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Briefing Notes

Group 62 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

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Afghanistan

Security situation

An explosion occurred near the Hanzala Mosque in the Shahr-e-Naw district of Kabul on 14.01.25. The National Resistance Front (NRF) has claimed responsibility for the attack which was directed against the Taliban's Military Prosecutor's Office in the city's 10th district. Two Taliban members were reportedly killed and others injured in the attack.¹

Governance and persecution

According to Human Rights Watch (HRW), the human rights situation in Afghanistan deteriorated in 2024 as the Taliban intensified its repression of women, girls and minority groups.

According to the Taliban, they have issued around 9 million electronic identity cards since seizing power. Currently, 73 distribution centres, known as Asan Khedmat centres, are operational across the country. These include a mobile distribution team and a centre in the UAE that supplies Afghan nationals abroad. The ID cards continue to feature the logo of the former government.

The Taliban arrested three people in Panjshir province, including a former employee of the National Directorate of Security (NDS), a former soldier and a doctor from the emergency medical centre in Dara district.²

Return of Afghan refugees from Iran, Tajikistan and Pakistan

The International Organisation for Migration (IOM) has reported that 1.2 million undocumented Afghan nationals returned from Iran between January and December 2024. According to the IOM, 67 percent of the returnees were deported.

In Daman district, Kandahar province, a refugee camp originally set up for internally displaced persons has become a temporary shelter for hundreds of returnees from Pakistan. They report very poor conditions there due to the harsh winter conditions and a lack of food, water, medical care and fuel and are calling on aid organisations for urgent help.

The Afghan consulate in Tajikistan's eastern city of Khorugh, which represents the Taliban-led government in Kabul, announced that around 60 Afghan nationals had been expelled from Tajikistan in December 2024 despite having valid visas. Most of Tajikistan's Afghan community live in the town of Vahdat, which is on the outskirts of Dushanbe.³

Azerbaijan

Trials against former leaders of the Republic of Artsakh

Two trials against former leaders of the separatist Republic of Artsakh, which is not recognised by the international community, began in Baku on 17.01.25. In the first trial, 15 people were charged, including former de facto officials

of the republic: Presidents Arkadi Ghukasyan, Bako Sahakian and Arayik Harutyunian, Foreign Minister David Babayan and parliamentary speaker David Ishkhanian.

The second trial was opened exclusively against the Russian-Armenian billionaire Ruben Vardanyan, who ruled as de facto prime minister from November 2022 to February 2023. A total of 42 charges were brought against Vardanyan, including accusations such as the financing of terrorism, the recruitment of mercenaries, forced deportations and torture. Only journalists from the state-controlled national television station AzTV and the state news agency AzerTaj were allowed to be present at both trials as observers. All of the defendants were arrested by the Azerbaijani military during the Azerbaijani lightning offensive in September 2023 and have been in pre-trial detention ever since.⁴

Belarus

Upcoming presidential elections

According to media reports issued on 23.12.24, the Central Election Commission (CEC) in Belarus has announced that four additional candidates alongside incumbent Alyksandr Lukashenko have been registered for the presidential elections to be held on 26.01.25. According to the CEC, these are Oleh Gaidukevich, Serhey Syrankov, Anna Konapatskaya, and Alyksandr Khizhnyak, who are considered to be pro-government. According to the leader of the opposition, Svyatlana Tsikhanouskaya, no independent observers will be allowed to be present. Mass protests broke out in the wake of the last presidential elections held in 2020 amid accusations of manipulation which were followed by a wave of arrests. The incumbent president is expected to be re-elected for his seventh term in office.⁵

Political prisoners pardoned while arrests continue

Since the summer of 2024, President Lukashenko has released a total of 225 political prisoners in several rounds. According to media reports, the presidential press service announced on 28.12.24 that a further 20 prisoners who were being detained on charges of extremism would be pardoned, including people with chronic illnesses, women and people with children. Since 2020, human rights groups have recognised almost 3,600 people as political prisoners. They continue to report arrests and politically motivated trials and currently estimate that at least 1,253 political prisoners remain behind bars.⁶

Burkina Faso

Northeast: fatalities from jihadist attack

On 11.01.25, members of a jihadist group ambushed a vehicle on a road between the northeastern towns of Dori and Seytenga, close to the border with Niger, killing a total of around 20 members of the Burkinabe army and civilians. According to media reports, several people remain unaccounted for. The armed actors are also said to have set fire to several vehicles and seized weapons and ammunition.⁷

Colombia

More than 60 dead after rebel fighting; peace negotiations with ELN suspended

On 17.01.25, Colombian President Gustavo Petro suspended peace talks with the guerrilla group Ejército de Liberación Nacional (ELN) (National Liberation Army). This step was taken after clashes erupted between the ELN and splinter groups of the former Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) rebel group in the Catatumbo region. According to the governor of Norte de Santander, William Villamizar, more than 30 people were killed and over 20 were injured in the clashes that took place on 16.01.25. According to the government's Ombudsman's Office that oversees human rights, the number of people killed had risen to more than 60 by 18.01.25, thirty-two individuals had been kidnapped and thousands of people had been displaced. At least five of those killed were former FARC guerrillas who were part of the 2016 peace agreement, the government said. According to the government spokesperson, members of the Estado Mayor Central (Central General Staff (EMC)), a dissident faction of the FARC that is engaged in separate peace talks with the government, were also attacked. In addition, many of the victims were family members of former FARC fighters. Hundreds of families have already sought refuge in

city of Cúcuta on the border with Venezuela and in the municipalities of Ocaña and Tibú. The government has declared its intention to send 300 more soldiers to the region in a bid to end the violence. The Ombudsman's Office has called on the ELN and other armed groups to allow humanitarian aid into the area and to cease all attacks on the civilian population.

The Catatumbo region is considered to be strategically important for drug trafficking due to its proximity to Venezuela, from where illegal armed groups export cocaine. In a statement released on 18.01.25, the ELN accused a faction of the FARC of having provoked the conflict by killing civilians. The FARC faction, however, did not comment publicly on the accusations, but announced that it had begun withdrawing its units the previous day in order to prevent a further escalation of violence.

Peace talks with the ELN have been ongoing since 2022 as part of President Petro's policy of Total Peace (Paz Total). An agreed ceasefire expired in August 2024 after months of stalled negotiations (cf. BN of 05.08.24).⁸

Côte d'Ivoire

Conviction of Soro confidants confirmed

On 15.01.25, the Court of Appeal in Abidjan confirmed the sentences handed down in two separate trials against leading members of the Générations et peuples solidaires (Generations and People in Solidarity (GPS)) movement and confidants of former Prime Minister Guillaume Soro. According to reports, Mamadou Traoré was sentenced to two years in prison and five years' deprivation of his civil rights for spreading false news and disturbing public order. On the occasion of the National Day parade held on 07.08.24, he reportedly claimed on Facebook that the military material shown at the parade had come from the European military mission Takuba, which had been withdrawn from Mali. A similar sentence was handed down to Kando Soumahoro, in his case for "illegally maintaining a political party". In August 2024, Soumahoro reportedly signed a joint document on behalf of the GPS drawn up by opposition parties calling for a reform of the electoral system in the run-up to the presidential election scheduled for October 2025. According to his lawyer, however, GPS is an association and not a party. The lawyers intend to appeal in both cases, claiming that no evidence has been presented to support the charges.

GPS founder Guillaume Soro is in exile. In April 2024, speculation abounded about his return to the country following contacts between him and President Alassane Ouattara. However, there have ultimately been no reports of a return. He is rumoured to be residing in Niger and Burkina Faso.⁹

India

Operations against Maoist rebels in Chhattisgarh

Since 15.01.25, at least 3,000 Indian security forces have stepped up efforts to quell the Maoist rebellion by the so-called Naxalites in the state of Chhattisgarh. On 16.01.25, twelve, according to other reports 17, rebels were killed during an operation carried out in Bijapur. In Sukma district, at least three Maoist rebels, including an explosives expert suspected of being responsible for the deaths of several security personnel, were killed in another operation carried out a week earlier.¹⁰

Iran

Freedom of the press: journalist sentenced to one year in prison

According to a media report issued on 15.01.25, a researcher and editor-in-chief of a Tehran-based research magazine was sentenced to one year in prison in Karaj (Alborz province).

In addition, the 36-year-old who is of Kurdish descent also received a two-year ban on online activities. The report refers to information provided by a Norway-based human rights organisation that campaigns for the interests of Kurds in Iran. According to the report, the defendant was charged in 2024 with spreading propaganda against the Islamic Republic after being temporarily arrested and released on bail.¹¹

Protest against the death sentence for a Kurdish activist

According to media reports, several Kurdish activists gathered in the city of Sanandaj (Kordestan province) on 15.01.25 to protest against the confirmed death sentence of the well-known social worker and activist Pakhshan Azizi. Videos on social networks showed demonstrators holding up pictures of the defendant and chanting slogans demanding, among other things, an end to all executions and the immediate release of political prisoners. There were no reports of any confrontations with the security forces in attendance.

Pakhshan Azizi, who has been imprisoned in Tehran's Evin Prison since 2023, was convicted on several charges in July 2024 for alleged membership of opposition groups and armed rebellion against the state. In addition to a four-year prison sentence, the sentence also includes the death penalty (cf. BN of 30.09.24). The judgment was upheld by the Supreme Court on 09.01.25.

According to human rights organisations, the activist was denied access to a lawyer during the trial. She was also denied family visits.¹²

Two controversial Supreme Court judges assassinated

According to media reports, two judges were shot dead in Iran's Supreme Court building in Tehran on 18.01.25. The gunman, who had been employed in the building, reportedly acted alone. He committed suicide immediately after the attack. At least two other people were injured in the attack. The offence has been described as a terrorist attack in pro-government media.

The judges who were assassinated were reportedly two well-known high-ranking clerics who were primarily responsible for crimes against national security, such as espionage and terrorism. They were allegedly also responsible for numerous convictions of individuals critical of the government and opposition activists, and for confirming the death sentences of members of opposition groups in 1988. Both men had previously been targeted in assassination attempts.¹³

Iraq

Human rights situation; HRW annual report

In its annual report on the development of the human rights situation in 2024, published on 16.01.25, HRW stated, among other things, that the Iraqi government had restricted the rights of its citizens by passing new laws.

In this context, HRW mentioned in particular a law banning homosexuality in the form of an amendment to the Law Banning Prostitution, which was passed by the Iraqi parliament on 27.04.24. It also reported an increase in "unlawful executions" that were not preceded by fair trials.¹⁴

Kosovo

Police action against Serbian parallel administration

According to media reports, the police closed further Serbian administrative centres in 10 municipalities, including 30 Serbian regional offices, on 15.01.25 without a court order and banned the use of the Serbian dinar (cf. BN of 12.08.24 and 02.09.24) even after the Kosovar government had already taken action against self-governing institutions of the Serbian minority (including administrative centres, post offices, banks, tax authorities, etc.) in 2024. The action was directed against institutions in the Albanian-dominated south of the country. According to the government, all parallel institutions in the country have now been closed. Kosovo's authorities justified the measure with the illegality of the Serbian institutions and suspected criminal activities. As part of the EU accession process, Kosovo and Serbia had agreed to dismantle the parallel structures in the long term in return for the Kosovo Serbs having their own association of municipalities. However, this process had come to a standstill. The EU and the Serbian government in Belgrade have criticised Kosovo's latest unilateral action. Representatives of the Kosovo Serbs consider the action to be part of Prime Minister Albin Kurti's election campaign in the run-up to the parliamentary elections to be held on 09.02.25.¹⁵

Lebanon

Ceasefire with Israel

During a visit UN Secretary-General António Guterres made to Beirut on 18.01.25, the recently-elected President Joseph Aoun (cf. BN of 13.01.25), confirmed that Israeli forces must withdraw from southern Lebanon by 26.01.25 in accordance with the ceasefire agreement.

Even now, occasional exchanges of fire and explosions continue to occur in areas still occupied by Israel, whereby, according to Israeli sources, Hezbollah tunnels and comparable infrastructure used for military purposes continue to be destroyed.

According to the head of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) mission, the Lebanese army has significantly expanded its presence in southern Lebanon in recent weeks and is now present in a total of 93 locations.

On 16.01.25, the US also pledged to provide the regular Lebanese armed forces with USD 117 million so that they can fulfil their obligations.¹⁶

Myanmar

Security situation and humanitarian situation

According to media reports, around 10,000 people fled from several villages in Madaya and Thabeikkyin townships (Mandalay Region) between 04.12.24 and 09.12.24 in a bid to escape fighting between the military junta, who are being supported by the Pyu Saw Htee militia, and armed resistance groups (People's Defence Forces, PDFs). According to information provided by the research group Data for Myanmar, Pyu Saw Htee troops and junta troops had razed eight villages in Madaya to the ground and destroyed hundreds of homes in Thabeikkyin by 26.12.24.

On 22.12.24, a Chin Brotherhood spokesman announced that resistance forces had gained control of 80 percent of Chin State and were preparing to attack the remaining infantry battalions of the military junta, including in the regional capital Hakha.

In December 2024, the NGO Insecurity Insight documented that nine attacks had been carried out on healthcare professionals and facilities by the military, ethnic armies or PDFs in the states of Chin, Kachin, Rakhine and Shan as well as in the Mandalay Region.

Between 30.12.24 and 06.01.25, the military carried out at least six airstrikes on locations in the townships of Ponnagyun, Ann, Gwa and Myebon (Rakhine State), which had been captured by the Arakan Army (AA). Ten civilians were killed and at least 12 others were injured. The AA, which controls 14 of the 17 townships in Rakhine State and the entire border region with Bangladesh, had previously offered to talk to the junta. On 08.01.25, the Myanmar Air Force killed 41 civilians and wounded 52 others in an attack carried out on the village of Kyauk Ni Maw (Rakhine). Most of the victims are said to be Rohingya.

According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), almost four years after the military coup, an estimated 19.9 million people – more than a third of the population, including 6.3 million children – are dependent on humanitarian aid. The reasons for this are "the spread of the conflict, widespread contamination with explosive devices and landmines, climate disasters, disease outbreaks and economic collapse". Since the beginning of 2025, the military junta has limited the power supply in the major cities of Naypyidaw, Yangon and Mandalay to a few hours a day in order to prevent a collapse of the power grid affected by the destruction of power lines.¹⁷

New cybersecurity law

On 01.01.25, a new cybersecurity law entered into force, which sets out a penalty of six months in prison and a fine of up to MMK 10,000,000 (approx. EUR 4,623, as of 16.01.25) for the use of virtual private networks (VPNs) as well as penalties for the digital distribution, transfer, copying or selling of information that is "inappropriate for the public". Furthermore, the law obliges platform providers to store personal data for up to three years and to make it available to authorities upon request. According to Chapter I, paragraph 3 (b), all measures also apply to Myanmar nationals residing abroad who violate the provisions of the law.¹⁸

Nigeria

Northwest: more deadly airstrikes on civilians

On 11.01.25, the Nigerian Air Force bombed the remote village of Tungar Kara in the northwestern state of Zamfara, killing at least 15 people, including members of local vigilante groups. According to media reports citing military sources, the airstrike was intended to target criminal gangs active in the region. The military denied having deliberately bombed civilians. The incident is being investigated. On 25.12.24, at least 10 civilians were killed in an airstrike carried out in the neighbouring state of Sokoto. According to official sources, these were also mistakenly attacked. The two most recent incidents are the latest in a series of similar incidents causing the death of civilians of late. In January 2024, the Nigerian Air Force took responsibility for the first time for an accidental airstrike that claimed civilian casualties (cf. BN of 26.02.24). According to media reports, the confidence of the population in the region in the capabilities and good intentions of the military is being sapped as a result of these events. In 2024, violence caused by criminal gangs in northwest Nigeria was widely reported in the media. Government agencies respond to the difficult security situation in the region by sometimes using massive force, including attacks carried out by the air force.¹⁹

Palestinian Autonomous Territories / Israel

Gaza Strip: ceasefire between Hamas and Israel; exchange of hostages and prisoners

After more than 16 months of war in the Gaza Strip, a ceasefire between Hamas and the Israeli military came into effect on 19.01.25 after a delay of a few hours.

The first of three planned phases will provide for a cessation of hostilities in the first six weeks, an increase in humanitarian imports into the Gaza Strip and the exchange of 33 of the 98 hostages still being held in the Gaza Strip. In return, around 1,900 Palestinians detained in Israeli prisons are to be released.

Initially, the hostage release is to involve only women, children, men over 50 and the sick and wounded. On 19.01.25, the first hostages, three women aged between 24 and 31, were handed over to the International Red Cross. A few hours later, buses carrying 90 released Palestinian prisoners, consisting of 69 women and 21 young men, arrived in the West Bank. Among those released were also people who had been held in custody in Israel on terrorism charges ranging from throwing stones through to attempted murder. Some of them were held in administrative detention without charge. At the same time, the plan is for more than 600 truckloads of humanitarian aid to be imported into the Gaza Strip every day and for the Israeli military to withdraw to the east.

As part of the second six-week phase, Israeli troops would leave the Gaza Strip completely and the remaining live hostages would be exchanged for more Palestinian prisoners from Israeli jails. Talks on the specific circumstances are to begin soon.

According to UN estimates based on satellite footage, the widespread destruction in the Gaza Strip includes around two thirds of all buildings, including key infrastructure such as hospitals, roads, water and electricity facilities. Due to the amount of rubble, unexploded ordnance and limited resources and space in the narrow coastal strip, the removal of debris could take years; reconstruction could take decades or centuries, depending on the circumstances. At the same time, it remains unclear who is to control and administer the Gaza Strip in the future. Shortly after the ceasefire began, members of Hamas appeared demonstratively in the streets of Gaza in uniform, with weapons and vehicles. Hamas banners were also on display to welcome the released prisoners in the West Bank.

The Hamas-led Ministry of Health reports that more than 46,000 Palestinians have been killed in the course of the war. The Israeli military claimed to have eliminated 17,000 fighters. In addition, at least 840 Israeli military personnel have been killed since 07.10.23.²⁰

Russian Federation

Prison sentences for Navalny lawyers

Three lawyers who once represented opposition activist Alexei Navalny, who died in a penal colony (cf. BN of 19.02.24), have been sentenced to several years in prison by a court in Petushki (Vladimir Oblast). According to

agency reports published on 17.01.25, they were found guilty of belonging to an extremist organisation, namely Navalny's Anti-Corruption Foundation (FBK), which is classified as such.

The information on sentences is inconsistent. It is predominantly reported that Vadim Kobsev was sentenced to five and a half years, Alexei Liptser to five years and Igor Sergunin to three and a half years in a penal colony. It is reported that the three men had already been arrested in October 2023 and placed on an official list of "terrorists and extremists" the following month. The reports state that prior to this, they had been the only ones, with a few exceptions, who had been able to visit Navalny in prison. It was reportedly through them that Navalny's messages had reached his team, which had then published them. According to the court, the defendants had thus abused their status as lawyers by using their position to pass information from him to his team, who are deemed members of an extremist organisation.

Various other criminal proceedings are taking place in connection with the accusation of supporting the FBK. Several fines, suspended sentences and also prison sentences have already been imposed for donations made to the FBK (cf. BN of 13.01.25). Four journalists are also on trial for posts on YouTube that were allegedly linked to the FBK (cf. BN of 08.04.24 and 07.10.24). Following Navalny's death, hundreds of participants who attended memorial events were arrested for disturbing public order following unauthorised gatherings and were sentenced to fines and detention (cf. BN of 26.02.24).

The civil rights organisation OVD-Info and western states see the ruling that has now been handed down as a deliberate crackdown on defence lawyers who take on cases of political prisoners and critics of the authorities and government, according to further reports. Two other Navalny lawyers who are on a wanted list are said to be abroad.²¹

Syria

Acts of retaliation and vigilante justice

Reports of acts of retaliation and vigilante justice in Syria following the end of Bashar al-Assad's rule continue. There are repeated reports of individual cases in which the local population, neighbours and acquaintances resort to violence and retaliate against (actual or alleged) supporters of the Assad government. On 16.01.25, an international daily newspaper reported an incident in which an affected family stated that one of their members had been murdered, even though the victim was a simple soldier on military service who had allegedly tried to defect twice. However, the local population, from which the perpetrators who reportedly killed the man after his return home are said to have come, accused him of passing on to the then government information which had allegedly led to the imprisonment and killing of others. A member of the police investigating the case also stated that the family of the murdered man was known to be working with the government. Initially, no one was arrested for the alleged extrajudicial killing.

According to the newspaper report, even ordinary conscripts who returned home after the fall of Assad were met with suspicion. They are reportedly accused of having facilitated the government's crimes.

There are also frequent reports of extrajudicial killings of former officials under the Assad government and killings for unclear reasons.²²

Israeli airstrike on HTS members in Quneitra

Three people were killed and five others were wounded in an Israeli airstrike carried out against targets in the village of Ghadir al-Bustan in the southern governorate of Quneitra. Two of those killed were reportedly members of Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), while the third was a municipal official who was also affiliated with the HTS transitional government. The Israeli military stated that vehicles transporting weapons were the target of the airstrikes.

Following the fall of Assad, Israel carried out hundreds of airstrikes against state military targets and equipment (cf. BN of 23.12.24). The Syrian transitional government had previously signalled that it was not seeking conflict with Israel and had condemned the airstrikes and ground operations, but had not taken any military action. However, this is the first airstrike involving victims who were directly linked to the HTS transitional government²³

Türkiye

Arrest of mayor and co-mayors

According to press reports, Rıza Akpolat, a member of the Republican People's Party (CHP) and mayor of the Istanbul municipality of Beşiktaş, was arrested on 13.01.25. He was accused, among other things, of bribery, and according to the Public Prosecutor's Office, he is a member of a criminal organisation. It was only a few days later, on 16.01.24, that an arrest warrant was finally issued against Akpolat. The CHP criticised the proceedings and described them as politically motivated.

According to media reports, two co-mayors from the pro-Kurdish Peoples' Equality and Democracy Party (DEM) had already been arrested during raids carried out in the Akdeniz district of Mersin province on 10.01.25. In addition to the co-mayors of Akdeniz municipality, Hoşyar Sarıyıldız and Nuriye Aslan, the police also detained three city council members. The detained co-mayors were replaced by trustees from the Justice and Development Party (AKP).

The reasons given for the arrest by the Public Prosecutor's Office included spreading propaganda for a terrorist organisation, membership of a terrorist organisation and violation of the Law on the Prevention of the Financing of Terrorism. On 10.01.25, the DEM held a rally and demonstration in front of the city council building in response to the arrest.

Since the local elections held on 31.03.24, trustees have been appointed in nine municipalities. In addition, according to a media report issued on 23.12.24, which is based on a report published by the opposition CHP, the AKP government removed a total of 154 mayors from office between 2016 and 2024 and replaced them with trustees appointed by the government. The mayors were generally ousted due to allegations of terrorism, such as suspected links to terrorist organisations like the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK).²⁴

Arrests of suspected supporters of the Gülen movement

According to media reports, security forces arrested around 200 people across the country between 07.01.25 and 17.01.25 for alleged links to the Gülen movement.

On 14.01.25, one hundred and ten people were arrested in raids carried out in 23 provinces. These included 13 former police officers who had previously been dismissed for suspected links to Gülen, two non-commissioned military officers, two university employees as well as teachers, doctors, a retired police officer and military cadets. Those arrested were accused of being involved in Gülen-linked activities at universities, in the military and in other areas. Previously, on 08.01.25, Minister of the Interior Ali Yerlikaya had stated on the social network X that 63 people had been arrested in operations carried out in 38 provinces. They were accused of financially supporting the Gülen movement and spreading its propaganda.

According to a press report issued on 15.01.25, a further 17 people were arrested in Izmir for allegedly praising the leader of the Gülen movement, Fethullah Gülen, who died in October 2024 (cf. BN of 21.10.24), on social media.

According to a media report published on 17.01.25, a further 18 people were arrested for allegedly supporting the Gülen movement in Istanbul and Çankırı. Among other things, they are accused of using the ByLock app, which is considered by the government to be a tool of communication for supporters of the Gülen movement.²⁵

Ukraine

Civilian casualties and compensation programme

Based on information provided by the responsible regional governor on 17.01.25, at least four people were killed in a Russian missile attack on the city of Kryviy Rih (Dnipropetrovsk region). According to the Kyiv military administration, at least three people died in a Russian missile attack on the capital on 18.01.25.

According to media reports, a compensation programme was set up for Ukrainians on 16.01.25 to enable them to apply for compensation for the loss of relatives as a result of the Russian war of aggression. Under the programme, the Register of Damage for Ukraine, based in The Hague, which was set up under the auspices of the Council of Europe and is supported by the EU, will now also accept applications for compensation for damage, losses and injuries that have been caused by the Russian invasion, in addition to property damage. Thousands of applications have already been received. The aim is to determine a total amount to obtain reparation payments from the Russian Federation.²⁶

War events, prisoners of war and recruitment/desertion

According to Ukrainian military sources, the Russian armed forces are still trying to bypass the eastern Ukrainian transport hub of Pokrovsk to the south in order to gain control of the motorway from there to the city of Dnipro and thus cut off the supply routes to Pokrovsk. There is a threat of encirclement of the Ukrainian troops. Ukrainian media reported renewed Russian drone swarms throughout the country on the nights of 13.01.25/14.01.25 and 15.01.25/16.01.25, including the use of so-called decoy drones or dummy drones with no explosive charges. This is intended to overwhelm Ukrainian air defences or force them to use up valuable ammunition (cf. BN of 13.01.25). According to media reports issued on 15.01.25, the Ukrainian parliament has extended the current martial law and mobilisation until 09.05.25.

According to media reports published on 15.01.25, both warring parties confirmed a fresh exchange of 25 prisoners from both sides, mediated by the UAE. In addition, the human rights ombudspersons of the Russian Federation and Ukraine, Tatyana Moskalkova and Dmytro Lubinets, stated on 16.01.25 that they had exchanged information about the civilians remaining in the Ukrainian-controlled area of the Russian border region of Kursk as well as missing civilians. Lubinets confirmed a joint agreement to "continue the mutual exchange of information regarding the search for missing persons among prisoners of war".

Media reports speak of increasing criticism of the Ukrainian military leadership (cf. BN of 13.01.25). According to these reports, 60,000 military personnel have been reported absent without leave since the start of the Russian full-scale invasion; 30,000 are considered to be deserters. The figures, which, according to the Ukrainian Prosecutor General's Office, rose sharply in 2024, are attributed to structural problems, severe exhaustion and demoralisation. An internal Ukrainian debate has been triggered in particular by Ukrainian journalist Yuri Butusov's published research findings on desertion. The criticism relates, for instance, to the inexperience of new recruits and commanders, to corruption and abuse of power by commanders as well as to internet videos about the harsh approach taken by some conscription authorities. A member of parliament also criticises the lack of basic training. The Ukrainian military commander Oleksandr Syrsky points to a lack of personnel in the mechanised brigades and insufficient mobilisation capacities, which is why a start has been made on setting up new combat brigades with personnel from the areas of logistics, supply and maintenance.

The nationwide raids that began last week against people-smuggling networks that help draft evaders to flee abroad (cf. BN of 13.01.25) were continued this week, according to a statement released by the authorities on 17.01.25. The Ukrainian police have reportedly searched over 200 private homes and offices in 19 regions.²⁷

Energy infrastructure

The authorities report that according to the Ministry of Energy, preventative measures have been taken due to nationwide Russian airstrikes that were carried out on Ukrainian energy facilities on 15.01.25, and the Ukrainian grid operator Ukrenerho has imposed temporary emergency power cuts in six regions. According to the governor, two power plants in the Lviv region were damaged.²⁸

Judicial sentence and action against collaborators

According to media reports published on 17.01.25, a former local official and member of parliament from the city of Trostyanets (Sumy region), who was arrested in May 2022, was sentenced to 15 years in prison for high treason and supporting the Russian armed forces. No details were provided.

In a video message released on 18.01.25, President Volodymyr Zelensky announced unspecified consequences for supporters of the Russian enemy in their own country: "We are taking action against traitors and all kinds of machinations that weaken our state and our Ukrainian society." In doing so, he also praised the work of the law enforcement authorities, which, according to media reports, had published several unverifiable reports on the arrest of suspected collaborators earlier that day.²⁹

Humanitarian financial aid and support for returns

According to media reports published on 13.01.25, the EU Commission has announced new humanitarian financial aid totalling EUR 148 million for Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova, with EUR 140 million earmarked for Ukraine. The funds are reportedly earmarked for emergency accommodation, food and medicines, particularly for the people of eastern and southern Ukraine. The other EUR 8 million is to be used to provide for Ukrainian war refugees in the Republic of Moldova.

According to a media report published on 20.01.25, the Ukrainian government wants to achieve the return of war refugees living in Germany by means of so-called "unity hubs". According to a statement issued by the Federal Ministry of the Interior, the hubs are to "act as a point of contact for Ukrainian refugees in Germany, providing cultural opportunities, courses on the German language and culture, assistance with finding jobs in Ukraine and Germany as well as advice on returning to Ukraine voluntarily and helping to rebuild the country". A centre initially planned for Berlin will soon be followed by others in other cities.³⁰

Venezuela

Arrests in the context of Maduro's swearing-in, kin liability

According to the NGO Foro Penal (Penal Forum), at least 90 arrests were made again (as of 17.01.25) in the run-up to and after Nicolas Maduro's controversial swearing-in on 10.01.25, most of them on 09.01.25 in connection with opposition protests, among other things. According to her party Vente Venezuela (Come Venezuela), opposition leader María Corina Machado was also briefly detained (cf. BN of 13.01.25). Attorney General Saab denied this and spoke of a staged coup by the opposition. In addition, numerous political activists and members of opposition parties (including former presidential candidate Enrique Marquez (Centrados), human rights defenders and journalists were again arrested. In several cases, relatives and NGOs spoke of disappearances, some of which lasted several days. A few of those affected have since been released, most recently including the director of the NGO Espacio Público (Public Space), Carlos Correa. In the course of the arrests, there have reportedly also been cases of kin liability. According to opposition politician González Urrutia, his son-in-law was taken away by people dressed in black while he was taking his children to school in Caracas on 07.01.24; his whereabouts initially remained unknown. According to the constitutional lawyer María Alejandra Díaz Marín, relatives of hers were also arrested on pretextual grounds, and she was threatened with the arrest of her children if she did not hand herself in. Díaz Marín had already been temporarily banned from practising as a lawyer in November 2024 as part of a disciplinary sanction after she lodged a constitutional complaint in connection with the non-publication of the itemised presidential election results. Machado's mother's house was reportedly also surrounded by security forces once again, and the electricity in the neighbourhood was cut off.

The police and military presence had been significantly increased around the swearing-in ceremony, and various colectivos (pro-government groups) had also been recruited by Interior Minister Cabello, among others, to "defend the Bolivarian revolution", as he put it. Online intimidation campaigns and numerous website blockades were also reported. According to government sources, more than 100 foreign nationals were arrested in recent weeks in the run-up to the swearing-in ceremony due to allegedly planned plots. No background information on these events has been released.³¹

Prison conditions and circumstances of release

Based on information provided by the Committee of Relatives and Friends for the Freedom of Political Prisoners (Clippve) on 28.12.2024, those most recently released from prison had to sign a declaration prior to their release stating that their human rights had been respected and that they had received adequate medical and nutritional care. The independent Venezuelan Observatory of Prisons (OVP) also criticised the release conditions for juveniles at the end of 2024. For example, they were reportedly forced to record videos in which they supposedly confirmed that they had spent their time in prison under good conditions. According to the OVP, these individuals were also prohibited from speaking to the media under threat of re-imprisonment. In addition, a recently published report by Clippve again criticises the prison conditions for persons detained for political reasons as precarious and inhumane. According to the report, Clippve has, for example, received specific reports of torture, ill-treatment, prolonged solitary confinement and denial of family and lawyer visits from the prisons El Helicoide, La Boleita, Rodeo I, Tocuyito, Tocarón, Yare III and the women's prisons INOF and la Crisálida. The report also criticises the denial of medication and medical care and the precarious hygiene conditions there, as well as in other prisons and police stations.³²

Yemen

UN Special Envoy's report on the situation in Yemen

The UN Special Envoy for Yemen, Hans Grundberg, presented his latest report on the situation in Yemen during a meeting held by the UN Security Council on 15.01.25. In this report, he mentioned, among other things, the attacks launched by the Houthis on international shipping in the Red Sea and the subsequent attacks carried out by the US, the United Kingdom and Israel against Houthi targets.

The deteriorating security situation has also had an impact on the humanitarian situation in Yemen, the UN Special Envoy said. Around 17 million people are currently unable to meet their basic food needs.³³

Human rights situation; HRW annual report

In its annual report on the development of the human rights situation in 2024, published on 16.01.25, HRW stated, among other things, that the situation for civil society and aid organisations in Yemen has deteriorated. The detention of some employees of nongovernmental aid organisations and the UN by the Houthis on 31.05.24 is cited as an example of the increased threat.³⁴

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