



Briefing Notes

Group 62 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

12 December 2022

Afghanistan

Security situation

A Taliban spokesman has stated that seven employees of a petroleum company were killed and six injured in a bomb attack on a bus in Mazar-e Sharif on 06.12.22. An explosion occurred on the same day near to a money exchange market in Jalalabad, capital of the province of Nangarhar in eastern Afghanistan, seriously injuring at least nine civilians.

Governance and persecution

The first public execution since the Taliban assumed power took place in a football stadium in Farah province on 07.12.22. According to international media, a man whom the Taliban had convicted of murder was shot dead by a firing squad. According to the Afghan exile press medium Hasht-e Subh, another man was also shot by firing squad and a woman was stoned to death. High-ranking Taliban leaders, including mullah Baradar and the presiding judge at the supreme court, were present at the execution. There are also increasing numbers of reports of public floggings in various provinces.

Reports of arrests of civilians who are accused of supporting the National Resistance Front (NRF) continue to emerge.

The Taliban have announced that girls will be permitted to sit school-leaving examinations after completing the 12th class, despite not having attended school for more than a year. The examination is reported to have taken place on 07.12.22 in all provinces apart from Kandahar, Helmand and Nimruz, where the school year ends at a later date. No media coverage was permitted.

Bangladesh

Shots fired at BNP protest rally

Last week, security forces shot at supporters of the conservative religious Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) during a protest action which was held in the capital, Dhaka, in connection with the elections which are to take place next year. One person was killed and more than 60 injured. Thousands of people were detained ahead of the rally as a preventive measure.

Cameroon

Situation of women driven out of anglophone regions

Voice of America reports demonstrations in Jaunde and Douala in support of the rights of women driven out of the anglophone regions. On International Human Rights Day on 10.12.22, the Association for the Fight Against Violence on Women and Young Girls was keen to draw attention to the fact that displaced women and girls

frequently face physical and sexual abuse at their place of refuge. The association's coordinator stated that 370 displaced women and girls who had been raped or forced into prostitution had turned to the association for help in the past two months alone. Marie-Thérèse Abena Ondoa, Minister of Women's Empowerment and the Family, advised victims to report crimes, pledging that the state would bring those responsible to justice.

Hundreds of thousands of people have been displaced in the conflict which has been ongoing in the anglophone regions since 2017 (cf. BN of 11.04.22). Kidnappings are a regular occurrence (cf. BN of 13.06.22, 19.09.22 and 07.11.22). It was reported on 07.12.22 that the military had taken over construction work on the roads linking the two regions to Nigeria, after workers had abandoned construction sites following the kidnapping of eight people, including road construction workers.

Chad

Mass trial of 401 prisoners at high-security prison

It has been reported in the media that 401 people were brought to trial at the Koro Toro high-security prison in the north of Chad between 29.11. and 02.12.22. 262 defendants received prison sentences of between two and three years, while 80 received suspended sentences of between one to two years; 59 were found not guilty and released. In all, the security services arrested at least 621 people in connection with the protests against a renewed extension of the political transition phase on 20.10.22 (cf. BN of 24.10.22), all of whom were taken to Koro Toro. The 401 defendants were accused of participating in unauthorised gatherings, damage to property, arson and disturbing public order in connection with the demonstrations. The trial took place in the absence of independent media and the accused had no access to legal counsel. The bar association council criticised breaches of the rules of procedure and declared a boycott of the court hearings. Prior to the trial, the bar association council had asked the authorities in vain for support and protection on the 600 km journey from the capital to Koro Toro prison.

According to information in the media, on 09.12.22 the authorities granted the conditional release of 80 minors who had also been arrested in connection with the demonstrations on 20.10.22.

Colombia

Killings of leading social figures reach new all-time high

The office of the Colombian ombudsman (Defensoría del Pueblo) announced on 07.12.22 that 199 killings of leading social figures and human rights representatives – so-called “líderes sociales” – were recorded between January and November 2022. Most of the attacks on people belonging to this category apparently took place in the provinces of Nariño, Cauca, Putumayo, Antioquia and Arauca. This represents the highest number ever recorded since the government began keeping records in 2016. According to ombudsman Carlos Camargo, 145 and 182 líderes sociales were killed in 2021 and 2020 respectively.

DR Congo

UNJHRO: Rise in the number of human rights violations; eastern Congo, M23

The UN Joint Human Rights Office (UNJHRO) documented 429 human rights violations and abuses throughout the country in October 2022, which represents a slight increase over the previous month. Around 40 % of the cases documented throughout the country are reportedly attributable to state actors and 60 % to non-state actors. 86 % of all cases documented nationwide were recorded in the eastern conflict-ridden provinces, where North Kivu accounts for the most cases by far (237), followed by South Kivu, Tanganyika and Maniema.

According to findings by the United Nations Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), the precarious security situation in eastern Congo has deteriorated substantially in recent weeks. A provisional report on an investigation by the UNJHRO has confirmed that the rebel group Mouvement 23-Mars (M23) carried out a massacre on the local population in the Kishishe and Bambo regions of Rutshuru Territory/North Kivu between 28.11. and 30.11.22 (cf. BN of 06.12.22). At least 131 civilians were reportedly killed in the massacre, including 17 women and 12 children. According to Special Representative Keita, at least 22 women

and five girls were additionally raped, resulting in the death of the rape victim in one instance. M23 is said to be holding the five girls as sex slaves.

Promulgation of law to promote and protect indigenous Pygmy peoples

It has been reported in the media that president Félix Tshisekedi has promulgated law no. 22/03 of 15.07.22 to promote and protect the rights of indigenous Pygmy peoples (original French: Loi n°22/ 03/ du 15 juillet 2022 portant protection et promotion des Droits des peuples autochtones pygmées). The law reportedly guarantees indigenous peoples recognition of their fundamental rights and an entitlement to participate fully in society on an equal footing with all other segments of the population. It prohibits the discrimination to which these marginalised indigenous peoples are subjected throughout the country - also at institutional level - in general areas of life (including those areas falling under civil law) according to the findings of a current report by the NGO Human Rights Watch (cf. BN of 31.10.22). Further benefits for these peoples include a legal entitlement to free access to justice, healthcare and education (including further education), with immediate effect. The costs in each case are to be borne by the state. Certain forms of discrimination against indigenous peoples, e.g. in the area of employment, reportedly now constitute prosecutable offences and are punishable with imprisonment (the maximum possible term of which is unknown). The government is additionally said to be planning the establishment of a special fund for the protection of indigenous peoples.

UN: One quarter of population at threat of being reliant on humanitarian aid in 2023

According to the UN coordinator for humanitarian aid in DR Congo, Bruno Lemarquis, forecasts indicate that one in four Congolese citizens in the country will be in need of humanitarian aid in 2023. Millions of Congolese citizens, primarily in the eastern parts of the country, continue to be affected by food insecurity and malnutrition, as well as internal displacement and epidemics. Lemarquis states that the DR Congo already has the highest rate of malnourished people worldwide (cf. BN of 19.09.22). According to the Congolese press agency, UNICEF is also warning of a worsening of the humanitarian crisis in DR Congo as a result of the ongoing attacks by non-state armed actors and armed hostilities. Members of relief organisations working in eastern Congo warned on 08.12.22 of a possible further deterioration of the health situation due to a steep rise in cholera cases in the severely overcrowded informal camps for people who have been internally displaced by the conflicts in the country, particularly in Nyirangongo Territory (North Kivu) in the vicinity of the provincial capital, Goma. Doctors Without Borders reports that more than 177,000 internally displaced people have moved into the makeshift shelters in this territory in recent weeks. It is generally agreed that the situation for the internally displaced people is highly problematic. A number of deaths have come to light in recent weeks as a result of inadequate medical care and the poor living conditions (cf. BN 28.11.22).

Ethiopia

Hostilities in Oromia

More than 100 people were reportedly killed by an unknown armed group in Kiremu (East Wellega zone) on 28.11.22. Clashes also occurred between Amharic troops and Oromia special units in Kiremu on 29.11.22, apparently claiming eleven lives. Recent weeks have witnessed repeated break-outs of hostilities in Oromia, involving government forces, the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA-Shane; cf. BN of 15.11.22) and regional militias. The Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC) has reported human rights violations in this connection, including mass killings, displacements of people and the destruction and looting of property.

The Gambia

Shortcomings in the protection of children's rights, child labour

The coordinator of the Child Protection Alliance (CPA) in The Gambia, Lamin Fatty, has raised various points of criticism, including the failure to apply current laws intended to protect children. He has also noted that the government has no programmes or projects in place in the area of child protection. According to Fatty, most violations of children's rights are attributable to non-state actors. Staff at the law enforcement authorities often lack an awareness or even any knowledge of the prevailing legal situation. Rather than affording victims protection,

staff at the law enforcement authorities sometimes expose child victims to further harm. Fatty observes that child labour and domestic violence against children appear to be culturally accepted where punitive measures or work obligations are concerned. Dr. Isatou Touray, executive director of the NGO The Gambia Committee on Traditional Practices (GAMCOTRAP) has also stated that child labour is accepted in part due to an absence of any sense of wrongdoing. Girls aged between five and 12 are more commonly victims of child labour than boys in the same age group. Children are furthermore exposed to various forms of child-related and gender-based violence, including early marriage, child marriage and genital mutilation, all of which are widespread throughout the country.

Iran

Execution of two death sentences related to protests

According to reports in the media, two death sentences have been executed in connection with the demonstrations for the first time since the beginning of the protests in September 2022. A 23 year-old man was reportedly executed at Tehran's Evin prison on 08.12.22. He is said to have been in custody since 25.09.22, after having attacked and injured a member of the Basij militia, which is being deployed to fight the uprising, at a road blockade. He was duly charged with enmity towards god (Persian: moharebeh) and finally convicted on 20.11.22. An appeal was dismissed by the supreme court. The criminal offence of enmity towards god is punishable with death under the Iranian criminal code (Art. 279 of the Islamic penal code) and entails taking up weapons with the intention of taking people's lives, possessions or honour or spreading fear and unease. Human rights organisations point out that the convicted man did not receive a fair trial. State media report that another man was publicly executed in Mahhad (Razavi-Khorasan province) on 12.12.22. Prior to his execution, he was in custody for 23 days on charges of having killed two members of the Basij militia at protests in November. He too was accused of enmity towards god. A confession by the man, which was supposedly made under coercion, was reportedly published in state media. According to varying reports, between twelve and 24 other people face charges with possible death penalties in connection with the current protests. One of the individuals concerned is suspected of having murdered a member of the Basij militia in Karaj (cf. BN of 15.11.22).

Violent action against student protests

It has been reported in the media that security forces used force against participants in student protests on 07.12.22, including at Amirkabir University in Tehran. Protesters were reportedly injured and a number of arrests were made. Following on from protests and strikes (cf. BN of 05.12.22), students at a number of universities in the country, including Rasht (Gilan), Shiraz (Fars) and Isfahan (in the province of the same name) had gathered at rallies to demonstrate solidarity and to demand the release of fellow students who have been imprisoned during the protests.

Iraq

The struggle against IS

A suicide attacker who is thought to have belonged to IS killed two members of a militia in Babil province on 06.12.22. This attack took place ahead of a major counter-IS operation.

On 10.12.22 the Iraqi army announced that six IS members had been killed in a major counter-IS operation in Salah-Al-Din.

Haidar az-Zaidi convicted

20 year-old online activist Haidar az-Zaidi was sentenced to a three-year prison term on 05.12.22. His conviction stemmed from a tweet which was posted under his name and allegedly contained an insult aimed at the pro-Iranian militias (militia chief Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, who was killed in an attack by the USA on 03.01.20, was referred to in the tweet as a "spy" - an allusion to the pro-Iranian character of his militia, Kata'ib Hezbollah). Az-Zaidi continually denied having posted the tweet, claiming that his account had been hacked. Protests broke out on 07.12.22, above all in Nasiriyah in Dhi Qar province. At least two people were killed and 21 injured, including one member of the security forces. The protesters consider the verdict unjust, arguing that murders of activists or protesters are practically never solved. The province's governor declared a day of mourning for the killed

demonstrators on 09.12.22 and ordered a three-day period of public mourning at provincial level. In the political arena, the long prison term was also openly criticised by a number of MPs.

Fire at an IDP camp in Erbil

A fire occurred at a camp for internally displaced people (IDP camp) in Erbil on 11.12.22, killing at least one person. Large-scale fires are no rare occurrence at the remaining camps, owing to the poor conditions which commonly prevail there.

Dispute over land in Kirkuk

Two people were injured in disputes over land in the Daquq district of Kirkuk province on 09.12.22. The disputes stemmed from Arab farmers ploughing land to which Kurdish farmers lay claim. The Arab farmers belong to a group of farmers who were settled in the region with the intention of Arabizing the area under Saddam Hussein's settlement policy. As a result of such settlements the property situation in the region is often confused, and this regularly escalates into violence between different families.

Kosovo

Attacks and unrest ahead of local government elections

Tensions have risen in the four Serb-dominated municipalities in the north of the country in connection with the early local government elections which were originally planned for 18.12.22. International media have reported attacks on the local police, shootings and explosions at various locations. According to official information released on 09.12.22, a police officer suffered minor injuries and a police car was damaged when unknown men opened fire from a vehicle in the municipality of Zvečan/Zvečan. The injured policeman was taken to hospital and the police are investigating the case. A number of days prior to this incident, Kosovo Serbs attacked electoral commission officials and police officers in Mitrovica and in Zubin Potok. Unknown persons have damaged offices of the local electoral commissions with explosive devices. Demonstrators have set up road blocks in Zvečan/Zvečan and Leposavić/Leposaviq. The police presence has been stepped up in the region, in addition to which the situation is being monitored by patrols of the EU's Rule of Law Mission (Eulex). The fresh elections have become necessary because representatives of the Serb minority resigned from office in connection with the row over the validity of Serb number plates in Kosovo (cf. BN of 15.11.22). Kosovo's president, Vjosa Osmani, has announced that the elections are to be deferred until April 2023 on account of the growing tensions.

Lebanon

Fighting in Ashrafiyya

Disturbances occurred in the Beirut district of Ashrafiyya following the World Cup football match between Morocco and Portugal on 10.12.22. Dozens of men waving Moroccan, Syrian and Palestinian flags rode on motorcycles to Sassine Square and began chanting Islamist slogans in front of the Christmas tree which is set up there (the district is Christian-dominated). Violent clashes with local residents ensued. The army quickly intervened and separated the different groups. The incident was sharply criticised by all relevant political groups on the following day.

Liberia

Government praised for anti-FGM measures

According to reports in the media at the end of November 2022, the UN Women Goodwill Ambassador for Africa, Jaha Dukureh, praised the Liberian government for its three-year ban on female genital mutilation (FGM) while on a visit to the country. The moratorium announced by the National Council of Chiefs and Elders of Liberia together with the government in February 2022 provides for a ban on the practice of FGM in Liberia from 2022 until 2025. Supporters of the moratorium are seeking a permanent ban on FGM. Reports in the media identify Liberia as one of the few countries in West Africa in which there is no law which expressly makes FGM a punishable offence –

although the country has signed and ratified international conventions, including the Maputo Protocol, which condemn FGM as a violation of human rights. On her visit, Dukureh expressly stressed the role to be played by the media and traditional leaders in helping to secure a de facto end to the still enduring practice of FGM.

Mali

Operation by army and Wagner group

The army is reported to have killed a number of people in an operation carried out together with the Russian Wagner mercenary group at a weekly market in the village of Kita in Dioura commune (near to the border with Mauritania) on 06.12.22. There are reports of between two and five civilians having been killed and a number of people injured. The soldiers and mercenaries are also said to have stolen money from various stands. The Support Group for Islam and Muslims (JNIM), which has close links to Al Qaeda, is reported to be active in the region.

Morocco

Demonstrations against high food prices and political repression

Between 1,200 and 3,000 people demonstrated against high food prices, corruption and repression by the state in the capital, Rabat, on 04.12.22. The demonstration was organised by left-wing trade unions and political parties. The previous weeks had also witnessed a number of demonstrations against rising prices. The government has undertaken measures in response and introduced medical care for all citizens. 10 million Moroccans had previously benefited from the medical care programme. In October the government launched a fund with a volume of EUR 4.1 billion to support private investment and the national economy.

Nigeria

Borno State: Military offensive against Islamists

It has been reported in the media that the Nigerian military launched an offensive against Islamist groups in the north-east of the country at the beginning of December as part of Operation Hadin Kai (cf. BN of 08.08.22 and 05.09.22). A substantial number of people belonging to Islamist groups have reportedly been killed in the attacks carried out by Nigerian troops with air support. This offensive comes in the wake of attacks by Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) on military bases in the town of Malam Fatori (Borno State) in which at least 29 members of the army were killed at the end of November 2022. According to reports in the media, the need for further joint military operations against Islamists in the Lake Chad region was recently affirmed at a summit in the capital, Abuja, which was attended by the presidents of Nigeria, Benin, Chad, Niger, the Central African Republic and representatives from Cameroon and Libya. The government of Borno State announced on 30.11.22 that it believed the overwhelming majority of Boko Haram's staunchest members are no longer alive.

Railway line reopened after kidnapping incident

It has been reported in the media that the railway line between Abuja and Kaduna, two major cities in the north of Nigeria, went back into operation on 05.12.22, some eight months after a very serious kidnapping incident. On 28.03.22, heavily armed attackers held up a train carrying hundreds of passengers (cf. BN of 04.04.22). At least nine people were killed and dozens were kidnapped. According to reports in the media citing information from a male hostage who has since been released, the kidnap victims were held in severe conditions and abused. In some cases, their families are said to have paid very large ransoms to secure their release. The kidnappers' identities remain unknown. Information provided by the same freed hostage indicate that they may have close links to Islamists. It has already been speculated in the past that activities by criminal groups in the north of Nigeria may involve cooperation with jihadists (cf. BN of 21.12.20 and 29.11.21). At the reopening of the railway line, Lucky Irabor, head of the defence staff, stressed that a video surveillance system had been installed.

Violence linked to upcoming elections

Nigeria is witnessing violence ahead of the general elections which are to take place on 25.02.2023. The violence is directed at politicians as well as establishments of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), for example. It has been reported in the media that INEC offices were attacked in Imo State in southern Nigeria at the beginning of December 2022, for example. A local politician was killed in Kaduna State on 28.11.22, and on 16.11.22 armed individuals attacked the convoy of a candidate running for the governor's office in Kwara State, injuring a number of people.

In the elections, the country's president and vice-president and members of both chambers of parliament are to be elected. Atiku Abubakar of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) and Bola Ahmed Adekunle Tinubu of the All Progressives Congress (APC) are considered to be the candidates with the best prospects of success in the presidential election (cf. BN of 30.05.22 and 20.06.22). Violence also marked the elections of 2015 and 2019. At the end of October 2022, the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) teamed up with the Organisation Center for Democracy & Development (CDD) to launch the online platform Nigeria Election Violence Tracker. This platform is monitoring both violence directly linked to the election and the effects of the election campaigning on the current security crises throughout the country.

Pakistan

Attacks and hostilities in North Waziristan

According to official information, five fighters of Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and one soldier were killed in a military operation in North Waziristan on 05.12.22. The TTP has reported one soldier killed in the military operation, without stating whether it suffered any casualties itself.

The military stated on 06.12.22 that two other security incidents had also occurred in North Waziristan, without disclosing the precise dates. Armed fighters killed a soldier of the Frontier Corps and his father in Bannu district after forcing their way into his home. In the other incident, attackers killed a tribal elder near Heidar Khel.

Hostilities at Chaman-Spin Boldak border crossing point

At least six civilians were killed and more than a dozen people were injured on 10.12.22 at the Chaman border crossing point in Balochistan, which links Pakistan with Spin Boldak in the Afghan province of Kandahar. The Pakistani military is blaming the escalation on indiscriminate shooting at civilians by the Afghan Taliban. In Afghanistan, a spokesman for the governor of Kandahar linked the hostilities to the construction of new checkpoints on the Afghan side of the border. One Afghan soldier was killed, according to information from the Kandahar police spokesman. In addition, ten people were injured, including three civilians.

Palestinian territories / Israel

West Bank: Numerous deaths in violent clashes with the Israeli military

According to reports in the media on 29.11.22, five Palestinians were killed and one Israeli soldier was seriously injured in the space of 24 hours in violent escalations against the backdrop of Israeli military operations. According to information from the military, a Palestinian was killed in the village of Al-Mughayyir when he threw incendiaries at members of the military. The soldiers were reportedly delivering demolition orders for buildings which had been built without permits.

Another Palestinian was killed by the Israeli military after running over an Israeli soldier in his car. According to the military, this was a deliberate attack on the soldier.

A Palestinian was killed when two Israeli military vehicles were forced to stop near Hebron for technical reasons. According to the military, Palestinians began throwing stones and incendiaries at them and attacking them with firearms, which prompted the military to open fire. In addition, eight people were injured. Two brothers were killed in violent clashes with the military near the village of Kafr Ein. The military has stated that it opened fire when Palestinians threw stones and incendiaries at them.

A Palestinian was killed on 30.11.22 when members of the Israeli military came under fire from armed individuals while carrying out an arrest mission in the village of Yabad, near Jenin.

On 01.12.22 the Israeli military killed two Palestinians at Jenin refugee camp. Members of the military were carrying out an arrest raid at the camp when they were attacked by armed individuals. The Islamic Jihad in Palestine group has released a statement claiming that the two killed men were two of its members.

On 02.12.22 a member of the paramilitary Israeli border police killed a Palestinian in the town of Huwara, to the south of Nablus. The attacker had attempted to injure an Israeli couple. The incident, which was captured on film, sparked criticism of the border police's actions.

On 05.12.22 the Israeli military shot dead a Palestinian and injured six Palestinians when a violent clash occurred during an arrest raid carried out by the military at Dheisheh refugee camp, near Bethlehem. The military has stated that it opened fire on protesters when they threw stones and incendiaries at the soldiers.

On 07.12.22 the Israeli military shot dead an armed Palestinian who opened fire on a military post near to the settlement of Ofra in the West Bank. The attacker was a member of the militant al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades. According to his family, he feared being arrested again after having spent ten years in Israeli prisons and preferred death to the prospect of going to prison again.

According to information from the military, a Palestinian was shot dead on 08.12.22 as he was throwing stones and paint tins at Israeli cars on roads in the West Bank.

Three Palestinians died on the same day in violent escalations sparked by an arrest raid by the military at Jenin refugee camp. According to local residents, two of those killed were known militia members, while one civilian was allegedly also killed when the shooting began.

A Palestinian minor died from a shot to the head in the late evening of 11.12.22. The Israeli military had carried out an arrest raid on the evening concerned and arrested three people, sparking armed clashes at the refugee camp. The 16 year-old girl was later found dead on the roof of her house. The military has announced that an investigation will be carried out.

Gaza Strip: Rockets from the Gaza Strip, air strikes on Hamas targets

Rockets were fired towards Israel from the Gaza Strip on 04.12.22. No armed group has claimed responsibility. The rockets were preceded by announcements that reprisals would be forthcoming from the group "Palestinian Islamic Jihad" (PIJ). Two high-ranking PIJ members had been killed a number of days previously in military operations in the West Bank. Israeli fighter aircraft shelled targets in the Gaza Strip only hours after the first rockets were fired. According to information from the military, the targets were an arms factory, an underground tunnel and a Hamas military post.

Peru

Political crisis: President Castillo impeached; people killed and injured in violent demonstrations

Against the backdrop of ongoing political clashes between the conservative-dominated parliament and the left-leaning government under president Castillo, in anticipation of a no-confidence vote the latter announced on 07.12.22 that he would dissolve parliament, install an emergency government and rule by decree in the interim period up to fresh elections. He justified this step on the grounds that congress had destroyed the constitutional state, democracy and the balance between the state authorities. Several members of the cabinet duly resigned; pro-government figures, the opposition and the armed forces all condemned Castillo's announcement as an attempted coup and a "breach of constitutional order". Parliament voted in a session on the very same day in favour of removing Castillo from office on grounds of "moral ineptitude" and he was arrested shortly afterwards for rebellion and conspiracy. Vice-president Dina Boluarte took over directly on 07.12.22 as the country's first female head of state and the sixth person to hold this office in the past five years, and a new cabinet was sworn in on 10.12.22.

Former president Castillo had already been the subject of investigation proceedings previously in connection with various issues, including corruption. Two previous impeachment proceedings were decided in his favour. The first hearing relating to the charges against Castillo on grounds of rebellion took place on 08.12.22; the supreme court subsequently ordered that Castillo be held in custody for a provisional period of seven days to cover the duration of further investigations. According to various consistent reports in the media and information from Mexico's president López Obrador, Castillo was planning to request Mexico for asylum on grounds of political persecution. In the wake of these developments, protests and unrest ensued in numerous towns and cities, including Cajamarca, Arequipa, Andahuaylas, Tacna, Cusco and Puno. According to information from the national ombudswoman, two

civilians, including a 15 year-old boy, were killed in violent clashes between supporters of former president Castillo and security forces in the city of Andahuaylas at the weekend. At least 26 people were injured, including members of the security forces. People were taken hostage at the nearby airport, part of which was set on fire. Numerous highways were blocked in other parts of the country. The protesters' demands included fresh elections and the president's release. The new president, Boluarte, had originally intended to remain in office until the scheduled end of the tenure in 2026. Partly on account of the protests, she has now announced that she will present a bill to parliament providing for early elections in April 2024.

Republic of the Congo

Arrest and detention of an opposition party leader

On 07.12.22 Radio France Internationale (RFI) reported that Destin Gavet, leader of the Mouvement républicain (MR), which was only officially accredited as an opposition party in March 2022, had been arrested in Pointe-Noire on 01.12.22. According to RFI, Gavet has since been held in incommunicado detention by the national intelligence service, Centrale d'intelligence et de la documentation (CID). No official information on the grounds for his arrest and detention have been forthcoming to date. A police source contacted by RFI declined to comment on the case. NGO's have speculated that the events may be linked to the MR party's initiation of a petition for the release of political prisoners on 19.11.2022. The petition calls in particular for the release of former opposition presidential candidates André Okombi Salissa and Jean-Marie Michel Mokoko, both of whom were convicted in 2018 of endangering the states internal security and sentenced to 20 years in prison (cf. BN of 11.10.21).

Russian Federation

Opposition politician receives long prison term for criticism of the war in Ukraine

On 09.12.22 a district court in Moscow sentenced Ilya Yashin, one of the last remaining prominent opposition politicians in Russia who had not yet been imprisoned, to a prison term of eight and a half years for publicly and knowingly disseminating false information about the deployment of Russia's armed forces (Art. 207.3 of the Russian criminal code). His conviction stems from a video published on the YouTube platform in April 2022 in which Yashin publicly denounced war crimes committed by Russian soldiers in the Ukrainian city of Bucha. According to international observers, the verdict represents the most severe sentence ever handed down on the basis of Art. 207.3 (cf. BN of 07.03.22).

Research by independent Russian news portal Verstka reveals that at least 122 trials are currently pending on charges of spreading false information about the army - an offence which was introduced at the beginning of the war. Fines or prison sentences of up to seven years have reportedly been handed down in 15 cases to date.

Somalia

Attack on NISA officers

Abdirahman Abdullahi Adan Bakaal, a high-ranking intelligence officer of the National Intelligence and Security Agency (NISA) was killed by a bomb attached to his car in the Gedo region near to the Kenyan border on 08.12.22. Six other NISA officers were also killed in the attack. Al-Shabaab has claimed responsibility.

South Sudan

Fighting continues in Upper Nile State

Reports in the media indicate a continuation of the fighting in Upper Nile State. More than 4,000 people have been killed and at least 20,000 people have been displaced by the continually escalating conflict since August 2022. According to information from the UNHCR, at least 3,000 people have left South Sudan and are headed in the direction of Sudan. Flight in the direction of Sudan has increased due to the overcrowding of the regional UN camp

set up to protect the civilian population in Malakal, which is full to three times its planned capacity. People who are unable to find a place at this camp thus commonly head for nearby Sudan.

According to information from UNOCHA, around 9,000 people have been displaced as a result of the latest fighting in the Fashoda region. Other reports indicate that several thousand of these displaced people are in the south of the town of Kodok (formerly Fashoda) and are hiding from the fighting in marshland. As a result of the precarious security situation, the region is reportedly inaccessible for deliveries of humanitarian aid at present, in addition to which many areas remain difficult to access on account of flooding. According to eye-witness reports, there are no security forces in place outside of the town of Kodok.

The fighting initially broke out in a village on the upper Nile in Upper Nile State, before spreading to other parts of the state and to the northern regions of neighbouring Jonglei State and Unity State. The continuing conflicts stem from rivalries between different ethnic groups (cf. BN of 29.08.22 and 21.11.22).

Sudan

Framework agreement on handover of power; demonstrations

Following the signing of the framework agreement for the handover of power to a civilian-led interim government by representatives of the military and parts of the Forces For Freedom and Change (FFC) on 05.12.22 (cf. BN of 06.12.22), the current ruler, General al-Burhan, publicly announced on 06.12.22 that the military would only hand over power when the involved civilian parties had resolved outstanding issues and drawn up a joint draft constitution for a future interim government.

According to reports in the media, the framework agreement has met with a very mixed response in Sudanese society. Important political actors, such as the Baath party, the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM), the Communist Party and a number of resistance committees, continue to strictly reject the framework agreement, claiming that it serves solely to keep some members of the FFC in power and that it was concluded under pressure from the international community. The divisions within the FFC over the framework agreement are becoming ever more evident, as splinter groups such as the FFC-DB (Democratic Block) maintain a clear stance against the signing of the agreement.

Demonstrations against the signing of the framework agreement took place in the capital directly on 05.12.22. The Central Committee of Sudanese Doctors reported on 06.12.22 that 43 people had been injured. A number of resistance committees called for demonstrations in response to the signing of the framework agreement. Security forces countered the demonstrations by deploying tear gas on a large scale. Only a few days later, further demonstrations took place in Khartoum and Omdurman on 08.12.22. The security forces set up road blocks in an attempt to prevent the demonstrators from reaching the presidential palace. Tear gas and flash grenades were apparently also used. In all, 54 people are reported to have been injured, four of whom were deliberately hit by police vehicles.

Syria

Fuel shortages: Authorities to remain closed for two days in December

Syrian state media reported on 06.12.22 that the government authorities are to suspend their services on 11.12. and 18.12.22, on account of the acute shortage of fuel in the country. Many employees have recently no longer been able to reach their workplaces.

The ministry of domestic trade raised fuel prices by almost 100 % on 05.12.22, to SYP 5,400 (US\$ 0.93) for a litre of diesel and SYP 4,900 (US\$ 0.84) for a litre of petrol. The prices of subsidised fuel are to remain unaffected by these rises, however. The arrangement whereby the state covers the cost of 25 litres of fuel per vehicle every ten days also remains in force. It has recently been common for only 20 litres to be dispensed, however.

The government blames the current crisis on Western sanctions and supply bottlenecks involving delays of up to 50 days.

A pro-government newspaper has reported that Iran resolved in November to support Syria with three million barrels of oil a month in future. It had previously been supplying two million barrels a month.

Aleppo: Protest after fatal accident involving Turkish military

According to local reports, a woman and a child were run over by a Turkish military vehicle in Atarib, a town to the west of the governorate capital, Aleppo, on 05.12.22. Their instant deaths sparked spontaneous protests among the local population. According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR), local militias helped bring the Turkish soldiers who were involved in the accident to safety.

The population in the region has frequently complained about reckless driving by convoys of the Turkish occupying forces. The SOHR recently documented a similar incident in which a girl is reported to have been killed by a Turkish convoy near to the city of Ras al-Ayn at the beginning of November.

Türkiye

Sentencing in trial relating to attempted coup

On 08.12.22 a court in Istanbul sentenced 42 defendants to prison terms and acquitted 23 in a trial relating to the attempted coup of 2016. The defendants were former military officers who were accused of having supported putschists. The court found that 73 other defendants had no case to answer. Five defendants were banned from leaving the country.

38 defendants were handed down prison terms of between twelve and 15 years for “complicity in attempting to overthrow the constitutional order”. Two defendants were convicted of “membership of a terrorist organisation”.

Ukraine

Searches within the Ukrainian Orthodox Church

Ukraine’s national intelligence service, SBU, stepped up searches within the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Ukrainian: Ukraïns'ka pravoslavna cerkva; UPC) last week. The searches targeted church institutions in the oblasts of Kyiv, Kherson, Cherkasy, Zhytomyr, Volyn and Kharkiv. According to official information, evidence seized in the searches indicated sympathy for and collaboration with Russian state structures and the Russian forces by UPC dignitaries. In some instances, criminal proceedings have been instituted against clerics on charges of treason. The UPC is coming under increasing pressure in Ukraine. On 02.12.22 Ukraine’s president Volodymyr Zelenskyy signed a decree which brought into force a resolution by the national security and defence council specifically prohibiting the activities of religious organisations with links to Russia. In addition, a bill on the prohibition of the Russian Orthodox Church and all institutions and religious organisations which belong to or recognise subordination to the latter or has been introduced in the Ukrainian parliament. There are two orthodox churches in Ukraine. The Orthodox Church of Ukraine (Ukrainian: Pravoslavna cerkva Ukraïni; not to be confused with the UPC) was recognised as an independent church by the Patriarchate of Constantinople in 2018 and subsequently also by three of the 14 generally recognised orthodox churches. The UPC is recognised as canonical by ten churches, but as part of the Russian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate. In May, the UPC declared its complete “autonomy and independence” of the Moscow Patriarchate and condemned Russia’s military actions in Ukraine, but without becoming autocephalous under canon law.

The course of hostilities

According to official information, the Russian army stepped up the pressure along the contact line last week, in particular at the front in Donetsk. Russian troops have carried out repeated attacks near Kupiansk in Kharkiv oblast in recent days. Fighting also continues near Bakhmut (Donetsk oblast). The oblast and the city of Kherson are being subjected to Russian shelling on a daily basis. According to information from the Ukrainian president, the recent heavy rocket bombardments have destroyed around 50 % of Ukraine’s energy infrastructure.

Yemen

UNICEF report: At least 11,000 child victims of the war

According to a UNICEF report presented on 12.12.22, at least 11,000 children have been killed, maimed or seriously injured in connection with the war in Yemen to date. The report stresses that this represents a conservative, verified

number and that the real numbers are probably much higher. 22 million children are said to be malnourished, and since 2015 at least 4,000 cases of boys being recruited as child soldiers have become known. UNICEF's Executive Director, Catherine Russel, appealed to the warring parties to agree to a new ceasefire.

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