

Group 62 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

Briefing Notes

28 January 2019

Egypt

TV presenter jailed for interviewing a gay man

According to reports in the Egyptian media, a TV presenter was sentenced to a year in prison on 20 January 2019 for interviewing a gay man on his chat show a year ago. The court accused the journalist of encouraging immorality and contempt of religion.

Afghanistan

Attack against intelligence base

On 21 January 2019, four Taliban insurgents attacked a training centre for Afghan intelligence staff in the province of Wardak (central Afghanistan). First a suicide bomber blew himself up in front of the base, then three Taliban fighters stormed the building. According to official figures, 36 members of the security forces were killed and about 60 were wounded in the fighting. Other sources speak of significantly more casualties.

Suicide bombings and attacks

Fighting and suicide bombings were also reported in the following provinces: Wardak, Logar, Kapisa (central Afghanistan), Baghlan (northern Afghanistan), Faryab (northern Afghanistan), Paktia (south-eastern Afghanistan), Helmand, Uruzgan, Kandahar (southern Afghanistan), Nangarhar, Laghman, Khost, Kunar (eastern Afghanistan), Herat (western Afghanistan), Balkh, Samangan and Jawzjan (northern Afghanistan).

The Afghan non-governmental organisation Civilian Protection Advocacy Group (CPAG) has reported that 2,615 civilians were killed and 4,072 were injured last year, the vast majority of them in the provinces of Kabul, Nangarhar, Helmand, Ghazni and Paktia. However, there is no information available on how CPAG gathered this data.

The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) is expected to publish its report on civilian casualties in February.

Peace talks launched between the US and the Taliban

According to press reports, US and Taliban negotiators have made progress in their talks held in Qatar. If an agreement were reached, the US would present a timetable for the withdrawal of its troops. In return, the Taliban would undertake not to allow terrorist groups such as Al-Qaeda or ISIS to operate from Afghanistan. Representatives of the Afghan government were not involved in the talks. Therefore, no agreement was reached on the release of prisoners or on a ceasefire. Further talks are due to take place at the end of February.

Afghanistan/Pakistan

General-Consulate closed in Mazar-e Sharif/Afghanistan

Pakistan closed its Consulate General in Afghanistan's Mazar-e-Sharif in Balkh province (northern Afghanistan) after a woman tried to enter building carrying hand grenade on 28 January 2019.

Angola

Same sex relations decriminalised

A new penal law passed by Parliament on 23 January 2019 no longer characterises same-sex relationships as "vices against nature". The provision had previously been understood as a prohibition on same-sex relationships. The new penal code replaces the law in force since Angola gained its independence from Portugal in 1975. It also includes a ban on discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation, which is punishable by up to two years imprisonment. It is not known if homosexuals were prosecuted under the old law. Iris Angola, the only non-governmental organisation working for the rights of homosexuals, was legally recognised in 2018.

China

Prison sentence for human rights lawyer

On 28 January 2019, a court in the north-eastern Chinese city of Tianjin sentenced human rights lawyer Wang Quanzhang to four and a half years in prison for subversion of state power. Wang had represented people affected by land seizures as well as activists. He was arrested during police actions in July 2015 against Fengrui lawyers, their staff and activists (also known as "709-Crackdown"). Wang's pre-trial detention will contribute to his sentence, meaning he could potentially be released earlier.

Democratic Republic of the Congo

President sworn in

On 24 January 2019, Felix Tshisekedi was sworn in as the new President in Kinshasa. This was the first peaceful transfer of power since the country gained independence in 1960. In his inaugural speech, he declared that he would soon release all political prisoners. However, it is questionable how much power Tshisekedi actually has. The party alliance Common Front for Congo led by former President Joseph Kabila has 337 of 500 seats in the National Assembly (Parliament) elected on 30 December 2018. By contrast, the alliance "Cape for Change", which supports Tshisekedi, only won 46 seats. Many observers also believe that Tshisekedi won the election through vote rigging and with protection of the Kabila regime. Contrary to the official figures announced by the Election Commission, according to the election result determined by the Episcopal Conference of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (CENCO) with the help of a network of 40,000 election observers, the presidential candidate Martin Fayulu won the election with around 60 percent of the votes.

FYR Macedonia

FYR Macedonia to be renamed Republic of North Macedonia

On 25 January 2019, the Greek parliament voted by a narrow majority to rename the country "Republic of North Macedonia" (Severna Makedonija). Nationalists in both countries had protested against this agreement until the bitter end.

Macedonia must now amend its constitution accordingly in the coming weeks and then inform all international organisations and countries of the new name. Citizenship and the official language will remain