to hold early parliamentary and regular presidential elections on the same day. According to a media report, the constitutional requirement that presidential elections be held by the end of January 2023 is problematic because the Constitutional Court, as the highest legal instance of appeals, is unable to rule on election irregularities without a quorum (cf. BN of 15.11.22).

Myanmar

Mass amnesty on Day of Independence

Myanmar's junta announced an amnesty of 7,012 prisoners on 04.01.23, the day that marks 75 years since Myanmar gained independence from Britain. According to estimates considered to be credible by the UN, they include up to 300 political prisoners. However, another 22 people were arrested nationwide for political reasons the very same day. The number of political prisoners arrested since the military coup on 01.02.21 currently totals 13,272.

Trial against Suu Kyi concluded

On 30.12.22, the military junta's show trial against ousted head of government Aung San Suu Kyi, which has been ongoing since June 2021, ended with the final guilty verdicts in a total of 19 trials. She has been sentenced to a

further seven years in prison. The 77-year-old Suu Kyi, who has already announced her intention to appeal, now faces 33 years in prison for corruption, inciting sedition and importing walkie-talkies, among other charges.

Pakistan

Two intelligence agents killed; TTP threatens government

On 03.01.23, two intelligence agents were shot dead in Khanewal district, Punjab province. No one has claimed responsibility for the killings. One of those killed was reportedly the head of the Counter-Terrorism Department, which is responsible, inter alia, for investigating members of the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), also known as the Pakistani Taliban. In a statement released on 04.01.23, the TTP, which is ideologically close to the Afghan Taliban, threatened leading government politicians and warned of "concrete action". Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari were specifically named.

Palestinian Autonomous Territories / Israel

West Bank: one person killed in clash with Israeli forces

On 03.01.22, Israeli forces shot and killed a Palestinian man in the town of Bethlehem, in the southern part of the West Bank. According to the military, firing was opened after Palestinians threw stones, explosive and incendiary devices at military personnel.

Peru

New elections in 2024; resumption of protests; attack on journalists; investigation against the government

A constitutional reform bringing forward presidential and parliamentary elections to April 2024 was approved by Congress on 20.12.22. Nevertheless, in the wake of the socio-political crisis, protests resumed in the first week of January following a two-week break in demonstrations at the end of the year. Since then, at least 40 persons have been injured, according to data supplied by the Ministry of Health. A total of 28 persons have been killed in the protests so far, according to the National Ombudsman's Office. The press association APEP also called on authorities to investigate those responsible for injuring a photojournalist who was clearly identifiable as a member of the press and was covering the protests in Jualiaca. The Public Prosecutor's Office has also launched investigations against President Dina Ercilla Boluarte and other high-ranking individuals of the state and security apparatuses who are suspected of being responsible for the killing of persons during the protests, prompted by a complaint filed by Congresswoman Ruth Luque.

Senegal

Several protests proceeded peacefully and without incident; further developments in Niang's case

According to media reports, several protests by various civil society and opposition actors took place peacefully and without intervention by security forces in the period between 30.12.22 and 08.01.23. Protestors demanded the release of Pape Ale Niang, a journalist who is a critic of the government and has been charged with several crimes. He was recently arrested once again (cf. BN of 02.01.23) and his health has further deteriorated due to his ongoing hunger strike and refusal to accept medical care. Niang's request for provisional release had been rejected on 03.01.22. According to several media reports, about a hundred people protested in Dakar on 29.12.22 and 30.12.22 against irregularities and mismanagement in the administration of the "FORCE COVID-19" support fund, which the Senegalese Court of Auditors had reported in mid-December 2022, in response to a call for demonstrations by the largest opposition coalition, Yewwi Askan Wi (YAW). While these two protests, approved in advance by the authorities and monitored by a large police contingent, were allowed to take place at the Place de la Nation, authorities had prohibited a demonstration planned by YAW for 06.01.23 with the same objective and at the same location. The ban on protests justified with ongoing construction work was respected by the organisation and the protest was postponed.

Members of parliament receive prison sentences for grievous bodily harm

According to media reports, a court in Dakar sentenced the two opposition deputies Amadou Niang and Massata Samb in absentia to six months' imprisonment without parole for grievous bodily harm and awarded the victim, among other things, compensation amounting to CFA 5 million (approx. EUR 7,700, as of 05.01.23). The parliamentarians, both members of the YAW-affiliated Parti de l'Unité et du Rassemblement (PUR) (Party for Unity and Rally), who have been in custody since 15.12.22, physically assaulted Amy Ndiaye Gniby, a pregnant MP from the ruling Benno Bokk Yakaar coalition, during a parliamentary session captured on video that was held on 01.12.22 for remarks made against PUR party leader Moustapha Sy. The lawyers, who objected to the trial argued the pair were immune from prosecution and said they would be filing appeals and provisional release motions.

Somalia

Several persons killed in bomb blasts

At least 35 persons were killed and at least 40 others were wounded in two car bombings carried out in the city of Mahas (Hiiraan region) on 04.01.2013. Most of the victims were civilians. The homes of Mumin Mohamed Halane, the mayor of Mahas, and Mohamed Abukar Jacfar, a member of the federal parliament, were reportedly targeted in the attack. Al-Shabaab has claimed responsibility for the attack.

Al-Shabaab is also believed to be responsible for an attack carried out on an army base near the town of Runirgod (Middle Shabelle region) on 06.01.2013 in which at least seven soldiers and several assailants were reportedly killed. According to army sources, the town was the militant group's last stronghold in the region.

Civilians kidnapped

According to reports, the number of civilians kidnapped in the Hiiraan region is once again on the rise. Nine civilians were reportedly abducted, for instance, near Dheenweyne on 02.01.23 and 20 farmers belonging to the Hawadle clan were abducted near Beledweyne on 04.01.23.

South Sudan

Fighting in Jonglei State

According to media reports, fighting broke out in Uror and Duk counties on 06.01.23 and 07.01.23, killing at least 14 people. According to the Uror County Commissioner, armed youths were responsible for several attacks in different parts of the region on 06.01.23. He said that in Duk county, several attacks of a similar nature had taken place on 07.01.23. Representatives of both regions assume that the youths involved in the attacks came from the Greater Pibor Administrative Area (GPAA). Local ethnic groups have already announced that they will pursue the assailants to recover the cattle stolen during the attacks.

Over the past few weeks, there has already been serious fighting between youths of different ethnic groups in Jonglei State with numerous fatalities (cf. BN of 02.01.23).

Sudan

Renewed demonstrations

Based on information provided by a medical association, on 05.01.23, one hundred and eleven people were injured during peaceful demonstrations against the military government in Khartoum due to the violent actions of the security forces. A total of 30 people were reportedly arrested. The report said that some of the injuries treated were caused by tear gas, rubber bullets and projectiles containing glass fragments. In addition, two people were reportedly hit and injured by military vehicles. The Sudanese Emergency Physicians Association accused the military government of violating the right to peaceful demonstration.

On 06.01.23, the Sudanese Teachers' Committee (STC) announced that teachers would go on strike for three weeks, from 08.01.23 to 28.01.23, resulting in the closure of schools. A meeting with the Minister of Finance and Economic Planning was not satisfactory from the STC's point of view, which is why they had resorted to this measure. The

STC's demands to raise teachers' wages, among other things, have already been rejected by the ministry several times.

Syria

Northwest: protests after political rapprochement

On 06.01.23, thousands of people in rebel-held parts of Aleppo and Idlib reportedly protested against recent talks in Moscow between the Defence Ministers of Syria, Russia and Türkiye. The rebels fear that a rapprochement between Damascus and Ankara could have negative consequences for them.

Days earlier, Abu Mohammed al-Golani, leader of the rebel faction Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), which is dominant in the region, had warned against any such rapprochement and called on his fighters to prepare for a long battle with the Syrian government forces.

Tunisia

Case against LGBTIQ activist dropped

As reported in press articles, an appeals court ruled on 02.01.23 that the prosecution of a queer activist in a high-profile LGBTIQ case was legally flawed. The NGO Damj (Tunisian Association for Justice and Equality), which is involved in the queer community, and a judiciary spokesperson stated that the charges had been dropped due to a procedural error. The case dates back to 2015, when six students were charged with sodomy, sentenced to three years in prison and banned from the Kairouan region.

Türkiye

Deportations

On 07.01.23, the Presidency of Migration Management reported that a total of 1,028 refugees had been deported between 01.01.23 and 05.01.23. It added that during this period, 1,889 refugees had been prevented from entering Türkiye. According to the Presidency, a further 20,497 refugees remain at repatriation centres.

Arrests for suspected membership of terrorist organisations

On 07.01.23, the Ministry of National Defence announced that it had arrested a total of ten people at the border with Greece who were suspected of being members or supporters of a terrorist organisation. Among them were eight persons suspected of being members of the Gülen movement and two persons who were reportedly members of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK).

During 2022, a total of 1,263 people suspected of being members of terrorist groups were reportedly arrested by the Turkish Border Guard in Edirne province, on the border with Greece, according to the Ministry of National Defence. Those arrested reportedly included 939 members of the Gülen movement, 289 members of the PKK and 39 members of other terrorist groups.

Uganda

Arrest of opposition supporters

On 30.12.22, thirty opposition supporters were arrested in Kampala, according to media reports. Members of various opposition groups gathered to raise awareness about detained or missing opposition supporters. Police classified the gathering as unannounced and therefore illegal. It is unclear how many opposition members are currently in detention or missing. The opposition National Unity Platform estimates that 25 supporters have been missing since 2020.

Ukraine

Development of the war

Despite a 36-hour unilateral ceasefire ordered by Russian President Vladimir Putin on 06.01.23 and 07.01.23 to mark Orthodox Christmas, the war continues unabated. According to media reports, the main focus of the fighting remains in the eastern Ukrainian region of Donetsk (cf. BN of 02.01.23). According to Ukrainian reports, more than 60% of the city of Bakhmut, which has been heavily contested for months, has been destroyed. The neighbouring small town of Soledar has reportedly also been badly damaged, and fighting is underway there. Civilian deaths and injuries were reported from both towns on 08.01.23. According to Ukrainian sources, missile attacks were also carried out by Russian forces in the Kharkiv, Kherson, Zaporizhzhia and Dnipropetrovsk oblasts on 08.01.23 and 09.01.23; seven civilians were injured in an airstrike carried out on the small town of Shevchenkove in Kharkiv Oblast on 09.01.23, according to regional authorities. In the city of Makiivka near the major city of Donetsk, numerous members of the Russian armed forces were killed in a Ukrainian missile attack on New Year's Eve, according to both warring parties. The Russian Ministry of Defence announced on 04.01.23 that it had identified 89 dead, while the Ukrainian side spoke of 400 killed and 300 injured. On 05.01.23, according to media reports, Putin said in talks with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan that Ukrainian recognition of the southern and eastern Ukrainian territories annexed by Russia was a prerequisite for the start of peace negotiations. According to the Ukrainian Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal, 250,000 square kilometres of land have now been mined as a result of the war, representing approximately 40% of the country's total area.

General mobilisation and draft evasion

According to information provided by the Ukrainian border guard service on 30.12.22, around 12,000 men liable for military service had been caught trying to cross the border; 15 persons had reportedly died trying to escape across the state border. Due to the general mobilisation and martial law in force, men between the ages of 18 and 60 are still not allowed to leave Ukraine, with the exception of certain categories of persons who are eligible for an exemption. General mobilisation and martial law in Ukraine are currently in force until 19.02.23.

Venezuela

Armando.info investigative series on disappearances, secret houses and torture

An investigative series published by the portal Armando.info in December 2022, based on 14 witness reports on disappearances, secret houses (casas clandestinas/casas de seguridad) and torture, confirms recent reports by the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Venezuela as well as international and national NGOs. Secret houses, often located in residential areas in and around the Venezuelan capital, served as places outside the control of the judiciary, according to the interviewees. They reported that these places were where political opponents were repeatedly taken as part of enforced disappearances in order to obtain information through torture or inhumane treatment before they were officially handed over to the judicial authorities. They said such places had existed for about a decade, used in particular by the Directorate General of Military Counterintelligence (DGCIM), however their use had increased since 2018. Moreover, some of these places, such as a farm in La Mariposa, southwest of Caracas, had now become semi-official headquarters of the DGCIM; many of the buildings used had previously been occupied by criminal groups. According to witness reports, Cuban nationals and partially armed civilians, so-called colectivos, have also been involved in the acts of inhumane treatment in the respective centres. Family members of persons taken to these centres were reportedly also victims of reprisals occasionally during their disappearance or were themselves taken there in order to obtain information about the whereabouts of wanted opposition members. In the states of Carabobo, Cojedes and Táchira, there has allegedly been evidence of houses being used for this purpose. According to a 2022 report published by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, investigations rarely take place, and in fact it is only in individual cases that an investigation is carried out or someone is sentenced for such acts.

Report by Espaja.com (Transparencia Venezuela): restrictions on freedom of information, secrecy

In a report on restricted freedom of information and secrecy as a style of government (Opacidad en Venezuela: una forma de gobernar), the verification portal Espaja.com, a project supported by the NGO Transparencia Venezuela,

notes that the government has increased the secrecy of official figures, especially since 2016. Although the Venezuelan Constitution (Articles 58, 141 and 143) guarantees freedom of information and access to public information, the withholding, censorship and lack of transparency of the latter have been common practice for at least eight years, according to the report. For example, epidemiological reports and mortality indices have not been published since 2016. The last population census dates back to 2011; budgets, balance sheets of the individual ministries as well as social and economic indicators are, in some cases, published only sporadically, making a realistic assessment of the socio-economic and humanitarian situation in the country difficult. The report said that although various NGOs tried to fill the information vacuum in different areas, their possibilities were often limited compared to state capacities. It also stated that access to and receipt of social benefits and certain application processes were sometimes not clearly ascertainable through published government information.

Opposition: election of a new leadership body, arrest warrants against participants

After the fragmented Venezuelan opposition voted to remove the so-called interim government of Juan Guaidó in the last week of December 2022 (cf. BN of 02.01.23), the body elected in 2015 and currently acting as a parallel parliament abroad appointed a new leadership team on 05.01.23, which is to set up a five-member commission to manage foreign assets. The three members of the new leadership team of the Primero Justicia (Justice First), Un Nuevo Tiempo (A New Era) and Acción Democrática (Democratic Action) parties are currently in exile. On 07.01.23, an arrest warrant was officially issued for the leaders of the opposition. President Dinorah Figueroa and the two vice-presidents, Marianela Fernández and Auristela Vásquez, are accused of, among other things, impersonating public officials, treason and "corruption offences in connection with the illegal establishment of a sham parliamentary commission that was set up to steal Venezuelan assets".

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