

## Group 22 - Information Centre Asylum and Migration

# Briefing Notes

24 March 2014

### **Afghanistan**

#### **Security situation**

On 18 March 2014, a suicide attack on the market square in the city centre of Maimana (capital of Faryab province in northern Afghanistan) killed at least 16 civilians and wounded 47. On 20 March 2014, seven suicide attackers of the Taliban attacked a police station near the governor's headquarters in Jalalabad (capital of Nangarhar province in eastern Afghanistan). The gun battle - lasting for three hours - took the lives of the attackers, ten policemen and one civilian. 14 policemen were wounded. About 20 other people had to be treated in hospital. On 21 March 2014, four young men opened fire in the restaurant of the Serena Hotel in Kabul and killed at least nine people, among them five Afghans and four foreigners. Four were wounded. Afghan security forces shot the four attackers dead who were reportedly minors. The Taliban have taken responsibility for the attack. Their aim was reportedly to attack Afghan representatives of the authorities who had reportedly welcomed the Persian New Year with alcoholic drinks.

190 civilians were killed in the first two and a half months of 2014 in attacks with improvised explosive devices (IEDs); suicide attacks and more complex attacks such as the one on the Serena Hotel are also included in IEDs. This means an increase of 14% in contrast to the same period of time of the previous year.

### **Pakistan**

#### **Situation in north-west Pakistan**

On 19 March 2014, six civilians died in Shawal district (North Waziristan) when a mortar shell hit their house. A bomb attack in Peshawar (Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province) wounded at least five.

### **Iraq**

#### **General situation**

Attacks are still carried out every day. According to Iraq Body Count, 749 civilians have been killed in March so far (as of 22 March 2014). The news agency AFP says however (as of 19 March 2014) that the number of victims is lower, namely 333 people, among them 51 policemen, 24 service men, six members of the Sahwa and four extremists.

According to a press release, extremists are still trying to bring rural areas under their control. This is the reason why they blew up two bridges in Diyala province on 21 March 2014. The villages north-east of Baquba have reportedly been the scene of gun battles between the group "The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant" (ISIL) and the Iraqi armed forces and hundreds of civilians have reportedly fled.

## **Syria**

### **Turkey shoots down Syrian warplane**

On 23 March 2014, the Turkish air force shot down a Syrian warplane after it had reportedly violated Turkey's airspace, Turkey's Prime minister Mr Erdogan said. Syrian sources said that the jet fighter had attacked rebels on Syrian territory. Since 21 March 2014, Syrian rebels and government forces have been fighting for the control of the border crossing of Kasab (other spelling: Kesab) from the Syrian Latakia province to Turkey. On 21 March 2014, at least 21 people were reportedly killed in the fighting. Latakia province is mostly under government control. It is an Alawite stronghold.

### **Israel bombs posts of the Syrian army on the Golan Heights**

On 18 March 2014 and in the night to 19 March 2014, the Israeli armed forces attacked several posts of the Syrian armed forces on the Golan Heights (a training centre, an army headquarter and artillery guns) following a bomb attack which had wounded four Israeli soldiers on the Golan Heights. The Golan Heights have been occupied by Israel since 1967 and Syria has always requested their return. The situation in this area has been very tense since the outbreak of the civil war.

## **Lebanon**

### **Attempted kidnapping of bishop**

On 22 March 2014, the Maronite Bishop of Baalbek, Mr Semaan Atallah only hardly escaped kidnapping when travelling through the northern Bekaa plain. Two other cars had followed his car and forced it off the road however he was able to flee to an army checkpoint. Nothing has become known on the background of this attempted kidnapping.

### **Gun battle between Sunnis and Alawites**

In connection with the civil war in Syria, Sunnis and Alawites engaged in violent clashes in the north Lebanese seaside town of Tripoli where on 21 March 2014 at least seven people were killed.

### **Parliament confirms new cabinet**

On 20 March 2014, parliament confirmed with 96 of the 101 MPs Prime minister Mr Tammam Salam's cabinet comprising 24 MPs. After a period of approximately ten months, Mr Salam had been able to form a new government in February 2014 which includes both the Hezbollah and the coalition of Mr Hariri supported by the west.

## **Turkey**

### **Twitter is blocked**

On 21 March 2014, the access to the micro-blogging site Twitter had largely been blocked. Prior to this, Prime minister Mr Erdogan had already threatened in connection with the You-Tube publishing regarding the corruption affair that "we will pull out Twitter and other such things by the roots". The government said that Twitter was blocked because senior leaders at Twitter had reportedly ignored court decisions which had ordered them to delete certain links because of complaints of Turkish citizens. Numerous users evaded this blockade. Even President Mr Abdullah Gül ignored the ban and declared over his Twitter account that the ban is not acceptable. In addition, the judgment only allows that individual web sites may be blocked if these violate data protection provisions. He hopes that the ban will only be effective for a short period of time. The EU also expressed clear criticism.

## **Iran**

### **Prison leave for woman convicted to stoning**

Ms Sakineh Mohammadi-Ashtiani, sentenced twice to die by stoning, was granted prison leave due to good behaviour. After almost eight years in prison, she is reportedly granted prison leave until further notice said

the head of the Iranian Human Rights Committee Mr Mohammad Jawad Larijani. The case of Ms Mohammadi-Ashtiani caused worldwide attention in 2010. The Iranian judicial system convicted the woman - now 46 - in two proceedings for adultery and complicity in the murder of her husband to die by stoning. The execution was planned for July 2010. Although the sentence to die by stoning was suspended in face of massive international pressure, Ms Mohammadi-Ashtiani had however temporarily been threatened to be hanged. Eventually, the victim's family waived its right to the death sentence<sup>1</sup> and the woman's sentence was reduced to ten years of imprisonment.

## **Israel / Palestinian Autonomous Areas**

### **186 flats planned for settlers in eastern Jerusalem**

On 19 March 2014, the Israeli city council [*of Jerusalem*] announced to build another 186 flats in occupied eastern Jerusalem. This piece of information was announced by an opposition politician of the Jerusalem city council. According to him, 40 new houses will be built in the northern suburb of Pisgat Seev and 146 in Har Homa which is the newest Jewish settlement in eastern Jerusalem next to Bethlehem. The building permits granted by the city council is an especially critical topic because Palestinian President Mr Mahmoud Abbas has repeatedly emphasised that he will only then agree to the renewal of the direct peace talks agreed upon with Israel to last by the end of April when at the same time all settlement activities will be suspended. The spokesperson of the group "Peace now" (Shalom Achshav), Mr Lior Amichai – critical in view of the settlement policy – criticised the decision at this point of time when the international community is attempting to maintain the direct negotiations with the Palestinians. The latest information of the Jerusalem city council made at the beginning of February announced the erection of 558 settlers' homes in the occupied surroundings of the city.

## **Egypt**

### **Mass trial against Islamists**

The largest trial against supporters of the ousted President Mr Morsi has commenced in Minya owing to the violent protests of summer 2013. On 22 March 2014, the proceedings were opened against an initial number of more than 500 people. The court sentenced 529 people to death. The trial against another 700 defendants will begin on 25 March 2014.

### **Two people die in protests**

There have been gun battles with the security forces during protests of supporters of the ousted President Mr Morsi against the government in several towns. One protester died in Cairo and one in Alexandria.

### **Generals exchanged**

On 18 March 2014, field marshal Mr Abd al-Fattah al-Sisi, chief of the armed forces – who will probably run for president, however has not yet officially announced his candidationship – relieved several generals. Observers said that Mr al-Sisi who must resign himself from the armed forces as well if he runs for president, intends to install leaders loyal to him. This withdrawal will affect among others the commander of the Second Army, General Ahmed Wafsi. The Second Army competent for Sinai Peninsula has been without any lasting success in its fight against the Islamists linked to al-Qaida for the time being.

## **Algeria**

### **Protests ahead of the presidential elections**

In addition to the ailing President Mr Bouteflika who seems to have health problems, five other candidates were accepted for the presidential elections on 17 April 2014. Following the withdrawal of Prime minister Mr Sellal on 13 March 2013 who shall lead the election campaign, the hitherto minister for energy Mr

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<sup>1</sup> The policy of qisas in Sharia law is characterised by the principle of bodily revenge for murder and bodily injuries with the consequence of losing extremities. In this connection, the injured party or his or her family may on their part decide whether they insist on revenge or whether they will be satisfied with the payment of damages (blood money or "diyeh").

Yousfi will be the interim prime minister by the time the elections take place. There have been protests in several towns in the country against the fourth candidacy of Mr Bouteflika. On 15 March 2014, at least three people were killed in Ghardaia, approximately 600 kilometres south of Algiers in clashes between members of different ethnic groups. Violent actions between members of the Arab Chaamba community and the Berber Mozabites in Ghardaia have lasted for several days for the time being.

## **Guinea**

### **Ebola outbreak**

Reports of 23 March 2014 said that 59 people who have contracted the dangerous ebola virus have died in Guinea. Almost 100 people having contracted ebola have been registered. The Children's Fund Unicef warned that the epidemic has in the meantime spread to Guinea's capital Conakry where millions of people live. The authorities say that they found the ebola virus in the south of the country in February 2014 for the first time. The regions especially hit are the prefectures Macenta and Guéckédou on the border to Sierra Leone.

## **Sierra Leone**

### **Peace mission UNIPSIL ends**

On 31 March 2014, after 15 years in operation, the UN peace mission UNIPSIL (United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Sierra Leone) in Sierra Leone will come to an end. In a common ceremony on 6 March 2014, UN Secretary General Mr Ban and President Mr Koroma appreciated the mission's achievements in rebuilding the country following the civil war (1991 – 2002).

## **Nigeria**

### **Many fatalities owing to gun battles between Tiv and Fulani in Benue**

Early in the morning of 23 March 2014, fighters of the pastoral tribe of the Fulani in south-east Nigeria attacked Gbajimba (capital of the Guma Local Government Area, LGA), approaching from the federal state of Nasarawa in the neighbouring federal state of Benue. The attack was bloodily beaten back by armed youngsters of the tribe of Tiv (mainly crop farmers). Around 1 pm, several hundred fighters of the Fulani attacked again. They shot many members of the Tiv dead and burnt down their homes. Approximately 55 people were reportedly killed on both sides. A special rapporteur of the governor in Benue said that the conflict has lasted for three years now, mainly in the LGAs of Guma, Makurdi, Gwer West and Agatu in *[the federal state of]* Benue and that it has killed several hundreds of people as well as displaced at least 200,000 people.

### **Bomb attack of the Boko Haram near Bama**

In the evening of 20 March 2014, the security forces reported that a bomb exploded on a crowded market in the village of Nguro-Soye (also spelled Ngurosoye, near the town of Bama) in the federal state of Borno in the north-east which had reportedly been placed there by members of the Islamist organisation of the Boko Haram. Villagers however say that the Boko Haram has fired a rocket-propelled grenade on the village. The attack reportedly killed up to 32 people.

### **Number of victims of the Boko Haram conflict**

According to information of the UN news agency IRIN of 14 March 2014, approximately 350,000 people have fled the attacks of the Boko Haram in northern Nigeria since 2013. 290,000 of them found shelter within the country, 60,000 fled to Cameroon, Niger and to Chad.

## **Côte d'Ivoire [Ivory Coast]**

### **Intimate friend of former President Mr Gbagbo transferred to Den Haag**

Côte d'Ivoire has transferred Mr Ble Goude, the most intimate friend of former President Mr Laurent Gbagbo to the International Criminal Court. He is accused of having committed crimes against humanity and thus faces prosecution. The 42 year old is held responsible for murder, rape, targeted persecution and other crimes.

During the violent clashes following the controversial presidential elections in November 2010, Mr Ble Goude was at the top of the infamous Gbagbo patriotic militia "Young patriots". At the beginning of 2013, he was arrested in Ghana and then extradited to Ivory Coast. In October, the ICC made public an arrest warrant issued against Mr Ble Goude a little less than two years ago. Mr Gbagbo himself has already been under control of the ICC since November 2011 and is awaiting his trial. The 68 year old is the first former head of state who was arrested by this criminal court. By May 2011, more than 3,000 people had been killed in the bloody clashes for power with his rival Mr Alassane Ouattara who is today the country's president.

## **Somalia**

### **Blockade of relief goods**

The al-Shabaab refuses relief trucks access to the town of Hudur from which the Somali armed forces and the AMISOM have just recently chased away the Islamists (see BN dated 10 March 2014).

### **Offensive against the al-Shabaab**

On 21 March 2014, the deputy Somali foreign minister said that the militia Ahlu Sunna wal-Jamaa (ASWJ) which is an ally of the Somali government has started a military offensive against the al-Shabaab in the region of Galguduud in central Somalia.

### **Attacks on AMISOM**

The al-Shabaab has taken responsibility for a car bomb attack on a convoy of the AMISOM near a checkpoint at the Afgoye Corridor (connecting road between Mogadishu and the town of Afgoye) in the region of Lower Shabelle on 17 March 2014. Seven people were reportedly killed.

A car bomb attack in the night to 18 March 2014 on a hotel in Bulo Burde in the region of Hiiran and the subsequent gun battle of Somali and AMISOM soldiers against approximately ten al-Shabaab fighters reportedly killed 30 members of the armed forces, as the Islamists said. Eye witnesses however said that a total of 14 people were killed on both sides. On 13 March 2014, Bulo Burde was conquered by the Somali armed forces and AMISOM. There had already been several attacks on AMISOM and the Somali armed forces in the days prior to the attack on the hotel.

### **Attack on general in Puntland**

An ambush on a convoy of the Puntland security forces on 17 March 2014 in the village of Laag in the area of the town of Galgala (Bari region) took at least the lives of two people, among them the military commander of Galgala. A spokesperson of the al-Shabaab said that the military commander was the target of the attack.

## **Russian Federation**

### **Islamist leader Mr Doku Umarov presumably dead**

On 18 March 2014, an Islamist web site reported the death of Mr Umarov which is considered sympathetic to North Caucasus militants. The web site used the Arab fighter's name "Emir Doku Abu Usman". The latest news was that the warlord has repeatedly threatened to violently prevent the Olympic winter games in Sochi in February 2014. There was no information on the exact circumstances of his death. The Russian government has not yet confirmed the news. Mr Umarov has been seen as the emir of the self-styled so-called Caucasus Emirate. The group fights for an Islamist rule in the whole region of the Caucasus. The rebel leader was the most wanted Islamist in Russia and has taken responsibility for a number of acts of violence

in the whole country, among others the attacks on Moscow's airport Domodedovo in January 2011 and on Moscow's Metro in March 2010 with a total of 77 fatalities. The leader of the Chechnyan Republic Mr Ramsan Kadyrov had already announced Mr Umarov's death in the middle of January 2014.

## **Russian Federation / Ukraine**

### **Annexation of Crimea sealed**

Irrespective of all sanctions and protests of the West, Russia has carried out the controversial annexation of Crimea and has now complete military control over the peninsula. Following the State Duma's approval on 20 March 2014, the Federation Council voted on 21 March 2014 in favour of the absorption of the Ukrainian peninsula in the Black Sea. Only a little later on 21 March 2014, President Vladimir Putin signed the draft bills for the accession of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol to the Russian Federation. According to Russian law, Crimea has now finally become a part of the Russian Federation. As early as on 24 March 2014, the Russian rouble shall be introduced and old age pensions, salaries and wages shall be paid in roubles. On 23 March 2014, President Putin ordered that the peninsula's administration is to be restructured by the end of next week. This includes among others that police, civil defence, intelligence and other government bodies will act under Russian law.

### **Gas discount cancelled**

At the same time, Russia cancelled Ukraine's discount on the price of natural gas. The basis for this discount of 100 dollars per 1000 cubic metres each which had been granted since 2010 had been the use of a naval base on Ukrainian's peninsula Crimea. Now however, following the referendum of 16 March 2014, the Russian Black Sea Fleet is de jure no longer based in Ukraine but in Russia, said a spokesperson of Mr Putin.

### **Close cooperation between Ukraine and the EU**

On 21 March 2014 on its summit meeting in Brussels, the EU heads of state and government and Prime minister of the former Soviet Republic Mr Arsenij Yatseniuk signed a treaty designed for closer political co-operation. The interim Ukrainian President Mr Alexander Turtshinov declared that his country will never accept the separation of Crimea.

## **Vietnam**

### **Blogger again sentenced owing to criticism of regime**

On 19 March 2014, a court in Hanoi sentenced the blogger Mr Pham Viet Dao in accordance with article 258 of the Vietnamese criminal law owing to "abusing democratic freedoms to infringe on the interests of the state" to 15 months of imprisonment. In the pronouncement of his judgment the judge said that Mr Dao has "distorted the reputation of the top leaders, denounced them and was telling lies about them". His crimes are reportedly "dangerous for society and would raise fears in the public and weaken the people's trust in the leadership of the communist party". Mr Pham Viet Dao, former officer in the Vietnamese ministry of education, has become well-known in the social media due to his criticism of the one-party system and because he had criticised Vietnam's political leaders. Following his arrest in June 2013, the access to his web site has been blocked. As early as on 4 March 2014, the blogger Mr Truong Duy Nhat who had criticised the regime was jailed to two years of imprisonment.