

Group 22 – Information Centre Asylum and Migration

Briefing Notes

10 April 2017

Egypt

Palm Sunday attacks

Two bomb attacks targeting Coptic Christian churches claimed the lives of dozens on Palm Sunday marking the beginning of the Holy Week before Easter. In St. George Church in the northern city of Tanta, at least 27 people died; at least 17 people lost their lives in Alexandria's St. Marc's Cathedral. A total of approx. 120 individuals were wounded. ISIS has claimed responsibility for the bombings, warning of more attacks against Christians. President al-Sisi has announced the declaration of a three-months state of emergency as soon as the necessary constitutional measures including parliamentary consent have been completed. Before, he had ordered the immediate deployment of special forces from the military to assist police. After the attacks, Coptic protesters rallied against the government for lack of protection.

Christian Copts making up about 10 percent of Egypt's population; they largely enjoy freedom of worship and have generally coexisted peacefully with their Muslim neighbours. However, tensions and violence have been erupting time and again mainly in rural areas.

DR Congo

Kabila names Bruno Tshibala new DRC prime minister

On 7 April 2017, President Kabila, whose regular mandate had expired in December 2016, named Bruno Tshibala as prime minister of a new transitional government tasked to organise new presidential elections by the end of this year. This had been negotiated in a power transition agreement between the government and opposition forces signed on 31 December 2016 (see BN of 9 January 2017). Until a few weeks ago, Tshibala had served as the deputy secretary-general of the country's largest opposition party UDPS (Union for Democracy and Social Progress). However, following the death of UDPS-leader Etienne Tshisekedi on 1 February 2017, he left the party in dispute over the succession and was expelled from the UDPS in the beginning of March.

Observers say that Tshibala's nomination is a move likely to further divide Kabila's opponents. DR Congo's largest opposition coalition, known as 'Rassemblement' (which includes the UDPS and which, under the power-sharing December deal, was to choose the new prime minister), had named Etienne Tshisekedi's son Felix Tshisekedi (who was chosen as his father's successor) to be the country's new prime minister. However, President Kabila had rejected this option. In turn, Felix Tshisekedi has called Tshibala's nomination a deviation from the December political agreement. The UDPS has called for a mass rally to be staged in Kinshasa on 10 April 2017 in protest over the non-implementation of the December 2016 deal.

FYR Macedonia

Continuing crisis

Since the parliamentary elections of December 2016, the country has had no government. While the ruling conservative VMRO-DPMNE had won the election with a narrow margin against the Social Democrats (SDSM), it has failed to form a new government. Since then, President Gjorge Ivanov has refused to give the Social Democrats a mandate to form a government, despite the fact that the SDM has meanwhile established a parliamentary majority with the Albanian minority Democratic Union for Integration (DUI). The DUI calls for a revision of the Macedonian constitution and demands that ethnic Albanians be granted the status of state-constituting nation and that their language be raised to the status of second official language throughout

Macedonia. President Ivanov, however, takes the view that a coalition with the DUI would endanger both the unity and the sovereignty of the country. In March, tens of thousands took to the streets in protest against the planned coalition, striving to prevent the strengthening of ethnic Albanians' rights. So far, the mediation efforts of the EU have not been successful.

Gambia

Parliamentary elections

On 6 April 2017, Gambia's new parliament was elected. With a voter turnout of 42 percent, Gambian President Barrow's United Democratic Party (UDP) won 31 of 53 parliamentary seats. 238 candidates representing nine different political parties stood for election.

Guinea

Large-scale measles epidemic

Since the beginning of the year, there have been 3,468 confirmed cases and 14 deaths due to measles in Guinea, with most cases in the Conakry and Nzérékoré districts. During the Ebola epidemic, routine measles vaccination was drastically reduced due to fear that children might be infected with the Ebola virus when coming to the health facilities. To contain the measles epidemic, the Guinean ministry of health is mobilising 126 teams spread out across 164 vaccination sites in order to vaccinate all children from six months up to 10 years old.

Morocco

New government formed

King Mohammed VI has appointed a new coalition government. It is headed by prime minister Saad Eddin El Othmani (Party of Justice and Development PJD) who was named last month and has forged an alliance of conservative, socialist and pro-market parties. Together, they hold 240 seats in the 395-seat lower house of parliament. On 14 April 2017, the government will be formally invested by parliament. Critics say that there are too many close allies of the King in the new government.

Serbia

Ongoing protests against presidential election victory of PM Vučić

Thousands of Serbians, mostly young people, are protesting against the presidential election victory of PM Aleksandar Vučić who took 55 percent of the ballot on 2 April 2017. Every evening, rallies have been staged in Belgrade, Novi Sad, Nis and some smaller cities. On 8 April, a total of 10,000 gathered in Belgrade and demanded the resignation of Vučić for electoral fraud, corruption, autocratic rule and social grievances. Critics say that Vučić now has total power in his hands and is dominating parliament, judiciary and media alike. They fear that a new autocracy is on the rise in Serbia.

Vučić is a member of the conservative, liberal economic Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) and has been head of government since 2014. His aim is to lead Serbia into the EU while simultaneously preserving partnership relations with Russia. Before, Vučić had been a member of the ultra-nationalist Radical party and served as propaganda minister for Slobodan Milošević from 1998 until 2000.

Somalia

Attacks

On 5 April 2017, a car bomb exploded in central Mogadishu close to the ministry of homeland security and that for youth and sport, killing at least seven people and destroying a nearby restaurant.

On 6 April, at least 20 civilians were killed when their minibus was hit by a roadside bomb in Golweyn village (Lower Shabelle region). Al-Shabaab has denied responsibility for the attack, saying that they were

not operating in the area. On 7 April, three civilians lost their lives when Al-Shabaab fighters shelled a residential area in the Wadajir district of Mogadishu. On 9 April, at least 17 soldiers and civilians were killed when a suicide bomber attacked a military convoy on a busy street near the defence ministry. Apparently, the attack was targeted at the newly appointed chief of army staff, General Mohamed Ahmed Jimale Irfid, who remained uninjured. Al-Shabaab has claimed responsibility for the attack.

Military operations

On 3 April 2017, AMISOM, the federal government and the Somali national army announced a major operation to secure the main supply routes with a view to facilitating the delivery of relief goods to rural areas. The special envoy of the African Union said that a possible route might run from Mogadishu to Baidoa (Bay Region), which is about 150 km northwest of Mogadishu. According to AMISOM, operations are planned to cover up to twelve miles on both sides of the side in order to weaken Al-Shabaab's control of the rural areas.

On 6 April 2017, President Mohamed Abdullahi Farmajo declared Somalia a war zone and ordered the army to prepare for a new military offensive. He offered an amnesty to Al-Shabaab fighters who surrender within 60 days. The new campaign will at first be aimed at improving the security situation in Mogadishu, he said. Since Farmajo was elected president in February, Al-Shabaab fighters have intensified their attacks in Mogadishu.

Civilians killed by AMISOM soldiers

A member of parliament of the Southwest State confirmed that AMISOM soldiers killed a family of five near Barawe (Lower Shabelle region) on 6 April 2017. AMISOM has not issued a statement on the event. According to Al-Shabaab, at least ten civilians lost their lives in the incident.

Deaths from drought and cholera

According to information provided by the ministry of health, at least 407 Somalis have died from drought and cholera since February. Currently, more than 18,000 people are treated in hospitals. The most affected regions are Bay, Bakool, Middle and Lower Shabelle, the ministry said. The UN estimate that more than half of Somalia's population of about 11.2 million is in need of humanitarian assistance.

Acts of piracy

On 4 April 2017, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime UNODC warned against an increasing risk for merchant ships to become victims of acts of piracy off the Somali coast. Last month, Somali pirates seized an oil tanker, a fishing vessel and two merchant ships, UNODC stated. The latest cases of piracy occurred off the coast of Puntland near the easternmost point of the Horn of Africa. UNODC said that the resurgence of piracy is caused by the drought, disputes on illegal fishing and the diminishing presence of maritime security forces.

South Sudan

South Sudanese escape to Sudan

According to UN information, more than 60,000 South Sudanese have fled to neighbouring Sudan from famine and war since the beginning of 2017. By the end of the year, UNHCR expects about 180,000 more refugees. Apparently, over than a million children are acutely malnourished in South Sudan. The Sudanese Commissioner for Refugees has described the situation as distressing and deplored the lack of international aid. At present, 365,000 South Sudanese citizens are living in Sudan.

Syria

Toxic gas attack in Khan Sheikhun

The examination of victims in the southern Turkish province of Adana, conducted by representatives of the World Health Organisation (WHO) and of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), has revealed that toxic gas was used in the attack carried out against the rebel-controlled city of Khan Sheikhun in Idlib province on 4 April 2017. The injured people showed typical symptoms occurring after exposure to nerve agents, the organisations said. Media report that also the Turkish minister of justice

Bozdag confirmed the use of chemical weapons by the Syrian government forces. Also, the US government holds the Syrian government responsible for the attack.

Human rights observers say that at least 86 people were killed in the attack and dozens more wounded. However, the Russian ministry of defence stated that the Syrian government troops had not actively used poison gas in Khan Sheikhun, but rather their air force hit a store of toxic substances used by rebel forces.

On 6 April, the US reacted to the poison gas attack by firing 60 cruise missiles from US warships deployed in the eastern Mediterranean at a Syrian air base in Homs province, from where the suspected poison gas attack on Khan Sheikhun had apparently been launched.

Uganda

Bidi Bidi is the world's largest refugee camp

So far, the conflict in neighbouring South Sudan has forced more than 800,000 people to escape to Uganda. The UN expects about 400,000 more refugees to arrive during the year. In March, about 2,800 refugees came to Uganda per day on average. The Bidi Bidi camp in northern Uganda (Yumbe district) hosting about 274,000 refugees, is now believed to be the largest refugee camp worldwide, outpacing Dadaab in Kenya (which is hosting mainly refugees from Somalia). To avoid the overcrowding of Bidi Bidi camp, no newcomers have been let in since December 2016. For newly arrived refugees, other camps have been opened.

Vietnam

German human rights award given to civil rights campaigner

On 5 April 2017, the Vietnamese lawyer and civil rights activist Nguyen Van Dai was awarded the human rights award of the German Association of Judges. Since December 2015, Dai has been held in custody on charges of propaganda against the state. He had planned to meet with EU representatives who were investigating the human rights situation in Vietnam.