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Briefing Notes

Group 62 - Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

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Afghanistan

Attacks on civilians / internally displaced persons

On 30.07.21, five civilians were killed and twelve others wounded in Zabul province when a mortar shell hit. On 29.07.21, the Afghan State Ministry of Peace Affairs reported that 5,600 civilians had been killed or injured in the fighting in the last four months. On 27.07.21, it was reported that 100,000 people had been displaced in Kandahar province due to fighting between Afghan security forces and the Taliban. Civilian residential areas were being used as shelters by both sides and every day civilians were being killed in the fighting, reports said. On 27.07.21, the Afghan Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation reported that more than 14,000 families had been displaced due to the fighting in the last 15 days alone, and more than 72,000 families in the whole month. Most of them came from the provinces of Kunduz, Baghlan, Takhar, Jawzjan, Helmand, Laghman, Paktia and Ghazni. On 26.07.21, two women and a child were reported killed by artillery fire in Maimana town (Faryab province).

Combat operations / provincial capitals

According to the Long War Journal (LWJ), as of 02.08.21, the Taliban controlled 223 districts, the government 68 districts and 116 were contested. On 01.08.21, President Ashraf Ghani announced a tougher approach against the Taliban for the next six months, saying that they would only be willing to talk if they were weakened on the battlefield. 24,000 Taliban have been killed by the army in the last four months and foreigners are increasingly fighting along with the Taliban. Their number is estimated at around 10,000. On the same day, the Taliban captured districts of the provincial capital Lashkargah in Helmand province and fighting intensified around the provincial capital Herat in the province of the same name. In Herat, one staff member was killed and others injured in an attack by insurgents on an office of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) on 30.07.21. Two days earlier, UNAMA Chairperson Deborah Lyons had said that the Taliban would isolate themselves internationally if they were unable to provide security for civilians in the areas under their control. According to a report on 27.07.21, the provincial capital of Kandahar has been fiercely contested by the government and the Taliban for three weeks. On 23.07.21, it was reported that the Taliban had set up a spy network in Kandahar and abducted 300 civilians, accusing them of collaborating with the government. On 25.07.21, the US government declared that it had increased its air support for the Afghan army in the fight for Kandahar, and that a loss of the city must be avoided at all costs. Reports on 26.07.21 said that many soldiers of the Afghan army had fled from the advancing Taliban to Pakistan, Tajikistan and Iran, among other places.

Humanitarian situation / refugees

According to reports, 113 people were killed and 70 injured in a flash flood in Nuristan province on 31.07.21, with many still missing. 173 buildings were destroyed. On 26.07.21 it was reported that 10,000 Afghans were being smuggled daily from Zaranj, the border town with Iran, via illegal border crossings south of it through the town of Dak, first to Pakistan and from there to Iran. The majority of them would stay in Iran, the rest would go to Turkey and a few would travel on to Europe, it was said.

Albania

Assault on media workers

According to media reports on 27.07.21, when the television reporters Ergys Gjençaj and Klodiana Lala in Tirana wanted to report on an arrest in connection with drug-related crime, they were assaulted by police. One of the police officers seized Gjençaj's smartphone as he was capturing a video of the scene and then forced him to lie on the ground for minutes while he was being searched. When Klodiana Lala protested against this, another officer pushed her aside. The logo of the TV station News 24 on their vehicle clearly identified Gjençaj and Lala as reporters. The police apologised for the officers' actions, but they will not face any consequences under disciplinary law.

Bangladesh

Landslides and flooding in refugee camps

According to the UNHCR, on 27.07.21, six Rohingya refugees were killed in floods and landslides in refugee camps in the Cox's Bazar region caused by persistent monsoon rains. Numerous shelters were damaged or destroyed, more than 20,000 people in the camps are affected.

Burkina Faso

Rising number of internally displaced persons

According to UNHCR information, the increasing number of violent attacks on civilians and security forces is forcing more and more people to flee, both within the country and to neighbouring countries. According to the latest government figures, more than 1.3 million people are believed to have been internally displaced in the last two years, 60% of them children. Six percent of the population are now internally displaced. 237,000 people are reported to have become internally displaced in the first half of 2021. This is a significant increase against the 96,000 people in the second half of 2020.

Cameroon

Boko Haram attacks in Far North region: soldiers and civilians killed

According to Cameroon's Ministry of Defence, five Cameroonian soldiers and one civilian were killed when Boko Haram fighters attacked a military post near Zigue (Far North region), close to the border with Nigeria, on the night of 26.07.21. Four soldiers and one civilian were also reportedly injured.

On the morning of 24.07.21, Boko Haram fighters staged another attack in Sagme (Far North region) near the Nigerian border. According to various sources, up to eight soldiers were killed and up to 13 injured. According to the Cameroonian military, about 90 heavily armed Boko Haram fighters, coming from Nigeria, attacked the village of Sagme, causing hundreds of civilians to flee.

Central African Republic

Civilians again victims of attacks

After the death of at least 13 people (cf. BN of 26.07.21), presumably killed on 21.07.21, the perpetrators remain unknown. Various institutions announced the setting up of independent investigation commissions.

On 26.07.21, a Central African soldier was killed and several civilians injured in the capital of Haut-Mbomou prefecture, Obo (far east of the country), according to a media report. A blue helmet soldier from the UN peacekeeping mission MINUSCA was also injured. MINUSCA itself stated that it was a coordinated attack on the town, presumably by the rebel group Unité pour la paix en Centrafrique (UPC). According to the media report, other sources said that Moroccan Blue Helmets and Central African soldiers had clashed.

Two other attacks with civilian casualties, both near the border triangle with Cameroon and Chad, are attributed to the group Retour, Réclamation et Réhabilitation (3R). According to a report of 30.07.21, a father was killed and his

son injured in an attack by 3R in the village of Zoro (probably Nzoro). Furthermore, 3R captured traders in the nearby village of Letete. It is believed that these attacks became possible because the army withdrew from the region about a month ago due to logistics problems. According to another report, at least six civilians were killed in an attack by 3R on Mann village on 31.07.21. 3R is said to be a group dominated by members of the Peul ethnic group.

Chad

Protests against the military junta

Several hundred people responded to the call of the opposition party Les Transformateurs and civil society organisations to demonstrate peacefully against the Transitional Military Council (CMT) and for a return to democracy in the capital N'Djamena on 29.07.21.

After long-term president Idriss Déby died in April 2021 during a visit to the front in the north of the country, the CMT appointed a transitional government headed by Déby's son; this government is expected to lead the country until new elections are held in mid-2022 (cf. BN of 26.04.21 and 03.05.21).

China

Government-critical agricultural entrepreneur sentenced to 18 years in prison

On 29.07.21, a court in Gaobeidian (Hebei province) sentenced 67-year-old agricultural entrepreneur and billionaire Sun Dawu to 18 years imprisonment for, among other things, assembling a crowd to attack state organs, obstructing administration and sedition. Four members of Sun's family were sentenced to prison terms ranging from 18 months to 12 years. Sun's company, which employs over 9,000 people, had been involved in a land dispute with a state competitor. Sun himself was a member of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and an influential local politician. At the same time, he had advocated human rights activism and repeatedly criticised the government's agricultural and pandemic policies.

Hong Kong: First sentence handed down under National Security Act

On 30.07.21, democracy activist Tong Ying-kit was sentenced to nine years in prison for terrorism and separatism. Tong had broken through a barrier with his motorbike and injured three police officers on 01.07.20. The motorbike was carrying a flag with the words "Free Hong Kong - Revolution of Our Time". Tong's conviction was the first under the National Security Act which came into force on 01.07.20.

Colombia

Former FARC dissidents confess to attacks

Ten people have been arrested in Colombia, accused of participating in attacks on a helicopter carrying President Iván Duque (cf. BN of 28.06.21) and on the military base in the capital of Norte de Santander province (cf. BN of 21.06.21) in June 2021. According to Attorney General Francisco Barbosa, the accused are former rebels of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and members of the 33rd Front. The Magdalena Medio Bloc, a splinter group of the former FARC, then claimed responsibility for the attacks in a video. The Colombian government announced that it would send a total of 14,000 soldiers to the border region with Venezuela in Norte de Santander. The ELN guerrilla group and FARC dissidents as well as numerous drug gangs are active in the border region. According to Defence Minister Diego Molano, former FARC leaders operating from Venezuela had ordered the attacks. President Duque asked the US to put Venezuela on the list of countries that sponsor terrorism, as the neighbouring country harbours several members of the 33rd Front. The Colombian government has long accused Venezuela of ignoring the presence of Colombian rebels on its territory. President Maduro, in turn, countered that Venezuela was a victim of criminals from Colombia.

DR Congo

Convictions for gender-based violence

According to a report by the UN radio station Okapi on 28.07.21, the Supreme Court of Kavumu sentenced a total of 18 persons to prison terms of between two and 14 years and to payment of damages of an unknown amount for unspecified sexual and gender-based violence offences in a judgement of 02.07.21. According to various NGOs, sexualized and gender-based violence has increased in the country in recent years. These acts of violence are committed by both state and non-state actors and are not limited to the eastern crisis provinces and females. The extent of this violence is repeatedly criticised by national and international actors. According to the report "Double peine" by Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) published on 15.07.21, both medical care and support for victims of sexual violence are inadequate. This concerns, among other things, counselling, protection and rehabilitation as well as legal aid services. In 2020, MSF, in cooperation with the Congolese Ministry of Health, treated around 11,000 victims of sexual violence in six of the country's 26 provinces.

Eastern provinces of North Kivu, Ituri: activities of ADF militia persist

It is said that civil society forces and the vice-president of the provincial assembly of North Kivu had expressed concern that the Islamic rebel group Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) was able to continue its operations despite the state of siege in force in the eastern provinces of Ituri and North Kivu since the beginning of May 2021 and the start of military operations against them. According to reports by several media outlets, Congolese forces managed to free more than 150 hostages from ADF captivity after a military operation lasting several days in Irumu territory (Ituri), specifically the chiefdoms Boga and Tshabi, on 25.07.21. Military sources stated that the ADF are using the hostages as human shields. Several soldiers and militia members lost their lives in the fighting. On 26.07.21, at least seven soldiers were killed in an ADF ambush in the same chiefdoms and 15 ADF rebels were killed in the ensuing firefight, the source said. After the military had pushed back ADF fighters from the village of Luna-Samboko (Irumu territory), located in the border area with the neighbouring province of North Kivu, into the bush a few weeks ago, they attacked the village once again on 24.07.21. At least five people were killed. According to press reports, the ADF is currently active in many villages in the Walese Vonkutu chiefdom (Itrumi Territory), where it is terrorising the population. According to the UN Stabilisation Mission in the DRC (MUNUSCO), various local armed groups operating in Ituri territory joined the ADF militia last year.

An attack by the ADF in Beni Territory (North Kivu), in the Mbau sector, led to the death of more than 16 civilians and a dozen injured persons on 22.07.21. As recently as 19.07.21, several residents were killed in a militia attack, attributed to the ADF in the region. From 26.07.21 to 30.07.21 alone, ADF attacks had caused many casualties among the military, but mostly among civilians in the Rwenzori sector of Beni Territory, MUNUSCO said. In addition, several civilians were abducted by the ADF.

Ituri: Several CODECO militiamen convicted; military operation

According to the UN radio station Okapi, on 28.07.21, a military court in the province of Ituri found 20 members of the militia Coopérative de développement du Congo (CODECO) guilty of crimes under international criminal law and other general criminal offences committed in Djugu territory. The rebel fighters, including a woman, had been sentenced to prison terms ranging from ten years to life, the broadcast said. According to a UN Security Council report, the CODECO militia recruits most of the child combatants in Ituri province.

According to preliminary information, on 01.08.21, three civilians were killed and dozens more injured by air strikes of the Congolese armed forces against CODECO military targets in and around the commercial centre of Kobu and Bambou (Djugu territory, Ituri).

Egypt

Death sentences for several members of the Muslim Brotherhood

In two separate trials, a total of 24 Muslim Brotherhood members were sentenced to death by a criminal court in Damanhur, in the province of Al-Buhaira on 29.07.21. 16 of them were accused of involvement in a bomb attack on a police bus in the city of Rashid in 2015 in which three police officers were killed and 39 injured.

The eight other defendants were convicted for the murder of a police officer in Al-Dilinjat in December 2014.

Ethiopia

Supply situation in Tigray comes to a head

According to international aid organisations, the humanitarian situation in the Ethiopian regional state of Tigray is becoming increasingly dramatic. The Ethiopian government is accused of deliberately trying to cut off the civilian population from food aid in order to break the resistance of the Tigray Peoples Liberation Front (TPLF) and the population in Tigray. The EU accuses Ethiopia of using hunger as a weapon. Lorries carrying food essential for survival are apparently being deliberately prevented from travelling to the conflict region. The responsibility lies with the Ethiopian government, EU foreign affairs representative Josep Borrell said. A representative of the children's relief organisation World Vision expects a famine "within two weeks" if aid shipments continue to be blocked. About 5.2 million people would be affected.

Most recently, Tigray could only be reached from Afar (cf. BN of 26.07.21). Currently there is no air link to the provincial capital Mekelle, nor is there any electricity, mobile phone signal or internet. A shortage of petrol also affects the few aid organisations still active in Tigray. Access to basic health care is also critical. According to the World Health Organisation, about 3.8 million people in Tigray need medical assistance. The last aid shipment was delivered in June 2021 and the UN said that around 100 lorries a day would be needed to address "the disastrous shortage of food and medicine in Tigray".

Prime Minister Abiy stated that the ceasefire he unilaterally declared at the end of June 2021 has failed. Due to the offensive of the Tigray Defence Forces (TDF), who have captured parts of the regional states of Afar and Amhara, Abiy has declared an "all-out war against the TDF".

Hundreds killed after attacks by Afar militias

According to official reports, at least 300 civilians were killed in an attack by Afar militias on members of the Issa clan in Ethiopia's Somali region. The background of the fighting on 24.07.21 in the Sitti zone in Gedamaytu (also: Gabraisa, Woreda Amibara) remained unclear. It is suspected that territorial disputes are involved, as both Afar and the Somali region lay claim to the area.

The Gambia

Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on gender-based violence

According to a media report of 23.07.21, the Minister of Women, Children and Social Welfare, Fatu Kinteh, citing a report by the Network Against Gender Based Violence, stated that 251 cases of gender-based violence had been registered in The Gambia in the last twelve months, especially at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. While about 95 % of the reported cases concerned women, the remaining 5 % were primarily children, occasionally also men. The Vice-President, Dr Isatou Touray, also stated on the occasion of World Population Day on 11.07.21 that gender-based violence, as well as gender-based inequalities, had increased during the health crisis. There was evidence that more genital mutilations and child marriages were taking place, she said that women and children were those most affected by the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Guatemala

Renewed protests against the impeachment of the head of the Special Prosecutor's Office against Impunity

On 23.07.21, the head of the Special Prosecutor's Office against Impunity (FECI), Juan Francisco Sandoval, was removed from office by the Attorney General, María Consuelo Porras, and left the country for El Salvador the following day for security reasons. His office had assumed the duties of the UN-backed International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG) in 2019. In the course of his work, he was responsible for curbing corruption in the country and, according to his own statements, had recently also initiated investigations into corruption cases in connection with the current President Alejandro Giammattei and his government. The US and civic organisations

have condemned Sandoval's impeachment, and more protests were held last weekend demanding the resignation of both President Giammattei and Attorney General Porras.

Guinea-Bissau

Suspected assassination attempt on human rights activist

Luís Vaz Martins, former president of the Guinean (Bissau) League of Human Rights (LGDH), became the victim of an assassination attempt, according to a Facebook post by the LGDH on 31.07.21 that was picked up by the media. A vehicle occupied by several people allegedly rammed Martins' car three times intending to provoke a fatal accident. The LGDH condemned the attack as an attempt to silence critical voices in the country. According to an agency report, Martins, who also works as a lawyer for former Prime Minister Aristides Gomes currently staying abroad, considers the attack as response to his report on an internal crisis in the MADEM-G15 party, to which President Umaro Sissoco Embaló also belongs.

Leader of opposition party prevented from leaving the country

On 23.07.21, Domingos Simões Pereira, ex-Prime Minister and leader of the opposition party African Party of Independence of Guinea[-Bissau] and Cap Verde (PAIGC), was prevented from leaving the country for Portugal. The reason is a decree of the public prosecutor's office, which refers to several cases pending against Pereira. The PAIGC subsequently demanded the revocation of the order and the dismissal of the public prosecutor in charge, otherwise, the party would respond with protests and take other action.

India

Kashmir: military operations and drone defence

Since mid-July 2021, four Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) militants, including a LeT leader and a policeman, have been killed in military operations in the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir. The LeT has been one of the most active militant groups in the region this year. Indian security forces estimate that about half of the militants killed in security operations so far belonged to the LeT.

During the same period, a drone fitted with an explosive device was rendered harmless in Jammu district. Drone countermeasures were also installed in several places in Jammu district, including at the airport, following increased sightings of drones near the de facto border with the Pakistani part of Kashmir.

Naxalite activity in Chhattisgarh

In mid-July 2021, Maoist rebels (Naxalites) attacked villagers and security forces in the state of Chhattisgarh. One villager was killed in Bijapur district and several were abducted in nearby Sukma district. They were released a few days later with the threat not to cooperate with the police or support development projects. The Maoist militants oppose the latter and consider them exploitation of the regional mineral resources and the labour of the population. They also announced a "Martyrs' Week" from 28.07.21 to 03.08.21 to commemorate their members who have so far died in security operations. According to their own statements, increased attacks are to be expected during this period.

COVID-19 pandemic: Kerala imposes lockdown

On 29.07.21, following a renewed increase in registered Covid infections, a two-day lockdown was announced in the state of Kerala where over a third of all new infections were reported; while measures in the previously hard-hit state of Maharashtra have been gradually relaxed.

Border disputes between Mizoram and Assam

On 26.07.21, fighting broke out on the border between the north-eastern states of Assam and Mizoram near Vairengte, killing at least five Assam police officers and injuring 60 others. This was preceded by territorial disputes between the two states. Initially, the Mizoram government had accused Assam police officers of unlawfully capturing a border post. Assam accused Mizoram of unlawfully constructing a road and setting up a camp for security forces on neutral territory between the states. Finally, a violent crowd from Mizoram, allegedly with police

support, attacked security forces in Assam, using tear gas and bullets. During these clashes, Mizoram police allegedly opened fire on Assam police officers. Mizoram officials said that this had been necessary, because the border post had been unlawfully taken and unarmed civilians from Mizoram had been attacked. After the incident, Assam deployed 4,000 security personnel to protect the border.

Mizoram had been part of Assam until 1972 and gained independence as a separate state in 1986. Both sides continue to make territorial claims to this day. Assam is ruled by the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). In Mizoram, a regional party governs in coalition with the BJP. India's resource-rich north-east has repeatedly been the scene of ethnic tensions and separatist-motivated disputes since India's independence in 1947.

Iran

COVID-19 pandemic

According to media reports, health minister Namaki demanded a strict two-week lockdown due to the high rate of new infections nationwide in a letter to the supreme revolutionary leader on 01.08.21. According to Namaki, the lockdown should also be enforced with the help of the military and law enforcement agencies. Since the beginning of the pandemic, numerous temporary lockdowns have been imposed, but largely without coercive measures. According to official data from the Ministry of Health on 29.07.21, the number of new cases amounted to 34,433. The delta variant is spreading nationwide (cf. BN of 26.07.21).

Protests are spreading

The protests that started a fortnight ago in Khuzestan province and were originally directed against the water crisis and other environmental problems (cf. BN of 19.07.21 and 26.07.21), have spread further and changed their nature and political direction. According to Iranian media abroad, the protesters are now openly calling for the fall of the regime. On 26.07.21, security forces surrounded the protesters in their strongholds in the southern Iranian city of Ahvaz. The districts of Hayy al-Thaura and Ku-ye Alavi were affected. Special counter-insurgency units and revolutionary guards (Pasdaran) were deployed there. The internet is still blocked. On 27.07.21, protests took place in the district of Baharestan (Isfahan) as well as in Kermanshah and Karaj. The day before, more protests erupted in Tehran after a power cut in a shopping mall. Slogans such as "Down with the Islamic Republic" were chanted. On 28.07.21 further protests erupted in Baharestan and Eyvan-e gharb (Ilam province). On 30.07.21 the protests continued after a football match and the victory of the Persepolis team. Resalat and Tehran Pars in East Tehran and Sadeqiyeh in the west of the capital were particularly affected. On 31.07.21, there were clashes in front of the Municipal Theatre in Tehran. Security forces used tear gas, as is reported by Iranian media abroad. Ten people have been killed so far in the unrest and an unknown number of people have been injured and arrested.

Protesting mothers arrested

On 30.07.21, Iranian media abroad reported the arrest of some mothers of protesters killed in the November 2019 protests. The mothers were reported to have held placards and pictures in Meidan-e Azadi (Freedom Square) in western Tehran to draw attention to the fate of their children and to call for solidarity with the protesters in Khuzestan. The mothers then moved to nearby Sadeqiyeh metro station and were later arrested in the metro. In total, the security forces arrested seven women, but released them after a few hours. Some of the women were allegedly beaten during the incident.

Arrest of human rights activists

According to media reports, an activist and member of the Azeri minority was arrested in Tabriz (East Azerbaijan province) and transferred to Tehran's Evin prison, on 19.07.21. He is to serve a prison sentence of nine years and eight months there. Back in February 2014, the man was arrested at a private event to celebrate the International Native Language Day proclaimed by UNESCO and charged with being a member of an illegal group and violating national security. He had also been accused of propaganda activities against the Islamic Republic. He was temporarily released on bail after 55 days in custody. The sentence will be executed now, despite ongoing appeal proceedings and without prior notification of his legal representatives.

Iraq

Missile attacks

On 27.07.21, two rockets hit the Green Zone in Baghdad without causing any personal injury. On 30.07.21, security forces announced that they had recovered a total of 18 rockets intended for attacks on Baghdad from various groups.

Attack on a funeral in Salah ad-Din

On 30.07.21, an attack occurred at a funeral in Yathrib district in Salah ad-Din province, killing three people. So far, no group has claimed responsibility. It is suspected that IS is behind the attack.

Anti-IS operations

Since 27.07.21, an anti-IS operation coordinated between the army and various security forces has been underway in southern Kirkuk. It is directed against the IS bases that are still suspected to exist in the rural areas there.

In Diyala province, an IS emir was killed by security forces near Lake Hamrin. Major coordination problems exist between Kurdish and central Iraqi security forces in the region, which is why two joint brigades are currently being set up. The killing of this emir is seen as a first success in this respect.

Ivory Coast

Signs of national reconciliation; new opposition alliance

After the return of ex-president Laurent Gbagbo (cf. BN of 21.06.21), the country's political elite is positioning itself. The return was also made possible by an assurance of the government not to enforce the 20-year prison sentence against Gbagbo, to which he had been sentenced by a national court. The reason for the sentence was an alleged order by Gbagbo during the 2010/2011 conflict to break into the branch of the West African Central Bank (BCEAO) in Abidjan.

On 10.07.21, Gbagbo and his former rival Henri Konan Bédié, leader of the opposition party Parti démocratique de Côte d'Ivoire (PDCI), met with the participation of many supporters from both sides. They announced that they had agreed on a joint project of reconciliation towards a "final and lasting peace". An opposition alliance between Gbagbo's Front Populaire Ivoirien (FPI) and PDCI is in the offing.

On 20.07.21, on the occasion of the festival of Tabaski (the Muslim Feast of Sacrifice), President Ouattara called for the process of national reconciliation to continue.

On 27.07.21, Ouattara and Gbagbo met at the presidential palace. Ouattara said the turbulences were behind them; the important thing was to bring peace to the country. Gbagbo demanded the release of the remaining prisoners from the 2010/2011 conflict.

Ex-Prime Minister and Speaker of Parliament sentenced to life imprisonment

According to media reports, the politician Guillaume Soro was sentenced in absentia to life imprisonment for attacking the security and authority of the state on 23.06.21, this was in addition to another sentence of 20 years for embezzlement (cf. BN of 04.05.20). 18 supporters also received prison sentences ranging from 17 months to 20 years, some in absentia. His movement Générations et peuples solidaires (GPS) was dissolved. By January 2019 at the latest, President Ouattara and the then Speaker of Parliament, Soro, had fallen out, whereupon the latter resigned from office in February 2019 and went abroad, numerous GPS supporters were arrested. The core of the charge is said to have been an audio recording in which Soro spoke of a planned uprising. His defence announced that it would appeal and that this was a political trial. International arrest warrants are said to have been issued against Soro. His current whereabouts are unclear.

Neither has Charles Blé Goudé, who was acquitted with Gbagbo at the International Criminal Court (ICC), been included in process of national reconciliation, so far. According to media reports, Goudé's Ivorian passport continues to be withheld. Goudé is currently staying in the Netherlands.

According to a media report, both Soro and Goudé, welcomed the sign of reconciliation in the form of the meeting between Ouattara and Gbagbo.

Kenya

Members of the Shona community receive Kenyan citizenship

According to press reports, members of the Shona community received Kenyan identity cards with full citizenship rights on 28.07.21.

The Shona came to Kenya as missionaries in 1959. In 1963, the year of independence, there were 16 families living in the country who had originally immigrated to Kenya as British citizens from Zimbabwe and Zambia. They could not prove their legal ties to their countries of origin as required by the birth registration and citizenship legislation in Kenya. For this reason, they lost their Zimbabwean and Zambian citizenships and became stateless. Their descendants inherited this status.

Lebanon

Family feud in Khalde escalates

In the small town of Khalde in the Mount Lebanon region, a family feud that had been simmering for a year escalated from 31.07.21 to 01.08.21. In August 2020, members of Hezbollah and Amal had hoisted banners in a Sunni-dominated neighbourhood in support of a Shia convicted in the context of the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri; a 15-year-old Sunni and others died in the ensuing fighting. It is said that the Sunni victim's older brother shot a member of Hezbollah, who is considered to be responsible for the killing, at a wedding party. Further armed clashes accompanied the Hezbollah member's funeral. At this stage, five people are confirmed dead, at least three of them members of Hezbollah. The leaders of all relevant political parties urged that it should be left to the army to pacify the situation. The army entered the city, closed several streets and announced that non-uniformed gunmen could be fired upon.

Libya

COVID-19 pandemic: authorities impose curfew

Following a surge in the number of infections in recent weeks, the Libyan authorities imposed a two-week night curfew (from 6pm to 6am) in the western and central provinces from 26.07.21. According to the Ministry of Health, this was necessary to relieve the overcrowded COVID-19 isolation wards in western Libya.

Militia leader Mohamed al-Kani killed

During an attempt to arrest the leader of the Kaniyat militia, Mohamed al-Kani, at his home in Benghazi on 27.07.21, al-Kani and his bodyguard were killed in a shoot-out with Libyan security forces. From 2015 to June 2020, the al-Kani brothers exercised control over their hometown of Tarhuna through the Kaniyat militia. Allegedly, kidnappings, torture and disappearances of critical voices were very common during this time. Since the troops of the then Government of National Unity (GNA) took control of the western Libyan town in June 2020, more than 27 mass graves have been discovered in and around Tarhuna (cf. BN of 11.01.21 and 15.06.20).

Electricity grid damaged in violent clashes

Two local militias engaged in violent clashes at a checkpoint on the coastal road between Zawiya and Al-Maya on 29.07.21 and 30.07.21. According to eyewitnesses, medium and heavy weapons were used. Parts of the local electricity plant were damaged during the fighting.

Morocco

COVID-19 pandemic

The number of new infections has been rising steadily for weeks. On 21.07.21, the festival of sacrifice Eid al-Adha began, this year in the royal city of Fés. Joint prayers in mosques and public places were banned as a preventive measure.

On the occasion of this year's Feast of the Sacrifice, King Mohammed VI pardoned 761 people. Among them are 14 prisoners whose life sentences were commuted to a limited term. Others had their prison terms shortened or waived.

On the 22nd anniversary of his ascension to the throne on 30.07.21, King Mohammed VI issued 1,243 pardons. In doing so, he shortened prison sentences, remitted remaining prison terms and converted three life sentences into fixed prison terms.

Mozambique

International military operation in Cabo Delgado

According to media reports, Rwandan and Mozambican forces have captured a strategically important base of the IS-affiliated terrorist group operating in the Auasse (or Awase) region. In addition, 14 Islamist insurgents were reportedly killed. Meanwhile, South Africa deployed nearly 1,500 troops, Botswana nearly 300 and Angola 20 soldiers to Cabo Delgado as part of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) mission (cf. BN of 10.05.21).

Myanmar

COVID 19 pandemic: situation remains dramatic

On 27.07.21, the military regime announced the construction of ten new crematoria in the most affected city of Yangon (Rangoon) in view of the rising infection and death rates. According to official figures, more than 4,600 people have died from COVID-19 since the beginning of June 2021 (as of 28.07.21). Charities involved with the transport of bodies report more than 1,000 dead daily since mid-July 21. According to UN estimates, within the next two weeks half of the population may be infected. The situation is further exacerbated by flooded hospitals and rescue and supply routes cut off by high water. Dangerously high water levels were reported in Kayin, Mon and Rakhine states and the Tanintharyi region. Thousands of people had to be evacuated, including 1,700 from a refugee camp in Mrauk-U (Rakhine). Several people were killed by landslides.

Discover of corpses, fighting and assassinations in Sagaing

In Kani (Sagaing region), where bodies of 15 torture victims of the military were discovered in mid-July 2021 (cf. BN of 19.07.21), locals found another dozen dead bodies in a forest, some of them mutilated. Both members of local People's Defence Forces and non-combatants were identified. On 27.07.21, there were deadly clashes between People's Defence Forces and pro-militant Pyusawhti militias in Mingin. In Taze and Khin-U, unknown persons murdered two suspected Pyusawhti members. In Yinmarbin, about 10,000 people fled attacks and raids by the military between 24.07.21 and 29.07.21.

State of emergency extended by one and a half years

On 01.08.21, de facto ruler Min Aung Hlaing announced that he would not lift the state of emergency, which had been imposed on 01.02.21, originally for one year, until August 2023. He was appointed prime minister of a "transitional government". On 27.07.21 the junta officially declared invalid the results of the parliamentary elections in November 2020 the outcome of which had been in favour of the National League for Democracy (NLD). Despite the violent crackdown on protesters by the military and police, nationwide protests against military rule continue six months after the coup.

Nicaragua

Arrests of further opposition members, deprivation of legal personality of 24 NGOs

José Antonio Peraza, a member of the political council of the National Blue-White Unity (UNAB), was arrested on 26.07.21. He is thus the ninth member of the UNAB arrested since the end of May 2021. He too, is charged with acts undermining the independence and sovereignty of the people, in violation of Law 1055. On 28.07.21, according to police, a case has also been opened against former Foreign Minister Francisco Xavier Aguirre Sacasa on the basis

of the same charges. He was arrested after having been banned from leaving for Costa Rica by the Directorate of Migration and Foreigners' Affairs. On the same day, the authorities also opened proceedings under Law 1055 against the wives of the arrested presidential candidates Félix Maradiaga and Juan Sebastián Chamorro, Bertha Adelma Valle Otero and Victoria Eugenia Cárdenas. Both of them are currently staying in the US. In addition, the human rights defender María del Socorro Oviedo Delgado was arrested on 29.07.21, the 31st opposition figure to be arrested since May 2021.

Furthermore, on 28.07.21 the Sandinista-dominated National Assembly approved a motion to deprive 24 NGOs of their legal personality, including 15 medical organisations (cf. BN of 26.07.21).

Niger

At least 15 soldiers killed

According to information from the Niger's government, at least 15 soldiers were killed and seven wounded in an attack in the Torodi district (Tillabéri region) in the south-west of the country near the border with Burkina Faso on 01.08.21. The soldiers were ambushed and hit by an explosive device. So far, no one has claimed responsibility for the attack.

More than 30 civilians killed in attacks in border region

On 28.07.21, the village of Deye Koukou, in the district of Banibangou (Tillabéri region) was attacked. The government of Niger informed that 19 civilians were killed and three injured.

On 25.07.21, 14 civilians died in another attack in the region. Unknown armed assailants on motorbikes reportedly attacked the village of Wiye (Banibangou district), about 50 km from the border with Mali. Banibangou is located in the tri-border area of Niger, Burkina Faso and Mali, the scene of repeated attacks in recent years. So far, no one has claimed responsibility for the two attacks.

Nigeria

Schoolchildren released

According to media reports, 28 victims of a kidnapping of schoolchildren on 24.07.21 are at large again. However, at least 80 other schoolchildren are still in the hands of their kidnappers. The abduction took place on 05.07.21 in the northern state of Kaduna (cf. BN of 12.07.21). As a precautionary measure, schools in the region were temporarily closed. According to media reports, this is the tenth case of abduction of numerous schoolchildren since December 2020.

Shia leader Zakzaky at large

After almost six years in prison, Ibrahim Zakzaky (spelling also: el-Zakzaky), leader of the Shiite Islamic Movement of Nigeria (IMN), and his wife were released on 28.07.21 following an acquittal by the Kaduna State High Court. The prosecution reportedly confirmed the release of the couple and announced an appeal against the acquittal. About 350 civilians and one soldier had been killed in a raid against IMN members in the town of Zaria in December 2015. Zakzaky, his wife Zeenat, and over 200 IMN supporters were arrested. After numerous acquittals in 2019 and 2020, only the couple had remained in custody. They were charged with murder, conspiracy and disturbing the peace, among other things (cf. BN of 02.03.20). In the past, Zakzaky's continued detention had caused street protests in the capital Abuja, resulting in dozens of deaths in violent clashes with security forces. At the end of July 2019, the IMN was banned in Nigeria as a terrorist organisation. Around half of Nigeria's population is Muslim, predominantly Sunni.

Pakistan

Activity of the TTP

In mid-July 2021, security forces killed six suspected Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) militants who had abducted workers in the former Kurram tribal area of Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa province in June 2021. While one of the workers

was killed by his abductors, five of them were rescued during the police operation. The TTP was also allegedly responsible for two explosive attacks on a police vehicle and a market in the former Dera Ismail Khan and Mohmand tribal areas.

According to a recent UN report, the TTP has been able to increase its financial resources derived from illegal activities. With the withdrawal of international forces from Afghanistan, the TTP has also stepped up its cross-border attacks from Afghanistan, posing an increasing security threat to Pakistan. Recently, Prime Minister Imran Khan denied any Pakistani support for the Taliban in Afghanistan.

COVID-19 pandemic: One-week lockdown in Karachi

As of 01.08.21 a lockdown has been imposed in response to the rise in new Covid infections in the metropolis of Karachi (Sindh). The lockdown is expected to last until 08.08.21, after hospitals in the city experienced a rush. Only shops serving basic needs will remain open. Public transport is suspended during this period and government offices will remain closed for a week.

Somalia

US drone attack

On 01.08.21, the US military carried out another air-strike against al-Shabaab fighters near Qeycad (Galmudug). After a six-month break, more US air-strikes were flown in the same area on 20.07.21 and 23.07.21 (cf. BN of 26.07.21). Both the US and Somali governments stated that there were no civilian casualties. No information is available on the number of fighters killed.

Attack on local football team

On 30.07.21, an explosive planted on a bus carrying football players in Kismayo killed at least five people and injured more than twelve, according to official reports. The players were on their way to a football tournament. Al-Shabaab is blamed for the attack but has not claimed responsibility.

Elections

On 29.07.21, after a delay of several days (cf. BN of 26.07.21), the upper house elections took place in Jubaland State. The assembly met in Kismayo and elected four members for the Somali upper house. The other four states are yet to start voting, facing different reasons for delay. The elections to the lower house and the presidential elections can only go ahead, once they completed the voting. The lower house is to be elected between 12.09.21 and 02.10.21, while the presidential elections are announced for 10.10.21.

Sudan

Withdrawal of UNAMID in Darfur

The expiry of the UN-African Union Mission (UNAMID) was decided at the end of 2020 (cf. BN of 05.07.21). In order to end the mission no later than 30.06.22, almost USD 80 million were made available by the UN General Assembly. Thus, almost 6,000 military and police forces have been withdrawn from Darfur province by now. Only one security unit with 360 people has remained on the ground to secure the remaining withdrawal of UNAMID. Originally, it was planned to hand over 14 remaining UNAMID sites to the Sudanese government (cf. BN of 05.07.21), but ten of them have since been looted and damaged to varying degrees. The UN refers to discussions on the ground according to which local tensions over equitable access to UN facilities and equipment had led to the looting and destruction. In addition, the UN expressed concerns about the gradual handover of a large UNAMID camp in El Fasher to the Sudanese government, as there had been an increase in armed forces in the area, whose actions during this handover were unpredictable and therefore had to be carefully managed, the UN said.

South Sudan

Looting of a WFP warehouse

According to the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP), approximately 230 tonnes of food were stolen during the looting of a warehouse in the Tonj region of Warrap State. The looting occurred in early July 2021 in the course of local fighting between youth groups (cf. BN of 19.07.21). The food was to be distributed to local camps in the Marial-Lou region to prepare for the approaching rainy season, since the region is no longer accessible by road during the rainy season. The stolen food could have provided for 8,000 people for three months. According to the WFP, the resulting gap in food supply is even harder to fill, as WFP already suffers from a funding shortage. According to new plans, it is now possible to provide support for one month, hoping that it might suffice also for a second and third month.

Syria

Fighting in Dar'a

The Syrian army and its allies attacked areas under the rule of rebel groups on 27.07.21. A fragile pact for joint control had existed with these groups since 2018. Conflicts between the two sides have since been mediated by Russians. This time, mediation reportedly failed after local elders' councils and rebel leaders refused to allow the army access to Dar'a al-Balad, a southern neighbourhood in the old city of Dar'a, the governorate capital.

The pro-opposition Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR) reported that subsequently forces loyal to Assad had executed raids in the governorate and were attacked by rebels.

In the meantime, the government forces have been forced to abandon their positions. Because of the ongoing fighting in Dar'a al-Balad, the only hospital in the area was hit by artillery fire on 28.07.21. According to SOHR, three civilians, eight government fighters and five rebel fighters were killed on the same day. Meanwhile, the state news agency SANA reported that two civilians had been killed on 29.07.21.

As a result of the ongoing fighting, Jordan closed its border crossing with Syria along the Damascus-Dar'a highway (Nassib border crossing point) on 01.08.21. Aid organisations based in Damascus reported that around 2,000 families had fled in the wake of the escalation of violence.

Dar'a is considered the cradle of the uprising in Syria, because this is where the mass protests against President Assad's government started in 2011. The 2018 agreement allowed certain opposition groups to keep their weapons and retain control over public security in some areas.

Tunisia

Political unrest continues - new interior minister appointed

In the wake of the dismissal of Prime Minister Hichem Mechichi and other ministers (cf. BN of 26.07.21), President Kais Saied appointed former presidential security advisor Ridha Gharsallaoui as the new interior minister on 29.07.21.

Meanwhile, the head of parliament and Ennahda leader, Ghannouchi, called on Saied to engage in dialogue. His Islamic conservative party also called for early elections. Furthermore, four members of his party and one opposition politician were temporarily arrested. The reason given was incitement to violence in front of parliament and criticism of the military and the government.

Corruption allegations against Ennahda and two party alliances, inter alia

The Tunisian public prosecutor's office announced on 27.07.21 that it had opened investigations against Ennahda, the liberal party Qalb Tounes and the Aich Tounsi movement on suspicion of illegal party financing. It is suspected that during the 2019 election campaign funding had been received from abroad and funds from unknown sources had been accepted. Thereafter, at a meeting with an employers' association, Saied announced a comprehensive anti-corruption offensive affecting hundreds of companies.

Turkey

Deaths in alleged racially-motivated attack

On 30.07.21, seven members of a Kurdish family in Konya province were killed by armed perpetrators in their home, which was then set on fire. Already in May 2021 members of the family had been injured in a violent attack by a mob of about 60 people. One of the victims had told reporters a few days earlier that the family had been attacked because of their ethnicity and that authorities failed to take action against the perpetrators. Government officials denied a racial motive and instead described it as the result of a family feud. Protests took place in several cities on 31.07.21. A demonstration in Ankara was violently dispersed by the police. According to media reports, ten suspects were arrested in connection with the crime on 31.07.21, another four suspects were arrested on 01.08.21.

Venezuela

COVID 19 pandemic: current situation and vaccination campaign

Vaccination is progressing slowly, with only about 8% of the population said to have been vaccinated. However, according to official government information, 6.2 million doses of Chinese vaccines are expected in the coming days via the COVAX initiative. Since the beginning of the pandemic, 714 health workers have already died of COVID-19, according to Médicos Unidos Venezuela; from 19.07.21 to 25.07.21 alone, eight people died. A nurse who had demanded better working conditions and salaries as well as an efficient vaccination plan was given a prison sentence on 27.07.21 after she had been arrested at her workplace already on 21.07.21. According to the president of the Venezuelan Association of Chemical and Petrochemical Industries, there are sometimes problems with the distribution of oxygen tanks due to a lack of fuel for vehicles. Nevertheless, no supply bottlenecks have been reported so far.

Political prisoners 2021

According to the NGO Foro Penal, there were 275 political prisoners as of 26.07.21. They include 16 women and one minor and 129 of the total number are military personnel. In addition, more than 9,300 people had been subjected to unjustified trials for political motives and more than 15,700 arrests for political reasons had been made since 2014. The Secretary General of the Organisation of American States (OAS), Luis Almagro, confirmed the figures on Twitter on 27.07.21.

Majority of deaths in prisons in 2020 caused by disease

According to a report by the NGO Observatorio Venezolano de Prisiones (OVP) of 28.07.21, about 63 % of the 292 deaths in Venezuelan prisons in 2020 were due to health problems and diseases, a significant majority due to tuberculosis and malnutrition. Access to medical care is hardly guaranteed, prisons are heavily overcrowded and violent clashes occur repeatedly. 108 deaths were attributed to those clashes in 2020. More than 60 % of the proceedings of the approximately 37,540 prison inmates are still pending.

Homicides in Caracas 2020

According to a recent report by the NGO Monitor de Víctimas, 599 homicides were recorded in Caracas in 2020 (2019: 897), of which 204 were committed extra-legally by the police. Next to these, the most prevalent types of crimes were robbery with 93 victims and acts of revenge with 73 deaths. 17 killings were due to gender-specific violence. 91 % of the crimes cited occurred in the administrative districts of Libertador and Sucre, especially in communities with a strong gang presence, such as El Valle, Coche and La Vega (El Koki Gang) or Petare (Willexis Gang), as well as in the municipality of Sucre, which is dominated by colectivos (Tres Raíces, Alexis Vive and La Piedrita).

Vietnam

COVID-19 pandemic

The country is currently experiencing the largest wave of infections since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. Infections are reported in many parts of the country. According to the WHO, Ho Chi Minh City (HCMC) is the most

affected city, with around 72 % of the cases reported nationwide. Between 19.07.21 and 25.07.21 alone, the number of new infections exceeded 44,000. The vaccination rate is relatively low, with around 0.6% of people fully vaccinated, and the pressure on the health system is growing. Over 150,000 infections have been reported so far according to official figures and more than 1,300 people have died (as of 02.08.21). At the beginning of April 2021, merely 35 people had died in connection with COVID-19.

Due to the developments, the first session of the 15th National Assembly elected in May 2021, ended on 28.07.21, three days earlier than planned. During the session, high-ranking state leaders were elected or confirmed in office in addition to State President Nguyen Xuan Phuc and Prime Minister Pham Minh Chin.

Western Balkans

Stagnation of media pluralism and media freedom

According to current reporting, which refers to results of the scientific study "Media Pluralism Monitor 2021" (MPM) published in July 2021 on behalf of the European Commission, also the Western Balkan countries tended to experience a general stagnation or in some sectors a relative deterioration in media pluralism and media freedom in 2020. The study, prepared by the European University Institute (EUI) in Florence, examines media pluralism and its potential threats in EU member states and potential accession countries. In North Macedonia, which scored highest in the study, media professionals and their associations are no longer at risk of serious physical attacks or pressure; regulators are more independent and efficient, but risks remain from a fragmented market and the economic weakness of the media. Despite the establishment of the State Fund for the Promotion of Media Pluralism in Montenegro, the country still lacked serious efforts to introduce ethical standards and rules to limit political influence on public broadcasting and digital media, among other things, the study said. With regard to Albania, the study also mentions the lack of pluralism in the media sector, which is monopolized by a few family-run conglomerates; the study says that the country needs improved journalistic standards to prevent state intervention to regulate media content. Serbia, despite a solid media legislation, continues to lack full implementation; critical points are unregulated pro-government political advertising in the media, lack of transparency in ownership and protection of journalists, and impunity after attacks on media professionals.

Yemen

Houthi drone attacks against Saudi Arabia

The Saudi Air Force intercepted a drone armed with explosives heading towards the Saudi province of Asir on 28.07.21. Hours earlier, two missiles aimed at the Saudi city of Jizan had already been intercepted. On 30.07.21, the anti-Houthi coalition also announced that it had intercepted another explosive-charged drone targeting a Saudi merchant vessel in the southern Red Sea.

Fighting in Marib and al-Bayda

Fighting between the anti-Houthi coalition and the Houthi rebels is spreading. While Marib, the last area in northern Yemen controlled by the Yemeni government, remains contested, the Houthi rebels say they have taken control of the districts of Naman and Nateh in al-Bayda governorate.

Yemeni government ready for prisoner swap with Houthi rebels

The Yemeni government announced on 29.07.21 that it is ready to exchange prisoners with the Houthi rebels. The Houthi leadership had already declared itself ready for the exchange in early July 2021. The prisoner exchange is part of the Stockholm Agreement of 2018, which aims to end the Yemen conflict.