

## Information Centre Asylum and Migration

# Briefing Notes

07 October 2013

### **Afghanistan**

#### **Security situation**

At least five civilians were killed in a NATO air strike in Nangarhar province in the East of Afghanistan close to the provincial capital Jalalabad on 5 October 2013. Furthermore, fighting and attacks took place in the run-up to the handover of the Bundeswehr military base to the Afghan troops last week in Kunduz province, in northern Afghanistan.

On 6 October 2013, the Bundeswehr handed over its military base to Afghan security forces who will have sole responsibility for security in the region in future. The Bundeswehr military base in Mazar-e Sharif, the capital of Balkh province in northern Afghanistan will continue to be used.

### **Pakistan**

#### **Government of Sindh province to ban Internet services**

Internet communication services are to be banned for the next three months in Sindh province, Pakistan. The reason for the ban – according to the provincial government – is that terrorists are using these communication services.

#### **Attack on polio vaccination workers**

Unknown perpetrators launched an attack against polio vaccination workers in a village near Peshawar on 7 October 2013. Four police officers and two polio vaccination workers were killed in a blast.

### **Iraq**

#### **Bombings**

A suicide bomber drove up to a police station in Tikrit (Salahaddin province) on 1 October 2013 and blew himself up, killing five police officers.

On 2 October 2013, 29 people were killed in incidents in various parts of the country, including Baghdad, Mosul and Kirkuk.

At least 88 persons were killed in suicide attacks on 5 and 6 October 2013, some sources say 146 people were killed. On 5 October 2013 alone, at least 73 persons were killed in suicide bombings in Baghdad, Balad (Salahaddin province), Mosul (Ninive province) und Muqdadiah (Diyala province), including 49 Shia pilgrims and two TV journalists. At least 15 persons were killed in a suicide bombing of a school in Tal Afar (Ninive province) on 6 October 2013. According to official sources, 14 pupils and the school headmaster were killed in the blast. The majority of inhabitants are Shia Turkmen.

The United Nations announced on 1 October 2013 that 979 civilians had been killed across the country in September as a result of terror and violence. The fatalities included 92 members of the security services who were killed on duty as well as 127 police officers who were killed while off duty. The number of fatalities reported by other sources report differs. The news agency AFP says 880 people were killed; the Iraqi gov-

ernment says 971 people were killed. Iraq Body Count says 1,220 civilians were killed in the month of September.

According to AFP, the violence has now reached a peak last seen in 2008.

### **Military helicopter shot down**

According to a report by the dpa news agency, a military helicopter was shot down on 2 October 2013 in clashes between the Army and suspected Al-Qaeda-militants. All four crew members were killed.

### **Executions**

According to the Iraqi government, 23 people were executed on 22 and 26 September 2013, 20 for their involvement in terrorist activities.

## **Syria**

### **Islamist group gaining momentum in Syria's opposition**

The civilian members of the Syrian opposition, the National Coalition (NC) the majority of whom are living in exile have been losing support recently. The NC is currently representing the interests of the opponents of the Syrian government. On 24 September 2013, thirteen rebel groups including the Islamist Jabhat al-Nusra distanced themselves from the NC in a joint statement and called for a regrouping of the opposition against President Assad, calling on all groups to unite in a clear Islamic context that is based on sharia law. On 29 September 2013, 43 units of radical Syrian rebels operating in the area of Damascus merged to form Jaish al-Islam (Army of Islam). It is said to be led by Zahran Allush, the leader of "Liwa al-Islam". More and more rebels are distancing themselves from the international community and are turning towards more radical militant groups who are being supplied with arms and funds by the Gulf states, above all Saudi Arabia. The smaller groups are hoping that by joining an umbrella organisation they will improve their logistics problems whereas the large groups are hoping to expand their power base.

Against this backdrop, the UN special representative to Syria, Lakhdar Brahimi, said on 6 October 2013 that he did not know whether the peace talks scheduled to take place in Geneva in mid-November could go ahead.

### **Iran supports Syria**

According to sources at the news portal Spiegel Online who are quoting German secret services, Iran has allegedly sent its own military units to Syria, including units of the Revolutionary Guard. Syria and Iran are said to have concluded an agreement in 2012 that allows Assad to park his military aircraft in Iran.

### **Destruction of chemical weapons begins**

After the UN's first inspectors arrived in Syria on 1 October 2013, steps began to destroy chemical weapons on 6 October 2013. Syria's capacity to produce chemical weapons is to be eliminated by 1 November 2013 and the approximately 1,000 tonnes of chemical weapons that are spread across the country in 45 bases are to be destroyed.

## **Iran**

### **Telephone call with US President: Chief Commander of the Revolutionary Guard criticises Rohani**

The Chief Commander of the Revolutionary Guard (Pasdaran), Mohammad Ali Jafari, has criticised the landmark telephone call between President Hassan Rouhani and US President Barack Obama on 27 September 2013, referring to it as a "tactical mistake". Instead of talking to Obama on the telephone, he said Rouhani "should have waited for concrete action by the United States". The landmark telephone call was the first direct contact between the leaders of the two countries since the rupture of diplomatic relations in the aftermath of the 1979 Islamic revolution. The comment made by the Chief Commander broadcast by the "Tasnimnews.com" is the first time criticism has been levelled by a high-ranking Iranian official since the call took place between the two heads of state. The public criticism levelled by Jafari came despite appeals by both Rouhani and supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei for the Guards to steer clear of politics. So far, Khamenei has not commented directly on the contact between Obama and Rouhani. He spoke in general

terms, saying that some of what happened in the New York trip was not appropriate. The President has the backing of Defence Minister Hussein Dehghan for his move. He said in Tehran the telephone call with Obama demonstrated Iran's "power and importance".

### **Internet restrictions to be eased**

Iran's President Rouhani has indicated that restrictions on Internet access may be eased. He announced on the social media site Twitter that he was seeking to gain support for all Iranians having convenient access to global information.

### **Ban on women in advertising**

The Ministry for Islamic Culture has unexpectedly banned the printing of advertisements featuring women. The news agency Mehr announced that the Ministry had said Iranian laws prohibited this.

### **Passport of film director Mohammad Rasoulof confiscated**

The passport of the film director Mohammad Rasoulof was reportedly confiscated by authorities at Tehran Airport after he returned from a trip to Germany. He was ordered to attend an interrogation afterwards. The aim of his trip was to find out more about the detente strategy announced by the new President Hassan Rouhani last week in New York, according to the newspaper *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, quoting Rasoulof's wife who lives in Hamburg. This means he will be unable to accept the lifetime achievement award at the Nuremberg International Human Rights film festival on 8 October 2013.

## **Turkey**

### **Reform package presented**

Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan presented the eagerly anticipated "democratic reform package" drawn up by his government on 30 September 2013. The most important items include the partial lifting of the ban on women wearing a scarf at state institutions. However, the ban on women wearing the head scarf at state institutions that has been in place for decades will continue to apply to women in the military and security services or to judges and prosecutors.

The Islamic, Conservative AKP government had already eased or fully lifted restrictions on wearing of the Islamic head scarf at several institutions in the past few years. The University authorities had permitted women to wear a head scarf for the first time in October 2012. In January 2013, barristers were permitted to wear a head scarf in court. Another important item involved the possibility of teaching Kurdish at private education institutions which has been an optional subject at state schools since 2012. Irrespective of these language courses, the ban on Kurdish lessons in school education in general remains firmly in place. However, political parties will be permitted to hold election campaign events and other activities in languages other than Turkish. Although this has been tolerated by the Turkish government in recent years, it is officially illegal. The use of Kurdish letters not found in the Turkish alphabet will also be decriminalised. Prime Minister Erdogan also announced that a law amending the names of towns and cities would pave the way for a return to old Kurdish names and that the state would return land belonging to Mor Gabriel, the world's oldest Syriac monastery in south-eastern Turkey, that had been the subject matter of a legal battle over expropriation for many years. All primary school students in state schools will now also no longer have to recite a deeply nationalistic vow at the start of each week which has been compulsory since 1933, a practice that offended many liberal Turks as well as ethnic and religious minorities. Despite reports to the contrary, the 10 percent threshold for a political party to enter parliament of the national vote is to be maintained for the time being.

## **Egypt**

### **Renewed outbreak of violence claims dozens of lives**

Thousands of people took part in demonstrations held in a number of cities on 6 October 2013 against the deposition of President Mohamed Mursi which had been called by supporters of the President to mark the 40th anniversary of the Yom Kippur war against Israel. At least 51 people were killed and more than 240

were wounded in heavy clashes that erupted between the Muslim Brotherhood, their opponents and security forces. The majority of people were killed in Cairo and its suburbs. According to state media reports, over 400 Muslim Brotherhood supporters have been detained. On 6 October 2013, Islamist demonstrators also attacked the TV presenter Buthaina Kamel. Kamel was the only woman to stand in the presidential elections in 2012. She is considered to be a firm opponent of the Muslim Brotherhood.

The clashes have been ongoing since 4 October 2013. Protest marches have been held by the Muslim Brotherhood throughout Egypt and several people have been killed. The TV journalist Khaled Dawoud was also attacked on 4 October 2013. According to Mena sources, four people died in shooting between troops and insurgents on 5 October 2013 when an army post came under fire along the Cairo-Ismailia highway.

## **Libya**

### **High-ranking Al-Qaeda-member abducted**

Abu Anas al Libi, one of the most-wanted terrorist suspects in the world was abducted by US special units in Tripoli on 6 October 2013 and was brought to a location outside Libya. He is suspected of masterminding the twin bombings of the US Embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998 as a leading member of the terrorist organisation Al-Qaeda. Anas al Libi reportedly lived in Iran for several years before hiding out at a secret location in Libya. According to media reports, the government in Libya was involved in the operation.

## **Tunisia**

### **Agreement on interim government**

On 5 October 2013, the government coalition led by the Islamic-conservative Ennahdha Party and the opposition signed a roadmap agreement on the formation of a government made up of independent technocrats following weeks of negotiations. In the agreement, it says that a head of government is to be appointed by the end of this week. The head of government will subsequently appoint a cabinet to be made up of independent experts within the space of two weeks. The negotiating parties also agreed to adopt a draft constitution involving all political forces within four weeks following a national dialogue and to work out a roadmap for re-election.

## **Algeria**

### **Crackdown of demonstration**

A demonstration by members of the so-called Disappeared was violently dispersed by the police in Algiers on 29 September 2013. Around 20 protesters were briefly detained including Youcef Benbrahim, the Vice-President of Amnesty International in Algeria. The demonstration was organised by the Collective of Families of Missing people in Algeria (CFDA), a human rights organisation that has its registered office in Paris, and by its Algerian branch "SOS Missing".

## **Guinea**

### **Government party claims election victory**

The first democratic parliamentary elections were held in Guinea on 28 September 2013 since it gained independence from France in 1958. Amidst claims of poll-rigging by the opposition, the government party has claimed it is the winner of the parliamentary elections. The opposition is accusing President Alpha Conde and his party of manipulating the votes. The parties in opposition are now threatening to call for nationwide protests. Around 1,700 candidates stood in the elections in a bid for one of the 114 seats in the National Assembly with around five million people going to the polls. Turnout was around 80 percent. Hundreds of observers of the European Union, the African Union (AU) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) had travelled to the country. ECOWAS has said that the elections were held under acceptable conditions of freedom and transparency.

## **Somalia**

### **Attack against al-Shabab militia**

A team of the elite US Navy unit SEALs (Sea, Air, Land) has captured a high-ranking leader of the Islamist extremist organisation al-Shabaab, according to a report published in the "New York Times", quoting US security circles. The troops reportedly raided a bastion of the Islamist insurgents in the coastal town of Barawe in the early hours of 5 October 2013, According to police reports, seven people were killed. The strike is reportedly a response to the assault on a shopping mall in Nairobi, the capital of Kenya, two weeks ago in which at least 67 persons lost their lives. The Somalis government is said to have known of the plans.

## **Mali**

### **First suicide attack in almost seven months**

On 28 September 2013, four suicide bombers detonated their vehicle near a Malian army camp in Timbuktu. A total of six persons were killed in the blast, including the suicide bomber and two civilians. Six soldiers of the Malian Army were wounded. The MNLA pulled out of a peace agreement on 26 September 2013 that had been concluded with the government of Mali on 16 June 2013.

## **Nigeria**

### **Attack on the education system in Northern Nigeria**

According to a report published by Amnesty International on 3 October 2013, at least 70 teachers and over 100 schoolchildren have been killed or wounded in North Nigeria since early 2012. Some 50 schools have been burned or seriously damaged and more than 60 others have been forced to close. The majority of the attacks took place in Borno State, the bastion of the Islamist terrorist organisation Boko Haram. In Borno alone, at least 15,000 schoolchildren no longer have schools to attend. Over 1,000 teachers have fled northern Nigeria to seek refuge elsewhere. Boko Haram has claimed responsibility for many, but not all, of the attacks.

### **20 killed in attack in Damboa**

According to military sources, suspected members of the Islamist organisation Boko Haram attacked a mosque in the city of Damboa (in Borno State in north-eastern Nigeria) in the early hours of 5 October 2013, killing five worshippers. The subsequent shootout with troops led to the death of 15 of the attackers.

## **Kenya**

### **Riots erupt following assassination of Muslim cleric**

On 3 October 2013, unknown gunmen killed the radical Muslim cleric Ibrahim Ismail and three of his escorts in his vehicle in a drive-by shooting in Mombasa. Protesters subsequently set a church on fire in Mombasa. This was followed by violent clashes between protesters and security forces. According to the Red Cross, police officers shot four people. Schools were closed in Mombasa and all business activity grounded to a halt.

Ibrahim Ismail was seen as the successor to the Muslim leader Aboud Rogo Mohammed who was assassinated on 27 August 2012. Mohammed was on the UN and US sanction lists as a suspected supporter of the radical Somali militia al-Shabab. The UN Security Council has accused him of being the most important ideological leader of the Kenyan group al-Hijra which is considered to be a close ally of al-Shabab (cf. BN of 3 September 2012).

## **Russian Federation**

### **ECHR condemns Russia for violating human rights of Chechen national**

The European Court of Human Rights (ECMR) ruled yesterday that Russia was to pay a total of EUR 1.16 million in compensation to 13 Chechens, 18 of whose relatives were killed during an artillery bombardment of a Chechen village in February 2000. The case referred to a military operation against a village in Chechnya that claimed the lives of a large number of civilians. The village of Aslanbek-Sheripovo in the district of Shatoi was considered to be a safe haven at the time. Residents of the village of Aslanbek-Sheripovo had received assurances from the Russian Army that there would be no strikes on the village as long as no armed fighters were present. That is why the artillery bombardment came as a total surprise to residents on 17 February 2013. They said no armed fighters had come to their village. Around 30 persons were killed in the attack and around 25 persons were wounded.

The Chechens claimed their relatives' right to life had been violated, furthermore the authorities had failed to investigate the circumstances surrounding the deadly attack. The Russian government accepted that "the fundamental rights of the appellants had been violated, also regarding the use of violence and failure to investigate the deadly military operation", it says in the key sentence in the ECMR ruling.

### **Background:**

Russia has been repeatedly condemned of attacks on troops and civilians in the Second Chechen War (1999-2009). Up to now, the Russian government has always rejected claims by the applicants that those involved in the attacks were Russian troops. The greatest concession made so far was that the Russian government did not deny the accounts put forward by the appellants in several cases. The Kremlin has been ordered to pay large sums of money in compensation in the past, generally more than EUR 100,000 in each case.

## **India**

### **Lengthy prison sentences**

Five years after the deadly attacks on members of the Christian minority, eight defendants, seven Christians and one Maoist rebel have been sentenced to life imprisonment. The men were found guilty of assassinating a Hindu leader in August 2008 who had been involved in activities opposing christianisation in Orissa State. In the wake of the attack, supporters of radical Hindu organisations attacked a number of villages inhabited by Christians. More than 40 people were killed in the attacks. 25,000 people fled the violence.

### **Army fights against extremists**

Fighting continues between the Army along the demarcation line in Kashmir and Muslim extremist groups who had entered India from Pakistan a week and a half ago. According to Indian sources, 15 terrorists were killed who are thought to belong to the Pakistan-based terrorist groups Lashkar-e-Taiba, Hizbul Mujahideen and al-Badr. They are accused of trying to foil efforts to defuse tension.

## **Bangladesh**

### **More death sentences for war crimes**

On 1 October 2013, an MP of the opposition party Bangladesh National Party (BNP) was sentenced to death for crimes committed in the 1971 War of Independence. Since January, the International Crimes Tribunal that is investigating the genocide committed in the civil war of 1971 has convicted seven people, including six members of the Islamist organisation Jamaat-e-Islami, to death or to life imprisonment.

### **Pressure on Christians**

According to reports by the Christian organisation Open Doors, local politicians and Mullahs stopped construction of a church in early September in Central Bangladesh and has been putting pressure on worshippers to return to Islam.

## **Myanmar**

### **Violence against Muslims**

Houses owned by Muslims were raided following a row between a Buddhist and a Muslim shop keeper in Tandwe (Arakan State) on 29 September 2013. Violence continued in a number of villages on 1 and 2 October 2013. According to official sources, one person was killed, other sources say up to six people were killed. Up to 100 houses were destroyed. The violence is targeted at Kaman Muslims, an officially recognized Muslim minority whose members have Burmese citizenship rights. This is what distinguishes them from most Muslim Rohingya who have repeatedly become the target of Buddhist riots in recent months.