

## Group 22 - Information Centre Asylum and Migration

# Briefing Notes

24 February 2014

### Afghanistan

#### Security situation

A Taliban attack on 19 February 2014 onto the convoy of the presidential candidate and former Foreign Minister Mr Abdullah Abdullah and the following gun battle wounded one policeman. The attack was made in the Sarobi district in Kabul province.

On 23 February 2014 the Taliban attacked a remote operating basis of the Afghan armed forces in Kunar province (Ghaziabad district, near the Pakistan border). Here, at least 21 soldiers and dozens of rebels were killed. The Taliban said that they took several soldiers as prisoners.

#### Bundestag renews ISAF mandate

On 21 February 2014 the Bundestag [*Federal German Parliament*] decided to renew the mandate of the Bundeswehr [*Federal German armed forces*] in Afghanistan for a last time.

### Pakistan

#### Offensive against the Taliban

Since 19 and 20 February 2014 the Pakistani air force has bombed alleged Taliban in the tribal areas in North Waziristan. There have not been any exact numbers of victims so far. The armed forces said that at least 38 Taliban were killed. The military operation continues for the time being. Observers think that this operation is directed to the people responsible for the attacks onto a cinema in Peshawar and a police bus in Karachi (see BN dated 2 February 2014 and 17 February 2014) and that they are a revenge for the killing of an army officer. Therefore, it seems unlikely that the peace negotiations with the Taliban that have been initiated will be taken up again in the near future. The talks were suspended as early as on 17 February 2014 when it became known that the Taliban had killed 23 kidnapped soldiers.

#### Attacks

On 22 February 2014 the local leader of the Qaumi-Watan party in Buner district (Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa province) and two other people were all killed in a bomb attack.

On 23 February 2014 at least twelve people died in the town of Kohat (Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa province) in north-west Pakistan in a bomb attack at a bus stop. The bomb exploded near a police station and other government buildings.

### Iraq

#### Security situation

There are still attacks in Iraq every day. According to Iraq Body Count 708 people have been killed in February 2014 to the present day. So, 35 people were killed on 18 February 2014 in the town of Hilla and surrounding built-up areas (Babil province) when seven car bombs exploded. There were 14 fatalities in Baghdad in a suburb where mainly Shiites live. On 22 February 2014 at least five policemen died in an

attack onto a police station in Tikrit (Salahaddin province). On 23 February 2014 at least 17 people were killed in other attacks.

According to a UN report dated 20 February 2014 the town of Fallujah is still under the control of the extremists. Some reports say that the hostilities between the Iraqi security forces and the extremists groups are spreading to Sulayman Bek and Al-Tooze in Salahaddin province. Reportedly, more than 400 families have fled from Al-Tooze to more secure regions.

## **Syria**

### **Syria resolution adopted**

After months of negotiations the UN Security Council had adopted on 22 February 2014 a resolution which calls on the Syrian President Mr Assad to accept humanitarian aid across the country and to grant access for the relief organisations. In addition, the resolution requests an immediate end of the attacks onto civilians and the immediate ending of the siege of cities. The resolution also comes out against carpet bombing and barrel bombs as these mainly hit civilians.

### **Attack on hospital**

On 23 February 2014 a car bomb attack onto a privately run hospital in the Syrian rebel stronghold of Atme (near the Turkish border) killed at least 14 and wounded 70, among them doctors, nurses and patients. The hospital is part of the Orient Foundation, a relief association owned by the business man Mr Ghassan Abbud who supports the opposition. So far, nobody has taken responsibility for the attack. The village of Atme is controlled by an informal coalition of Islamist rebels at present, among them also the Jabhat al-Nusra (al-Nusra Front) and the Islamist Front which approximately two months ago chased away the fighters of the group "The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant" (ISIL).

## **Lebanon**

### **Double attack in Beirut and attack in Hermel**

A double attack onto the cultural centre of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Beirut, located in Bir Hassan on the outskirts in the south of the city on 19 February 2014 killed at least three people and wounded about 40. The Sunni extremist grouping Abdullah-Azzam Brigades has taken responsibility for the attack and said that the reason for this attack was Iran's support of the Syrian President Mr Assad. Since July 2013 this has been the ninth attack in a stronghold of the Shiite Hezbollah in Lebanon which just like Iran support the Syrian government in the civil war.

A suicide attack on 22 February 2014 onto an army barrier in Hermel in the Bekaa valley which is approximately 10 km away from the Syrian border killed at least three, among them two soldiers and one civilian. The Islamist grouping Jabhat al-Nusra (al-Nusra-Front) which committed a similar attack on 1 February 2014 in Hermel has taken responsibility for the attack.

## **Iran**

### **Ban on reform newspaper following criticism of Islamic law**

Only five days after its first publication the reform oriented daily newspaper "Aseman" (heaven) has been banned. The public prosecution office said on 20 February 2014 on its web site that the newspaper may no longer be published because an article reportedly criticised the Islamic law. The report had said that the legal principle of revenge for families of victims which is valid in Iran is "inhumane". The newspaper's chief editor Mr Abbas Bosorgmehr was arrested according to the official news agency Irna owing to "defamation of Islamic holy principles" and taken to Evin prison in Tehran. Prior to this Mr Bosorgmehr had apologised for the report. The word "inhumane" was in the text by mistake although he had already deleted it beforehand.

### **Increase in executions**

According to UN Information more than 80 people have already been executed in Iran since the beginning of January. Other sources mention 95 and/or more than 100 executions. This means that in 2014 there have been considerable more executions than in the same period of time in the previous year. Most executions are carried out owing to drug crimes.

### **Diplomatic relationship with Great Britain taken up again**

After more than two years Great Britain and Iran have taken up again a direct diplomatic relationship. Both countries had interrupted their relationship in November 2011. The reason for this was the storming of the British Embassy in Tehran by protesters who were close to the government and who wanted to protest against further sanctions with reference to the Iranian nuclear programme.

## **Turkey**

### **Internet law**

On 19 February 2014 the Turkish President Mr Abdullah Gül signed the law to increase the control on the internet which the Turkish parliament had adopted on 5 February 2014 (see BN dated 10 February 2014) in spite of national and international criticism. The law allows [*the telecommunications authority*] to block any web site without first seeking a court ruling in cases of a suspected defamatory and discriminating contents or in case of a contents which violates privacy. Mr Gül declared that sections of the law shall be toned down. Reportedly, in the meantime the Prime Minister Mr Erdogan has made the proposal to give preliminary information to the judiciary with the option to give an opinion.

On 21 February 2014 the Turkish police violently dispersed a demonstration of opponents to the law in Istanbul. They used teargas, water cannons and rubber bullets against several hundreds of protesters. The protesters themselves threw stones and firework onto the policemen.

### **Special courts abolished**

On 20 February 2014 the Turkish parliament adopted another step into the direction of a judicial reform and abolished the special courts which have been competent for severe political crimes so far. Pending proceedings will be handed over to the regional criminal courts of the ordinary jurisdiction. In addition, another law in this context will reduce the maximum period of detention while awaiting trial from seven and a half years to five years and it will aggravate telephone surveillance in investigations ordered by a court. The abolished special courts have been under criticism in the past few years, in particular owing to very extensive proceedings against high ranking military officers.

## **Egypt**

### **Islamists warn tourists to leave**

The group Ansar Bait al-Makdis which has taken responsibility for the deadly attack onto a tourist bus on 16 February 2014 threatens to commit further attacks and requested that foreigners leave the country by 20 February 2014. Egypt's Prime Minister Mr Hasem al-Beblawi said that Ansar Bait al-Makdis is a threat to tourists. At present, this group is regarded as the most active Islamist organisation in Egypt. It has threatened to throw over the transitional government of army chief Mr Abdel Fattah al-Sissi.

## **Libya**

### **Elections to the constitutional council**

On 20 February 2014 the constituent assembly was elected. About 1.1 million out of the country's approximately 3.3 million voters had themselves registered for the election and about 45% of them actually voted, so the public news agency Lana reported. The constitutional council with its 60 members has a period of time by the end of May to draft a constitution for the first time which will then be voted by referendum. The election was subject to threats and attempts of interference by militant Islamists.

## **Mauritania**

### **New cabinet**

On 14 February 2014 Mauritania's Prime Minister Mr Laghdaf presented his new cabinet in Nouakchott. Eight ministers were dismissed and eleven new ministers were appointed, among them six women. Following the second round of the parliamentary elections on 21 December 2013, the governing Union for the Republic (UPR) of President Mr Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz obtained 74 of the 147 seats. The UPR can send 108 MPs including the allied parties to parliament. The opposition obtained 37 seats. In the municipal elections that were held at the same time, the UPR won 154 out of 218 communities in the country.

## **Nigeria**

### **Boko Haram: Many people died in attack on Bama**

Around 4.30 hours a.m. on 19 February 2014 presumed members of the militant Islamist organisation Boko Haram attacked the town of Bama (seat of the Bama Local Government Area, LGA) in the north eastern federal state of Borno. The attack had lasted until noon and killed 80 people, as the president of the LGA said or 98 people, as the leader of the local civilian militia for the fight against the Boko Haram said. In addition, more than 500 buildings were set on fire, among them the palace of the traditional ruler of the town, the Shehu of Bama. The attackers only withdrew when an army helicopter appeared.

### **New threats of the Boko Haram leader**

The leader of the Boko Haram, Mr Abubakar Shekau has taken responsibility for the killing of the Islamist cleric and leader of the Salafist movement in Nigeria, Mr Sheikh Adam Albani on 1 February 2014, this was announced in a video of 28 minutes published on 19 February 2014. At the same time, he announced an expansion of the Islamist war to the whole of Nigeria and threatened with attacks onto oil refineries in the Niger delta in southern Nigeria. He also mentioned other general aims for attacks such as Christians, supporters of democracy and western education such as schools. He also mentioned planned attacks on specific people, e.g.: Nigeria's President Mr Goodluck Jonathan, UN Secretary-General Mr Ban Ki-Moon, Israel's Prime Minister Mr Benjamin Netanyahu, the British Queen Elizabeth II, the well-known Nigerian politicians Buhari, Babangida and Atiku and the high-ranking Islamic leader Ado Bayero, Shehu of Borno.

## **South Sudan**

### **New fighting in Malakal**

On 18 February 2014 rebels have for the first time since the ceasefire agreed upon on 23 January 2014 in Addis Ababa started a major offensive against a strategically important town and attacked the capital of the Upper-Nile region of Malakal which is rich in mineral oil. The government troops could successfully defend the city. In December 2013 Malakal had been captured by rebels and was then recaptured by government troops in January 2014.

## **Somalia**

### **Presidential palace attacked**

On 21 February 2014 the al-Shabaab committed an attack on the President's palace in Mogadishu. The attack started with the explosion of a car bomb at the entrance. Then, 15 to 20 gunmen stormed the premises. The attack killed at least 17, among them reportedly eight of the attackers and seven soldiers. The president was unharmed. He was away with a group of intimate friends to visit the Friday service when the attack took place.

## **Central African Republic**

### **UN requests another 3,000 soldiers**

UN Secretary-General Mr Ban Ki-Moon called on the community of states to send at least 3,000 additional soldiers to the Central African Republic in order to protect the population. This should be an interim measure until the UN will be able to send UN peacekeepers to the country.

The Central African Republic is still characterised by chaos and violence. According to Human Rights Watch peace troops from Chad promote the movement of armed Seleka leaders. Muslims who flee from Bangui to Cameroon (650 km) must overcome street barriers and they risk to be killed by attackers.

## **Uganda**

### **President willing to sign criminal law against homosexuality**

According to the government spokesman, President Yoweri Museveni will enact a law aiming at the severe punishment of homosexual acts on 24 February 2014. Homosexual acts can be prosecuted with 14 years of imprisonment or in serious cases with life imprisonment. Capital punishment will not be made because of international criticism.

## **Ethiopia**

### **Human rights violations in the course of forcible relocation**

According to the Human rights organisation Human Rights Watch the government has severely violated human rights in the course of the forced relocation of ten thousands of farmers in the Omo valley (in the south-west of the country). They said that the “state security forces have repeatedly threatened people who did not want to move and that they have attacked or arrested them at random. The reason for the relocations is reportedly to make land available to foreign investors in farmland. Practically the whole valley” will become farmland, said the organisation on 19 February 2014 under reference to current observations made by satellite. The government rejects all such accusations and says that the relocation programme is “voluntary”. The people concerned would be given - among others - better access to medical treatment and education in their new settlement areas.

## **Georgia**

### **Five years prison for former Interior Minister of Georgia**

Former Interior Minister and temporary head of government Mr Vano Merabishvili was sentenced to five years of imprisonment on 17 February 2014. The local court in the town of Kutaisi saw evidence for the fact that the lawyer aged 45 is guilty of abuse of authority, misappropriation of public funds and corruption. The defence announced appeal. Colleagues of his party, the “United National Movement” spoke of a political judgment and a revenge with former representatives of the government dating back to the term of office of President Michail Saakashvili whose office ended in November 2013 as scheduled.

Mr Merabishvili had been in detention while awaiting trial since May 2013. The once top-ranking politician is so far the highest ranking person who has been convicted in the context of the investigations against former members of the government since the change of power in October 2012. After eight years Mr Saakashvili’s party “United National Movement” had lost its majority in the parliamentary elections to the coalition “Georgian Dream” of billionaire Mr Bidzina Ivanishvili. There are controversial opinions regarding the judiciary’s approach. The EU and the USA have repeatedly come out in favour of a certain restriction regarding the investigations against former intimate political friends of former President Michail Saakashvili.

## **Ukraine**

### **President Yanukovych dismissed**

Although there had been signs of a relaxed political situation on 17 February 2014, there was new fighting in the evening of the same day between the security forces and protesters which then escalated. The police and special units of the security forces used their guns for specific targets; this led to the fact that more than 60 protesters died. There were also fatalities among the security forces. On 20 February 2014 the situation calmed down, President Yanukovych declared that the “anti-terror operation” was over and he announced early presidential and parliamentary elections. It became increasingly clear, however, that following the reckless operation of the security forces, Mr Yanukovych has massively lost his political support. On 22 February 2014 the Ukrainian parliament declared that President Yanukovych is no longer the country’s president. The same day, his most important political competitor, former Prime Minister Ms Julia Tymoshenko was released from prison. Reportedly, Mr Yanukovych has left the country in the meantime and went into hiding.

On 23 February 2014 the Ukrainian parliament had elected Mr Alexander Turtshynov to be the interim president. Only on 22 February 2014, Mr Turtshynov, intimate friend of former Prime Minister Ms Julia Tymoshenko who was released from prison, was elected as head of parliament. In addition, parliament removed Foreign Minister Mr Leonid Koshara from office, an intimate friend of the dismissed President Yanukovych. Following the political revolution in Ukraine the opposition wishes to appoint politicians rather quickly for all important posts. The transitional government shall now be completely appointed by 25 February 2014 and new elections are planned for 25 May 2014 in Ukraine.

Now, a national bankruptcy is imminent following the dismissal of President Yanukovych. Mr Turtshynov said that Mr Yanukovych and his former head of government Mr Mykola Asarow are responsible for the difficult financial situation. They reportedly have ruined the country. In addition, the Russian government reportedly holds back financial aid to Ukraine. In the meantime, the EU and the USA guaranteed prompt financial aid for the country.

## **India**

### **No execution of death sentence for murderers of Rajiv Gandhi**

India’s Supreme Court has changed the death sentence for the three murderers of former head of government Mr Rajiv Gandhi to life sentences. The bomb attack in 1991 killed a total of 18 people. The judges said the reason for this is the unacceptable situation that the convicts’ petitions for mercy have not been processed for eleven years. In January already the court decided in a fundamental decision that a death sentence must not be executed in case of “unacceptable, inappropriate and longsome delays”.

In May 1991 Mr Gandhi was killed during a campaign rally in the federal state of Tamil Nadu in southern India by a female suicide bomber. 26 co-perpetrators had been sentenced to death for this crime but most of these judgments were cancelled at a later point of time. At present, India has almost 500 convicts on death row. Although no executions have been carried out for many years, however, there have been some executions again since November 2012 in rare cases.

### **Seven Maoist rebels killed**

A gun battle between the police and Maoist rebels in the state of Maharashtra in western India killed at least seven rebels. The Maoists fight according to their own statement for the rights of the poor rural population. The Indian government said that the left-wing extremists are the most important domestic threat. Since 2005 the rebel’s fight has killed more than 6,000 people and civilians and security forces have also been among the victims.

## **China**

### **On the situation of wife of the arrested laureate of the Nobel Peace Prize Mr Liu Xiaobo**

Since 2009, when Mr Liu Xiaobo, Nobel Peace Prize laureate of 2010, was sentenced to eleven years of imprisonment, his wife Ms Liu Xia has been under strict house detention in her flat in Beijing. Her unsound health has reportedly further deteriorated, in particular since the time when her brother Mr Liu Hui was

convicted to eleven years of imprisonment in June 2013 owing to fraud (also see BN dated 10 June 2013). Observers assume political motives for the judgment. When a hospital in Beijing stopped her treatment without giving any reasons for doing so and the authorities denied her leaving the country for medical treatment abroad, Ms Liu Xia has now been in another hospital since last week.

## **North Korea**

### **Reunion of family members from North and South Korea**

Members of 150 families, in most cases elderly people have been allowed to meet each other for the first time for decades from 20 to 25 February 2014. For this purpose, South Koreans must travel to the Mount Kumgang Resort in North Korea.