



Briefing Notes

Group 62 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

27 February 2023

Afghanistan

Security situation

On 23.02.23, a Taliban district governor and four other Taliban insurgents were killed in a bomb attack carried out in Taloqan city in Takhar province. Furthermore, one civilian was killed and 10 others were injured. On the same day, a Taliban commander was also killed in a bomb attack carried out in the city of Kabul. No group has claimed responsibility for the attacks. On 26.02.23, the Taliban raided houses in the provincial capital of Zaranj (Nimruz). Another clash erupted between the Taliban and Pakistani border guards at the Torkham border crossing. Both sides closed the crossing temporarily.

Government leadership

On 22.02.23, the Pakistani Defence Minister and the head of the Pakistani Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) travelled to Kabul for talks, prompted by the increase in the number of attacks carried out by the Pakistani Taliban (Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan) (TTP) on the Pakistani government. It is hoped that the Afghan Taliban will bring the TTP back to the negotiating table. The TTP operates from Afghanistan with Taliban support (cf. BN of 20.02.23). According to reports issued on 20.02.23, the Taliban government is planning to convert some former foreign military bases into "economic zones" for commercial activities. According to a source quoted on 26.02.23, the Taliban have officially taken over the Afghan embassy in Tehran with the agreement of the Iranian government. The same is likely to happen in Istanbul, Türkiye, soon.

Persecution events

According to a media report issued on 25.02.23, the local Ministry for the Propagation of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice in Balkh province has asked its staff to patrol more frequently. They have been told to remind women of the obligation to wear the veil, to encourage all citizens to pray and to put a stop to music at weddings.

There has been a series of unexplained killings of civilians in Bamiyan province, according to a report issued by the daily Etilaat-Roz on 26.02.23. The Taliban have made no comment on this. According to media reports, the Taliban have detained a total of around 36 former soldiers and civil servants in Helmand province. According to Hasht-e Subh, approximately 50 civilians, including minors and senior citizens, were arrested by the Taliban in Panjshir province on 22.02.23. Nothing is known about the background to the arrests or the detainees' whereabouts. The previous day, a man whose relatives were members of the National Resistance Front (NRF) and died fighting the Taliban was arrested in Kabul. On 21.02.23 and 23.02.23, the Taliban shot dead two men, accusing them of theft, and displayed their bodies in central squares in Herat city. In Sar-e Pul province, 14 men and nine women were publicly flogged. Also on 21.02.23, in Parwan province, two relatives of a former policeman, who is himself living in hiding, were arrested by the Taliban. On the same day, a former policeman was arrested in Kabul. On 21.02.23, the Taliban closed several educational institutions in Bamiyan province that were secretly teaching girls.

Colombia

ICG warns of rise in child recruitment by armed groups

On 24.02.23, the think-tank International Crisis Group (ICG), when publishing a new report (Protecting Colombia's Most Vulnerable on the Road to "Total Peace") based on more than 90 interviews conducted with a wide range of civil society and state actors, urged the government not to lose sight of measures taken by armed groups to wield social control over particularly vulnerable groups, such as gender-based violence, movement restrictions and curfews, and to also curb them. In this context, ICG also warned of a rise in child recruitment by armed groups even though there has been a sharp reduction in lethal violence based on temporary ceasefires within the framework of the government's strategy for total peace (so-called "paz total"). Child recruitment is being used increasingly to sow dependence. The pandemic as well as economic reasons are reportedly factors influencing this observed rise in child recruitment. The Colombian Child Protection Agency (ICBF) also shared the view, when asked by Reuters, that there has been an increase in child recruitment. ICBF says there have been more than 1,150 cases of child recruitment since 2016, whereas ICG assumes that this number is an undercount.

Djibouti

Parliamentary elections held despite criticism and boycott

Only two parties, Ismael Omar Guelleh's ruling party and the opposition Union for Democracy and Justice (UDJ), contested seats in the parliamentary elections held on 24.02.23. The main opposition parties, including Movement for Democratic Renewal and Development (MRD) and Republican Alliance for Democracy (ARD), boycotted the election, claiming it was non-transparent and undemocratic. It is not clear how many of the 230,000 eligible voters actually cast their ballots. According to local media, voter turnout was low. Incumbent President Guelleh was re-elected for a fifth term in the last presidential election in April 2021, garnering 97% of the vote.

Ecuador

Extortion offences up 300% year-on-year in 2022, impunity high

According to the Attorney General's Office, more than 9,000 extortion offences were reported in 2022, compared to only about one-third of that number the previous year 2021. Only 66 of these more than 13,000 reported extortion offences resulted in a conviction; about 90% of the cases are still under investigation. In January 2023 alone, more than 1,000 cases were reported, and the number of unreported crimes is high due to fear of reprisals. According to an article published in the Spanish newspaper El País, the extortion of protection money (so-called vacunas) by criminal groups affects various population groups and sectors.

Ethiopia

Majority vote for new regional state

Under the direction of the National Election Board of Ethiopia (NEBE), a referendum on the formation of a 12th regional state was held in the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples' Region (SNNPR) on 06.02.23. More than three million people were registered to vote in the zones of Gamo, Gofa, South Omo, Gedeo, Wolayta and Konso as well as in the woredas (special districts) of Derashe, Amaro, Burji, Ale and Basketo. The new region is to be called the Southern Ethiopia Region. The chairperson of the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission, Daniel Bekele, announced that the referendum had met legal standards and had been conducted peacefully. On 21.02.23, the NEBE declared that the majority of people had voted for autonomy.

Under the constitution ratified in 1995, Ethiopia initially consisted of nine regional states, which were divided along ethno-linguistic lines. While almost all regional states - such as Afar, Amhara, Oromia and Tigray, among others - are each considered the "homeland" of the ethnic group whose name they bear, even if other ethnic minorities live there, SNNPR is characterised by ethnic diversity, which can invoke autonomy at local level. However, according to critical voices, this "ethnic federalism" is also responsible for violent clashes between the ethnic groups, which