

Group 41 – Information Centre Asylum and Migration

Briefing Notes

20 January 2014

Afghanistan

Security situation

On 16 January 2014 several civilians were killed in the NATO air raid in the province of Parwan in eastern Afghanistan. The Afghan government said that seven children and one woman were killed, whereas NATO reported the death of two civilians. On 17 January 2014 three attackers committed an attack on a Lebanese restaurant located in the diplomatic quarter in Kabul. One of the attackers died when he blew himself up at the door of the restaurant, the others have exchanged fire with security forces. This attack killed the attackers themselves and at least 21 people, among them many foreigners. The Taliban have taken responsibility for the attack. A spokesperson declared that this suicide bombing was a revenge for the NATO air raid and a targeted killing of foreigners. The Afghan government, however, said that foreign intelligence services were responsible for the attack. Without saying so explicitly, this statement targets Afghanistan's neighbouring country Pakistan.

Increase in civilian victims in 2013

According to information of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) the number of civilian deaths and casualties in the first eleven months in 2013 has risen by 10% compared to the same period of time of the previous year. According to these numbers, the downward tendency of 2012 has thus changed and the numbers of victims have now become similar to those of 2011 where the highest numbers so far had been counted. As UNAMA said, between 1 January 2013 and 30 November 2013 there were 7,899 civilian victims (2,730 fatalities and 5,169 injured people). Reportedly, government opposition groups such as the Taliban and others are responsible for three quarters of the victims. The majority of victims (49% in total) are due to improvised explosive devices (IED) and suicide bombings. What is alarming in particular is that the number of children among the victims has risen by 36% in contrast to 2012. UNAMA recorded 491 killed children and 1,018 injured children as a consequence of the armed conflict. And there are also 1,081 civilians who were killed (740) or injured (341) in targeted attacks, as UNAMA said. These people had worked for the government or foreign armed forces and/or government opposition groups assumed that they supported these organisations.

Additional and more detailed information regarding victims of the conflict, the situation of prisoners and on violence against women can be found in the "Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan and on the achievements of technical assistance in the field of human rights in 2013" dated 10 January 2014.

Opium production has risen since 2001

According to a report for the US Congress the land being used to cultivate opium poppy has risen from 8,000 hectares in 2001 to 209,000 hectares today. The Taliban reportedly earn up to 400 million dollars per year with the narcotics trade. Some analysts fear that Afghanistan could become a "narco-criminal state".

Pakistan

Security situation

An explosion of a remote controlled bomb in a mosque in Peshawar killed at least nine people on 16 January 2014. More than 60 people were injured. A bomb attack onto a military convoy in Bannu (province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, north-west Pakistan) on 20 January 2014 killed at least 20 soldiers, 30 others were injured. The Pakistani Taliban have taken responsibility for the attack. Another terror attack carried out by the Taliban on 20 January 2014 near the Pakistani army head quarters in Rawalpindi killed at least nine people and injured twelve.

The Pakistan Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS) counted 687 murders on the basis of religious grounds last year, 22% more than in 2012. In total 4,725 people were victims of terrorist attacks and other acts of violence.

Syria

Syrian National Coalition willing to attend Syria peace talks

On 18 January 2014 the opposition alliance Syrian National Coalition decided with 58 to 14 votes in a vote in Istanbul to attend the Syria peace talks starting on 22 January 2014 in Montreux/Switzerland.

UN Secretary-General also invites Iran to attend the Syria peace talks

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon declared on 19 January 2014 he also invited the Iranian government to attend the Syria peace talks. After talks with the Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammed Jawad Sarif he thinks that the Iranian government supports the plan for a political transition in Damaskus, something which was the result of a conference in 2012. Western states and countries from the Gulf region had said that they were sceptical about Iran's participation in the conference. As a consequence of the invitation of Iran the Syrian National Coalition threatened that it would pull out. The USA too said that they are concerned.

Offers of the Syrian government

Only a few days prior to the planned Syria peace talks and after a meeting with his Russian counterpart Mr Lawrow, the Syrian Foreign Minister Mr Walid al-Muallim offered the rebels a cease fire for Aleppo where heavy fighting continues and he offered an exchange of prisoners.

Lebanon

Rocket fire kills seven

The civil war in Syria also destabilises Lebanon. The number of acts of violence is on the rise. Rocket fire on 17 January 2014 has left at least seven people dead and fifteen others wounded in the Lebanese border town of Aarsal.

Hearings taken up against alleged assassins of Hariri

On 16 January 2014 the UN special tribunal in The Hague started hearings against four Lebanese Shiites who are members of the militant Islamist Hezbollah group. They are accused of having planned the attack on former Lebanese Head of Government Rafik Hariri on 14 February 2005 when a car bomb killed him and 22 other people. The accused have not been arrested yet. The hearings are made without them. Pro-Iranian Hezbollah deny a participation in the attack. At the same time when the hearings started, a car bomb exploded on 16 January 2014 in the town of Hermel (in the north-east) which is regarded as a stronghold of the Hezbollah. This bomb killed three people and injured more than 40.

Israel/Palestinian Autonomous Areas

Netanjahu travelled to Jordan for peace talks

On 16 January 2014 the Israeli Head of Government Mr Benjamin Netanjahu surprisingly travelled to Jordan in order to talk to King Abdullah II on the peace process in the Middle East. They in particular discussed how a final peace agreement could intensify the cooperation in terms of security matters with Jordan, Israel and the Palestinian Autonomous Areas. A main topic of conflict is the question how to secure the border on the river Jordan. The President of the Palestinian National Authority Mr Mahmud Abbas was also present in Amman. After the meeting, official sources said that they discussed how “to fulfil Palestinian expectations in this decisive phase and how to protect Jordan’s own interests at the same time”. The background is that US Secretary of State Mr John Kerry is trying to induce Israelis and Palestinians to sign a framework agreement soon.

Israel releases well-known Hamas leader

On 19 January 2014 after more than two years in prison Israel released the well-known leader of the militant Islamist Palestinian organisation Hamas Mr Hassan Jussef from prison. Mr Jussef, one of the co-founders of the Hamas and member of the Palestinian Legislative Council in Ramallah, was arrested in November 2011 owing to membership in an illegal organisation. A dozen supporters greeted him at the checkpoint Beitunya to the West Bank.

Yemen

Iranian diplomat shot dead by unknown persons

On 18 January 2014 an Iranian diplomat was killed in an attack in the Yemenite capital of Sanaa. The attackers are unknown. The relationship between the Shiite dominated Islamic Republic of Iran and Yemen with a mainly Sunni population is tense. Among others Yemen blames Iran for supporting the Shiite Saidi rebels in northern Yemen. In July last year an Iranian diplomat was displaced in Sanaa. Until today he has been in his hijacker’s hands.

Turkey

Corruption affair

In connection with the corruption investigations, also public prosecutors were relocated on 16 January 2014 for the first time. According to the High Judicial Council (HSYK), 20 public prosecutors from Istanbul were relocated to different provinces and among them was Istanbul’s Supreme Public Prosecutor. At the same time the High Judicial Council announced that it had given its consent to carry out corruption investigations against leading public prosecutors. On 17 January 2014 numerous employees were dismissed from public supervisory authorities and the media. Turkish media reports said that also three top officials of the Banking Supervisory Committee BDDK lost their jobs, five department managers were dismissed at the Regulatory Office for Telecommunications as well as a dozen of senior editors and department managers at the public TV station TRT.

In addition, specific numbers have become known in this corruption scandal for the first time. According to this piece of information, the public prosecutor’s office accuses four former ministers of having received corrupting gifts of more than 44 million euros all together.

In the meantime Prime Minister Erdogan aims at reforming the judiciary which would lead to the fact that the government would gain more powers in the appointment of judges and public prosecutors. Parliamentarians of the opposition say that this is “against the Constitution” and they request to withdraw these plans. This controversial bill plans among others to introduce increased political control of the High Judicial Council, a nominally independent control body in the judiciary. In future the Ministry of Justice shall reportedly have the last word when people are placed in key functions in the judiciary.

Protests against internet law

On 18 January 2014 there were violent clashes between protesters and security forces on Taksim square during a demonstration against a planned internet law. After incendiary projectiles had been thrown out of the crowd onto policemen, these used water cannons and teargas to put an end to the demonstration.

The law foresees reportedly to allow the Turkish Regulatory Office for Telecommunications to block websites which are accused of violating privacy without a judicial order. In addition, internet user data shall reportedly be stored for two years. Critics think that this would be a widening of state control of the internet and they speak of censorship. The government declared the law's main function will only be the protection of children and privacy.

Egypt

Constitution approved

According to the electoral commission on 18 January 2014 the constitutional draft was adopted with a turnout of 38.6% with 98.1% of the votes. Observers criticise that there was no independent election observation across the country.

The Muslim Brotherhood had called for a boycott of the referendum. Whereas on 14 January 2014, the first day of the vote, eleven people were killed in clashes across the country, the second day of the vote was mainly calm.

The new constitution guarantees among others equality between men and women, it protects the Christian minority and forbids the creation of parties on the basis of religion. The armed forces will continue to have the real power in the country by at least 2022. They have been allowed to appoint the Minister of Defense in the next eight years.

This constitution replaces the old constitution of an Islamist character which was adopted under President Morsi in December 2012 with a turnout of 32.9% with 63.8% of the votes.

People killed during protests against the constitution

At least five supporters of former President Morsi who was overthrown, were killed during protests against the new constitution. Two protesters were killed during clashes with security forces in Fajum. Riots in Cairo took three other lives.

Libya

State of exception

On 19 January 2014 after continued fighting in the south of the country, the Libyan government ordered a state of exception in this region. The General National Congress came together to an extraordinary session after attackers had stormed an air base in the south of the country. In addition the country's armed forces were put on alert. In southern Libya hostile tribes had been fighting for days. According to the Libyan Ministry of Defense the situation has reportedly been under control in the meantime on the air base and in the nearby town of Sebha.

Algeria

Presidential elections

The presidential elections shall reportedly take place on 17 April 2014. This is what the acting President Abdelaziz Bouteflika decided on 17 January 2014 after he had returned from France where he had been in hospital again. Mr Bouteflika has not decided yet whether he will run again for a fourth term of office. In contrast to this former Algerian Prime Minister Ali Benflis has announced his candidanship already. Mr Benflis was Prime Minister from 2000 up to his dismissal in 2003 by Mr Bouteflika. In 2004 he was his rival candidate in the presidential elections. At that time a large part of the governing FLN party supported him, however, he only obtained six per cent of the votes.

Nigeria

Anti gay law effective

It became public on 13 January 2014 that President Goodluck Jonathan had signed the “Same Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Bill” – a law banning same sex marriages – on 7 January 2014 in spite of international protests. The law came into force with this signature and stipulates 14 years of imprisonment for marriages and registered partnerships between two women or two men. People who attend such a ceremony or support it are threatened with ten years of imprisonment. In addition, somebody who “directly oder indirectly shows his or her romantic relationship to someone of the same sex publicly” may also be prosecuted with ten years of imprisonment. The same penalty applies to the foundation and support of clubs, organisations or other institutions for gay men and women. On 13 January 2014 US Secretary of State John Kerry criticised Nigeria’s government for the fact that it restricts the freedom of assembly and expression of their citizens in a dangerous way and undermines constitutional clauses for the protection of human rights.

In accordance with secular laws in Nigeria homosexual acts may be prosecuted with a prison sentence of up to 14 years and in accordance with Sharia law in specific cases with the death penalty through stoning.

Persecution of homosexuals

Since the point of time when the Same Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Bill came into force, the press has reported on cases of persecution of homosexuals. According to information given by the President of the Official Sharia Commission of the northern federal state of Bauchi in December 2013 the general public has reportedly helped to arrest ten (other sources say eleven) Muslims and one Christian who have been suspected to be homosexuals. A Sharia court sentenced one of the arrested Muslims to receive 20 whippings. The penalty has already been executed. It was taken into account in favour of the defendant that his perpetrations date back seven years. The hearings of two other Muslim defendants shall take place on 23 January 2014. According to Ms Dorothy Aken'Ova, founder and director of the Nigerian NGO “International Center for Reproductive Health and Sexual Rights”, the police of the federal state of Bauchi reportedly arrested four male homosexuals during Christmas and tortured them until they disclosed the names of other members of an organisation of homosexuals. The police have reportedly by now arrested 38 people and are searching for 168 others.

Boko Haram: Car bomb attack in Maiduguri

On 14 January 2014 at 13:30 hours a car bomb exploded on the “GSM Market” in Maiduguri (the capital of the north eastern federal state of Borno). Reportedly approximately 40 people were killed and about 50 were injured. On 15 January 2014 the armed forces said that they have received a video message sent by Abubakar Shekau, the head of the Islamist organisation Boko Haram in which the group has taken responsibility for the attack and in which it threatened to commit further attacks.

Sudan

Shortage of flour and cooking gas

In several federal states including the capital of Khartoum there is a shortage of flour and bottled gas for cooking purposes. Many bakeries complain that they have only received half of the intended quantity of wheat flour or even less. The government refused the proposals brought forward by the bakers’ association to increase the bread price or to reduce the weight of a loaf of bread.

Sudan imports 2 million tons of wheat costing 900 million USD every year.

In autumn 2013 cutting of subsidies for basic commodities with the exception of bread led to protests across the country in which more than 200 people lost their lives.

Cutting subsidies is part of an economic plan of 2012 which aimed at reducing public spending by 1.23 billion USD.

South Sudan

Refugees die in ferry disaster

200 to 300 refugees were reported to have drowned in the White Nile in a ferry disaster on 12 January 2014 or 14 January 2014 (information varies according to the source). The victims are mainly families with their children who wanted to flee to Sudan from renewed fighting between rebels belonging to Riek Machar and government forces from Malakal, the capital of the federal state of Upper Nile.

Hopes for a cease fire / fighting continues

A spokesperson of President Salva Kiir announced on 15 January 2014 that the government expects a cease fire agreement with the rebels soon resulting from the negotiations in Addis Abeba.

Fighting in the federal states of Jonglei, Unity and Upper Nile continues. UNMISS (United Nations Mission in South Sudan) estimates the number of people killed in the conflict so far to up to 10,000. More than 400,000 civilians have reportedly been driven away from their villages owing to the fighting. Most of them reportedly live in South Sudan as internally displaced persons and approximately 80,000 people have fled to neighbouring states.

Guinea

Government resigned

The government in Guinea which has governed the country for three years, resigned on 15 January 2014 in order to ease the way for a transition to democracy. Prime Minister Mohammed Said Fofana and his complete cabinet put down all their offices following the inaugural meeting of the newly elected National Assembly, as the office of President Alpha Condé informed the public. A time schedule for the appointment of new Head of government has not yet been set up.

Somalia

New Cabinet presented

Mr Abdiweli Sheikh Ahmed, new Prime Minister since December 2013, presented his new cabinet on 17 January 2014 after negotiations lasting for several days with representatives of the most influential clans. The cabinet reportedly includes 25 ministers, 25 vice-ministers and five ministers of state. Two women are also among them.

New President in Puntland

On 8 January 2014 the parliament in Puntland elected former Somali Prime Minister of the transitional government, Mr Abdiweli Mohamed Ali (Gas) with a majority of just one vote to become the new president. Mr Abdiweli Mohamed Ali takes over from Mr Abdirahman Mohamed Mohamud "Farole". The president's term of office is five years.

Uganda

President stops law on homosexuality

According to a report in the Kenian daily newspaper "Daily Monitor" of 17 January 2014 President Yoveri Museveni referred a law against homosexuality which stipulates drastic punishment back to parliament for further debate. Parliament had passed the bill on 20 December 2013 (see BN dated 23 December 2013).

Serbia

Start of EU accession talks under difficult conditions

On 21 January 2014 the EU accession talks with Serbia (7.3 million inhabitants) will officially start. The following topics will be discussed first of all: judicial system, human rights and Kosovo. In addition to problems with the Serbian population in Kosovo, Serbia has to cope with enormous difficulties e.g. with regard to corruption and the economic and social situation. The heavily indebted country has an unemployment rate of more than 26%.

Serbia/Kosovo

New violence in Northern Kosovo

The creation of the "Community of Serb municipalities in Kosovo" which was agreed upon in April 2013 is still a difficult thing. A part of the municipal election must be repeated as the Serbian politician Pantic refused to accept his election as Mayor of Northern Mitrovica. He refused to sign the document of appointment because this paper had the coat of arms of Kosovo on it.

Many Serbs still do not wish to be integrated into the state of Kosovo. The murder of a Serbian municipal councillor in Mitrovica on 15 January 2014 illustrates the tense situation.

Russian Federation

Rebel leader reportedly killed

Doku Umarov, one of the most wanted rebel leaders in northern Caucasus is reportedly dead. According to the Head of the Chechen Republic, Mr Ramsan Kadyrov on 16 January 2014 this can be assumed from an audio file. This document is reportedly a conversation between two high-ranking Islamists from Kabardino-Balkaria and Dagestan who talk about a possible successor for an "Emir" who was killed in an anti-terror operation. By now the federal authorities and the intelligence services have not been able to confirm the extremist's death. They reportedly have not enough information available. In addition, the killing of Umarov has always again been announced in the past few years (see BN dated 8 July 2013).

Islamists have taken responsibility for attacks in Volgograd

Militant Islamists belonging to the group Ansar Al-Sunna have taken responsibility for the two attacks in the Russian city of Volgograd. A video in Russian language was published on 19 January 2014 in a well-known Jihadi forum where the two alleged Volgograd attackers can be seen where they take responsibility for the two attacks and at the same time warn against further attacks onto the Olympic Winter Games in Sochi. At the end of December 2013 suicide bombers killed 34 people in attacks within 24 hours in Volgograd in southern Russia. The distance between Volgograd and Sochi is about 700 kilometres.

Ukraine

Situation tense after excessive outbreak of violence

President Viktor Yanukovich has announced the foundation of a crisis committee following a meeting with the pro European opposition politicians. During riots of government opponents in Kiev on 19 January 2014 more than 70 militiamen were injured and approximately 50 members of the security forces had to be treated in hospitals. The well-known opposition politicians Mr Klitschko and Mr Yatseniuk called their supporters to keep calm. They warned against shedding of blood and requested peaceful negotiations in order to find a way out of the crisis. Following a mass protest on 19 January 2014 with up to 100,000 participants, approximately a thousand people separated from the demonstration and tried to storm the government district. They said that the opposition leaders are too soft in their requests to Mr Yanukovich. Militant opposition members have taken action against the militia with wooden sticks and incendiary projectiles. The security forces then used teargas, stun grenades and water cannons. Numerous emergency cars of the security forces were set on fire. More than ten people were arrested.

Stricter anti-protest laws

The Ukrainian parliament (Supreme Rada) has voted for stricter anti-protest laws. In a tumultuous session on 16 January 2014 it increased prison sentences for occupying and blocking of government buildings. In future any unauthorised installation of stages or tents on public squares may be prosecuted with prison terms of two weeks. In addition, parliament voted for the prosecution of covering up one's face on a demonstration as well as for defamation and "extremist calls" on the internet. The Supreme Rada is dominated by the government party of President Viktor Yanukovich.

The head of state will still have to sign the laws so that they can become effective.

India

Rebel's attack kills five

Separatist rebels have killed five people in the union state of Assam (north east). As the police informed on 18 January 2014 the attackers had stopped a bus the previous day in the district of Kokrajahar, forced eight people to get out of the bus and then opened fire on them. Five people died and three were injured.

The attackers are reportedly fighters of the National Democratic Front of Bodoland, a group which for years has fought for more autonomy for the people of Bodo. There are approximately 40 different active separatist or left-wing groups.

China

Uyгур government critic arrested

On 15 January 2014 Mr Ilham Tohti one of the most well-known Uyгур government critics was arrested in Beijing. His mother was also arrested, however released a short time later. Mr Tohti, researcher in economic science who teaches at the University of National Minorities in Beijing was for the time being only accused of having violated the law; the authorities did not give any more detailed information on this.

Myanmar

Anti-Muslim violence

According to contradictory reports a mob and securities forces attacked between 13 and 15 January 2014 a village in Maungdaw (state of Rakhine) where Muslim Rohingya live and up to several dozens of people were killed. At least 100 houses and one mosque have reportedly been destroyed. The authorities at first were not willing to confirm this.

Campaign of Buddhist monks against marriages between different religions

Several thousand Buddhist monks gathered on 15 January 2014 in Mandalay. They decided among others to campaign for a ban of marriages between Buddhist women and men of other religions until a respective bill will have been adopted. The draft goes back to the initiative of Buddhist monks in 2013 and shall be taken to parliament by the opposition party National Democratic Front. The anti-Muslim 969 Movement of monk Wirathu also campaigns for the draft.

Report accuses armed forces of attacks

The organisation Women's League of Burma located in Thailand has accused the armed forces of Myanmar in a report published last week that they are still raping women as a means of warfare. Since 2010 reportedly more than 100 women and girls have been raped so far. The majority of these incidents have reportedly been made in the northern state of Shan and in the state of Kachin.

Since 2011 approximately a dozen of ethnic rebel groups have agreed on separate cease fire agreements. In spite of this there are still some armed conflicts in some areas. A cease fire agreement across the country which is meant to ease the way for a political dialogue among all parties to the conflict is being prepared at present.