

Group 22 - Information Centre Asylum and Migration

Briefing Notes

30 March 2015

Afghanistan

Security situation

Numerous security incidents occurred once again last week.

The main ones include:

a suicide bombing near a cricket ground in Ghazni (in south-east Afghanistan) on 23 March 2015 that killed six children.

A suicide bombing was carried out on a bus in Wardak province (central Afghanistan), killing 13 passengers. Four passengers were killed by masked gunmen in Ghazni province on 24 March 2015.

Two suicide attacks were carried out in the capital Kabul on 25 and 29 March 2015, killing one MP and at least ten civilians and wounding another 40 persons.

Further attacks were carried out on security forces and military operations, also claiming civilian casualties, in Helmand, Zabul (in the south), Ghazni, Khost (so-called cross-border shelling from Pakistan), Paktika (south-east), Faryab (north), Badakhshan, Takhar (north-east), Jawzjan (north), Parwan and Wardak (central Afghanistan).

Suspects arrested in connection with lynching of woman

According to official sources, 42 suspects, including police officers, were arrested in Kabul on 23 March 2015 in connection with the lynching of a woman on 19 March 2015 (she reportedly burned a Koran, cf. BN of 23 March 2015).

Pakistan

Another attack on a church in Lahore

Following two suicide bombings at two Christian churches in Lahore on 15 March 2015 (cf. BN of 16 March 2015), attackers launched another attack on a church in Lahore. Two passersby sustained minor injuries. The attackers fled after security guards fired warning shots.

Turkey

Security laws tightened

The Parliament adopted a new law on demonstrations on 27 March 2015. It makes it easier for police to arrest protesters and to use firearms at demonstrations. It will also be easier to ban demonstrations. A new Internet law has also been adopted that will enable the government to close down websites without a judicial decision.

Parties in opposition and human rights organisations criticise the reforms. They are accusing Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan of setting up a police state and of hindering the peace process with Kurds.

Syria

Military alliance seizes Idlib

On 26 March 2015, militants from a military alliance made up of al-Nusra Front and other Syrian rebel groups advanced into the city of Idlib. Idlib is the capital of the Idlib Governorate which borders on Turkey and had been under the control of the Assad regime until then. The city is an important junction between the capital Damascus and Aleppo. According to the "Syrian Observatory for Human Rights" in London, government troops reportedly killed prisoners before they pulled out of the city. At least 130 persons were killed in the hostilities.

Refugee aid reaps criticism

The relief organisation Oxfam said in the run-up to the third donors conference for Syria in Kuwait on 31 March 2015 that there is a lack of aid for Syrian refugees. The humanitarian appeals by the United Nations and the Red Cross for 2015 and overall appeals are only 9.8 percent funded so far. Approximately EUR 8 billion is needed for 2015 to assist around 18 million people in Syria and neighbouring countries. Oxfam said that although Germany had met its financial obligations, it could take in more refugees. The President of the World Food Programme of the United Nations also expressed his concern. He said the money for Syrian refugees in Jordan will only last until April.

Army surrounds border town in Lebanon

On 27 March 2015, Lebanese security sources claimed that the Syrian army supported by Hezbollah fighters had surrounded the town of Sabani along the border with Lebanon.

Palestinian Autonomous Territories

Large number of Palestinian civilians killed in 2014

According to a UN report published on 26 March 2015, the number of Palestinian civilians killed in the conflict between Israel and the Palestinian Autonomous Territories in 2014 equals the number killed in the six-day war in 1967. Around 1,500 civilians were killed in the Gaza strip alone. More than 11,000 persons were wounded and around 100,000 Palestinians lost their homes. The death toll on the Israeli side was 73. Owing to the ongoing conflict in the Middle East, the UN considers the life, physical safety and freedom of civilians to be under threat.

Yemen

Airstrikes against Houthi militia

Saudi King Salman issued the command for airstrikes by a Saudi-led alliance on 25 March 2015. Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Bahrain, Qatar, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, Jordan, Morocco, Sudan and Pakistan are all involved in Operation Decisive Storm. The US is providing logistics support. Iran has condemned the intervention. A spokesperson for the Houthi rebels has said they will continue with the revolution.

Côte d'Ivoire

Mother convicted of circumcising her daughter

A court in the city of Bouaké has sentenced a mother who circumcised her four-year-old daughter to one year behind bars. A relative accompanying the woman was fined CFA 360,000 (approx. EUR 550) and also received a prison sentence. The woman who carried out the procedure is on the run. The public prosecutor said the sentence was a "warning" and threatened stricter prosecution in the future. Prison sentences for female genital mutilation were handed down for the first time in 2012. Although female genital mutilation is prohibited, it is practised regularly by Muslims in the north and Animists in the west. According to UNICEF, 38 percent of women throughout the country have undergone female genital mutilation.

West Africa/Ebola

Situation report on Ebola virus disease (EVD)

After *Guinea* suffered a setback in its fight against Ebola with a rash of new cases, a health emergency was declared in five regions in the west and south-west on 28 March 2015. Precautionary measures are to be taken in these regions for a period of 45 days initially. They will include possible lockdowns and tighter measures for funerals. According to the government, there is resistance in some parts of the country against the measures aimed at stemming the spread of the deadly disease.

Because no new cases of EVD had been reported since 5 March 2015, *Liberia* was expecting to be declared Ebola-free by mid to late-April. However, these hopes were dashed on 28 March 2015 with the death of a woman who last week became the country's first new Ebola patient in more than a month. However, there are initial positive interim results for tests establishing the effectiveness and safety of Ebola vaccinations which around 600 persons have taken part in in Liberia since early April 2015. There are plans to expand the tests to over ten thousand people.

Sierra Leone

New Vice-President

Following the dismissal of former Vice-President Sam-Sumana on 18 March 2015, President Koroma swore in a new Vice-President of the Republic of Sierra Leone, former Ambassador to China, Victor Bockarie Foham on 19 March 2015.

Nigeria

Presidential and parliamentary elections

Despite several attacks by the terrorist organisation Boko Haram, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has said the presidential and parliamentary elections held on 28 and 29 March 2015 were, by and large, conducted peacefully and in an orderly fashion. Owing to delays in the election procedure caused by technical problems with card readers used to check voters' fingerprints, voting in Nigeria's general election scheduled for 28 March was extended by one day in 300 out of 150,000 polling stations. Hundreds of supporters of the main opposition party APC took to the streets in Port Harcourt (the capital of Rivers state in the south) owing to irregularities at the polls. No result has been announced yet. Forecasts predict a neck-and-neck race between incumbent Goodluck Jonathan and his opponent Muhammadu Buhari.

Boko Haram attacks during the elections

On 28 March 2015, suspected Boko Haram militants attacked the town of Buratai (Biu Local Government Area (LGA)), killing 25 persons. In Gombe state, Boko Haram killed one police officer and seven civilians in Shole village (Nafada LGA) and another police officer in the neighbouring town of Biri. In Biri, terrorists seized election documents and card readers. Boko Haram leader Abubakar Shekau had threatened to disrupt the elections.

Boko Haram headquarters recaptured

On 27 March 2015, the army announced that it had recaptured the city of Gwoza (Borno state, Local Government Area of Borno State). Boko Haram had captured the city as its headquarters in August 2014.

Sudan

Rebel attack on South Kordofan

According to a spokesperson for the rebel organisation SPLM-N (Sudan People's Liberation Army-North; the active branch of the south Sudanese SPLM), units of the organisation have captured a garrison in the town of Habila (a small town in South Kordofan), killing 54 troops.

The government in Khartoum denies the allegations. It claims the army was trying to foil an attempted sabotage. Sudan has been fighting the SPLM-N in Blue Nile and South Kordofan since 2011.

South Sudan:

President Kiir's term of office extended

South Sudan's Parliament extended President Salva Kiir's term of office and the legislative term of Parliament for another three years by a majority vote on 24 March 2015. According to the parliamentary spokesperson, the extension is intended to facilitate a peace agreement between the rebels and the former Vice-President Riek Machar. According to the constitution, presidential and parliamentary elections must be held before 9 July 2015.

12,000 child soldiers

According to estimates by UNICEF, the government and rebel organisations in South Sudan are using at least 12,000 child soldiers. In February alone, hundreds of children were abducted (cf. BN of 23 February 2015).

Following an agreement concluded in late January 2015 with UNICEF on the release of 3,000 child soldiers, the SSDA-Cobra Faction (South Sudan Democratic Movement-Cobra Faction) militia released 250 child soldiers on 22 March 2015.

Somalia

Attack on a hotel in Mogadishu

At least 21 persons were killed when a car bomb detonated in front of a hotel in Mogadishu and in the subsequent raid by Islamist terrorists on 27 March 2015. Those killed include civilians, security officers and government troops as well as Somalia's Ambassador to the United Nations in Geneva. At least 20 persons were wounded. Somali troops managed to put an end to the siege after an exchange of fire lasting several hours. Al-Shabaab has claimed responsibility for the attack.

Democratic Republic of Congo

UN mandate extended

On 26 March 2015, the UN Security Council extended the mandate of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) peacekeeping troops who are deployed mainly in the Democratic Republic of Congo for a further year until 31 March 2016. At the same time, it resolved to reduce the number of troops by 2,000 (currently 21,000 troops). The UN Security Council accommodated the Congolese government which had called for the force to be reduced by 50 percent. The potential maximum strength of the force (around 22,000 troops) remains unchanged.

Kosovo

Swoop on human traffickers

Austrian police swooped on a human trafficking network that reportedly smuggled around 10,000 persons from Kosovo to western Europe in 2014. 77 suspects were arrested in several European countries. Europol and the judicial authority Eurojust were involved in the investigations. The trafficking route ran from Kosovo via Serbia, Hungary and Austria. The destination countries were France, Germany and the Benelux countries. The traffickers charged EUR 2,800 per person or EUR 7,000 for a family. Some people were promised wonderful living conditions to persuade them to leave their home country. A Bosnian national is thought to be the main culprit. He was reportedly in charge of the accomplices, nearly all of whom originate from Kosovo.

Ukraine

Fighting rages on in eastern Ukraine despite the ceasefire

The ceasefire agreed between the pro-Russian separatists and the Ukrainian Army in eastern Ukraine in mid-February 2015 has repeatedly been breached. Both sides have accused each other of dozens of attacks on 28/29 March 2015. Observers from the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe on site say that hostilities have increased. They say the seaside town of Shyrokyne near the port of Mariupol has come under fire. Shyrokyne is under the control of the rebels.

Sri Lanka

Ban on Tamil diaspora organisations under scrutiny

Prime Minister Maithripala Sirisena, who was elected in January 2015, has announced his plans to review the list of "foreign terrorists". Several groups and hundreds of Tamils are to be removed from the list. This is intended to be an initial step towards "reconciliation with the largest ethnic minority".

With this move, Sirisena is demonstrating that he is charting a different course than his predecessor Mahinda Rajapaksa, who basically accused all Tamil diaspora organisations of having links with the LTTE (Liberation Tamil Tigers of Eelam) and who tried to prevent rebel organisations which disbanded in May 2009 from regrouping by imposing bans.

Amnesty for deserters

Whereas the former government had stepped up the search for deserters just a year ago, the new government announced that it will grant an amnesty to cover all military deserters who report to their respective regimental headquarters between 2 April and 16 April 2015. Army circles assume that amnesty will be granted to around 41,000 troops who deserted the army particularly in the last months of the civil war.

China

Activists in detention fall ill

Two of the five female activists who were arrested on 6 and 7 March 2015 because they were distributing stickers calling for action against sexual harassment just before International Women's Day (8 March 2015) have been admitted to hospital. The human rights organisation Human Rights named them as Wang Man and Wu Rongrong.