

Information Centre Asylum and Migration

Briefing Notes

26 August 2013

Afghanistan

Security situation

On 17.08.13, nine road workers were killed in a Taliban attack in western Herat province. In southern Helmand province, five people were killed when a roadside bomb exploded, and three women were killed on a different site by an improvised explosive device. On 20.08.13, a suicide attack claimed the lives of three persons, among them a police officer, in Puli Alam (eastern Logar province); eight people were wounded.

Opium cultivation intensified

According to a UN report, opium has been cultivated in 20 of the 34 Afghan provinces so far this year. Three years ago, only 14 provinces had been affected. With this increase, Afghanistan has extended its position as the world leader in opium cultivation, with 90 percent of all opium coming from the country. Besides, Afghanistan has become one of the leading producers of cannabis in recent years.

Pakistan

Duration of residence permits extended for Afghan refugees

The Pakistani government has announced that Afghan refugees will be able to remain until 31.12.15.

Civilians killed in Kashmir

Pakistan accuses India of having killed two women by shelling attacks in the Kashmir border region on 24.08.13. Since the beginning of August 2013, border incidents in the region have increased considerably, with both sides accusing each other of taking unprovoked action.

Floods claim at least 178 lives

A total of nearly 350 emergency shelters for flood victims have been set up in central Punjab province, southern Sindh province and in southwestern Balochistan. During the last three weeks, at least 178 people were killed by the floods, 855 were injured.

Iraq

Dozens killed in attacks

On 25.08.13, a total of 48 people lost their lives in several attacks. In Bakuba alone (Diyala province, 65 km northeast of Baghdad), eleven people were killed in a car bomb attack. In Baghdad, at least 18 people were killed in several attacks. In Salahuddin province, a car bomb attack killed five people and injured 21. In Nineveh province, five soldiers died when their vehicle was fired on by unidentified gunmen. Three other attacks in this province claimed the lives of one soldier and two civilians. Already on 23.08.13, a suicide attack in a busy park in Baghdad had killed 25 and wounded more than 50 people.

Syria

Suspected poison gas attack

The Syrian opposition is accusing the government of having launched an attack using poison gas near Damascus on 21.08.13, with a death toll of 1,300. The Syrian government is blaming the opposition for the attack. On 24.08.13, the aid organisation 'Doctors without Borders' stated that a total of 3,400 people had been brought to several hospitals showing 'neurotoxic symptoms', of whom 355 have died. On 25.08.13, the Syrian government assured that it would allow access to the UN inspectors. U.S. Defense Secretary Hagel said that a military intervention was included the options considered in reaction to the incident.

Lebanon

Bomb blasts in Tripoli

On 23.08.13, two bombs were detonated in the Lebanese city of Tripoli, killing 43 people and injuring 500. The blasts, the biggest and deadliest since the end of the civil war, were launched at the two Sunni Muslim mosques of al-Taqwa and al-Salam, the latter being located in the Mina area of Tripoli. Sunni Muslims are blaming the Hezbollah militia for the attacks.

Israel reacts with bombardment to rocket strike

On 22.08.13, rockets were fired from Lebanon into northern Israel. The Islamist Abdullah Azzam Brigade claimed responsibility for the attack. On 23.08.13, the Israeli air force launched an airstrike on a site belonging to the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command (PFLP-GC), which has close ties to Iran and the Hezbollah militia.

Tunisia

Anti-government protests

On 24.08.13, several thousands of protesters demanded the resignation of the government. Police observed the protest rally and searched bags and pockets. There were no violent clashes. The rally marked the beginning of a whole week of protests organised by opposition parties who have formed a coalition under the name 'National Salvation Front', demanding the government to step down and to install a cabinet of technocrats until new elections are held. The week of protest was announced after the attempt of the trade union UGTT to mediate between government and opposition failed on 23.08.13. Before, the opposition had rejected the government's invitation to enter talks on a technocrat administration, and continued to demand the dissolution of the government.

Libya

Attack on Egyptian Consulate

On 17.08.13, unidentified men threw an explosive device at the Egyptian Consulate in Benghazi from a car. According to local reports, the blast caused only material damage. The attack occurred during protest rallies organised by supporters of Islamist parties expressing solidarity with Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood. In this context, the Libyan government has so far maintained a neutral position.

Egypt

Muslim Brotherhood stages new rallies

For 23.08.13, supporters of ousted President Morsi announced a 'Friday of Martyrs' with protest rallies against the army at 28 Cairo mosques. Only a few thousand protesters turned out for the rallies which were mostly peaceful, not least due to the presence of a massive security force. Violent clashes were reported from the Nile Delta; in the city of Tanta, a Morsi supporter lost his life when the rally was attacked by a mob. Elsewhere, unknown attackers stormed the houses of Islamists.

The transitional government has shortened the curfew by two hours from 9pm to 6am, excluding Fridays, when the curfew remains for eleven hours.

Trial opened against Muslim Brotherhood leaders

On 26.08.13, trial in absentia was opened in Cairo against Muslim Brotherhood leader Mohammed Badie and his deputies Khairat el-Shater and Rashad Bayoumi. They are accused of having instigated violence among their supporters. As the defendants could not be brought to court for security reasons, proceedings were adjourned.

Mubarak released from prison

On 22.08.13, former Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak was released from prison, after a court had ruled that the maximum custodial term was exceeded. To avoid new unrest, he was placed under house arrest by the government. Since then, he has been staying in a military hospital. He had been sentenced to life imprisonment for the killing of demonstrators during the revolution of 2011. However, an appeals court overturned the sentence and ordered a retrial.

Iran

Increasing pressure on Christian converts

On 20.08.13, Vatican news agency Fides reported with reference to local observers that Iranian Christian convert Mohammad-Hadi Bordbar was sentenced to ten years in prison. Apparently, he was found guilty by a Tehran court of having committed a 'crime against state security' by distributing 12,000 bibles in pocket book format. After being baptised, he had met with other Christians in his house for prayers, which is another violation of Iranian law. According to process reports, police had found and confiscated more than 6,000 bibles and other Christian publications in the defendant's house in December 2012.

In another recent case, reported to Fides by the Iranian Christian agency 'Mohabat News', a court in Robat-Karim, south of Tehran, sentenced another Iranian Christian to one year in prison and two years of exile, for 'evangelization activities and distribution of bibles' and 'opposition to the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran'. In the ruling, the defendant was found guilty of 'holding prayer meetings at home and having spread doubts on Islamic principles among the young'. The man had been arrested in March 2013.

Meanwhile, Christian human rights organisations have voiced concern over the increasing pressure on Christian converts in Iran. Many churches holding services in Farsi language have been closed because the rising interest of young Iranians towards Christianity is regarded as a 'threat' by the Iranian authorities, the Fides report went on, citing the two NGOs 'Barnabas Team' and 'Christian Solidarity Worldwide'.

Albania

Return of work migrants

During the last two decades, approx. 1.4 million Albanians have left their home country, accounting for half of the current population of 2.8 million. Most of them have gone to Greece (around 700,000) and Italy (500,000). Since these two countries have been affected particularly hard by the economic crisis, many Albanians are under pressure to leave the countries again. In the time period 2008-2011, a total of approx. 83,000 Albanian migrants returned to their home country. Until now, the figure may have risen to more than 100,000.

Despite these return flows, the migratory potential must still be regarded as being high. The main reasons are a low per capita income, high unemployment rates (particularly among young people, minorities and recently also among returners), the sustained, suppressed economic situation as well as local conflicts and vendetta feuds that are still common in rural areas.

Russian Federation

Nine insurgents killed in Dagestan

On 20.08.13, the Russian National Anti-Terror Committee stated that nine insurgents were killed by the OMON police (special purpose mobile unit under the command of the interior ministry) in a house in the city of Buinaksk (Dagestan). Apparently, four police officers were wounded in the clash. The fatalities included Bamatkhan Sheikhov, prominent leader of a local extremist group. The authorities are blaming the group for 20 terror attacks in the region since the beginning of 2013 alone. Also, a deadly bomb attack on the imam of the main mosque of Buinaksk in March 2012 is attributed to this group.

According to information provided by the Russian interior ministry at the end of January 2013, there are up to 40 militant groups with approx. 600 active members in the northern Caucasus region. Around ten of them are operating in Chechnya, some 16 in Dagestan, 3 in Ingushetia, up to 5 in Kabardino-Balkaria and one in Karachay-Cherkessia.

Nigeria

Boko-Haram leader Shekau is allegedly dead

On 19.08.13, the spokesperson of the Joint Task Force (special unit consisting of police and army officers to fight the Islamist terror organisation Boko Haram) stated that Boko Haram leader Abubakar Shekau was dead. Apparently, he was wounded by gunshots in fights between the JTF and Boko Haram members near the insurgent group's camp in Sambisa Forest (northeast Borno State). Subsequently, he was taken to Amitchide, a border town in neighbouring Cameroon, the spokesman said. According to an intelligence report, it was 'greatly believed' that Shekau might have died in a hospital there between 25.07. and 03.08.13. Shekau's death has not yet been confirmed by independent sources. Military officials say that the person in a video message on 12.08.13 having the same appearance and voice as Shekau was a mere smokescreen.

Boko Haram attack in Borno state claims dozens of lives

On 19.08.13, suspected Boko Haram member attacked Demba village (near Baga town, northeastern Borno State), killing 35 people; other sources report 44 fatalities. Military officials said the assault was made after locals refused to co-operate with Boko Haram. During the previous week, soldiers had detained several Islamists in a raid in Demba village.

Somalia

80,000 Somalis returned from Kenya

The Kenyan interior ministry reported that approx. 80,000 Somali refugees have voluntarily returned to their home country.

Presently, there are roughly 500,000 Somali refugees in Kenya whom the Kenyan government plans to repatriate.

Swedish politician killed in Mogadishu

On 21.08.13, gunmen fired from a car passing Mogadishu university and killed 24-year-old Abdirahim Hassan, member of the youth wing of Sweden's Left Party. Ann-Margarethe Livh, also a member of the Swedish Left Party and Stockholm councillor, was injured. Mr Hassan had served as interpreter for Ms Livh when she gave a lecture at the university. Apparently, it was not an attack by radical Islamists, but rather an attempt to kidnap the female Swedish politician. The Somali police detained three suspected perpetrators.

Al-Shabaab assaults thwarted

On 21.08.13, units of the African Union Mission to Somalia (AMISOM) thwarted two attacks on one of their bases in Kismayo launched by al-Shabaab members, killing seven extremists.

For a long time, the southern port city had been vital in financing the al-Shabaab militia. In September 2012, the militia was driven out of the city by AMISOM and AU troops.

DR Congo

Fights near Goma

Following several weeks of ceasefire, fighting has again erupted between M23 rebels and government soldiers on 21.08.13, after the rebels' advance to the security zone surrounding Goma (capital of eastern Congolese North Kivu province), which was set up by the UN peacekeeping mission MONUSCO. When an M23 rebel attack on Goma claimed five lives on 22.08.13, MONUSCO soldiers supported by government troops attacked rebel positions near Kibati (approx. 15 km north of Goma). This was the first time that the new UN Intervention Brigade consisting of Tanzanian and South African soldiers intervened. On 24.08.13, Goma was hit again by two explosives; the population staged a protest rally demanding the UN to take determined action against the rebels. The protests escalated into violent fights with police and UN units. The fighting north of Goma continued during the weekend. On 26.08.13, AP news agency reported with reference to a medical doctor in a hospital that at least 82 people had died since early Sunday (25.08.), among them 23 government soldiers.

China

Alleged Uyghur terrorists killed

On 25.08.13, Radio Free Asia sent a report on a police crackdown on suspected Uyghur terrorists in Yilkiqi township in Kargilik county (in Chinese: Yecheng), Kashgar prefecture on 20.08.13. Unconfirmed sources report that at least 15 of the more than 20 suspect individuals were killed. Also, a police officers was reported to have died.

Myanmar

Anti-Muslim violence

After the arrest of a Muslim man on suspicion of attempting to rape a Buddhist woman, anti-Muslim violence broke out in Htan Gone village (near Kanbalu town, Sagaing region) on 25.06.13. The police had refused to hand the Muslim over to an angry crowd. Subsequently, a 1,000-strong mob torched more than 50 homes and shops in Htan Gone village.

UN Special Envoy says mob attacked his car

UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in Myanmar, Tomás Ojea Quintana, stated on 21.08.13 that he had been attacked by a mob two days before when he visited the city of Meikhtila. Some 200 people, apparently Buddhists, had attacked his car, kicking windows and doors, he said. Subsequently, he cancelled a planned visit to a camp of internally displaced Muslim people. The city of Meikhtila had been the scene of several clashes between Buddhists and Muslims last March. Radical Buddhists are accusing Mr Quintana (and also the international press and aid organisations) of one-sided support of the Muslim community.

Mr Quintana also voiced concern that the authorities had denied him access to Laiza city (Kachin State) which is controlled by the rebels of the Kachin Independence Army (KIA). There are tens of thousands of internally displaced people living in dire conditions in the region, having escaped from the fights between the military and the rebels that had erupted in 2011 (in May 2013, a ceasefire was negotiated). Mr Quintana ended his ten-day visit of Myanmar on 21.08.13.

Korea (Democratic People's Republic)

UN investigates human rights violations

There are some 120,000 people detained in prison camps in the country, with increasing reports of human rights violations, torture and murder. The United Nations have set up an official inquiry commission mandated to collect proof of human rights violations and to clearly name the persons responsible. The existence of such prison camps is being denied by North Korea.