

## Information Centre Asylum and Migration

# Briefing Notes

2 September 2013

### **Afghanistan**

#### **Security situation**

On 25.08.13, Taliban insurgents kidnapped twelve Afghan civilians in western Herat Province, among them five relief workers of the International Rescue Committee (IRC); one day later, all of them were executed.

Also on 26.08.13, the dead bodies of six kidnapped truck drivers were found in eastern Paktia province.

On 28.08.13 a suicide attack on an ISAF convoy killed four civilians and injured 15 in Lashkargah (capital of southern Helmand province). In western Farah province, Taliban militants fired rockets at several tank trucks that supply NATO forces with fuel, killing six drivers and injuring another ten; 40 vehicles were destroyed. Also in Farah province (Bakwa district), a police convoy on the road from Kabul to Herat was ambushed by Taliban; 15 Afghan police officers were killed and ten injured; also several Taliban members lost their lives. At the outskirts of eastern provincial capital Ghazni, Taliban militants attacked a military camp housing Polish and American soldiers, injuring five Afghan civilians.

On 30.08.13, the governor of Archi district (northern Kunduz province) was killed in a suicide attack on the court of a mosque. Apparently, also one of his sons, two bodyguards and two civilians were killed in the attack.

On 31.08.13, eight Afghan mining company workers died when a roadside bomb exploded in northeastern Parwan province. A suicide attack in southern Kandahar city killed at least five people and injured another 25, when a suicide bomber detonated the explosives in his car near a police checkpoint in front of a bank.

In the morning of 02.09.13, Taliban insurgents attacked a US base in Nangarhar province bordering Pakistan. Information on casualties have not yet been provided.

### **Pakistan**

#### **Attack on military personnel**

A bomb attack in Waziristan close to the Afghan border has killed nine Pakistani soldiers and 19 other military officials. As yet, no-one has claimed responsibility for the attack.

#### **Late-night calling rates banned**

The Pakistani government has ordered mobile companies to ban cheap late-night calling rates for mobile phones as of 01.09.13, saying that these rates were promoting vulgarity among young men and women and were against the moral values of society as young people were seduced to chat and flirt.

#### **Mobile mediation courts**

The Pakistani government has decided to tackle the lawsuit backlog of currently 1.4 million pending procedures, with many cases dragging on for decades. It is particularly in rural areas that regular court proceedings are replaced by assemblies of elders who frequently impose harsh penalties. Mainly in areas controlled by Taliban groups, sharia courts pass quick decisions including stoning and similar methods of punishment. For these reasons, Pakistan is testing the application of mobile courts responsible for civil lawsuits, juvenile offenders and minor criminal cases.

### **Moratorium on death penalty expired / case-by-case assessment adopted**

The presidential decree of 2008 imposing a moratorium on the death penalty had expired on 30.06.13 without being renewed by the new government. However, the resumption of executions was temporarily suspended on 18.08.13. The government has decided to deal with all capital punishment convictions on a case-by-case basis.

## **Iraq**

### **Attacks**

On 28.08.13, a total of 18 car bomb attacks in several districts and two southern suburbs of Baghdad killed at least 66 people and wounded another 140. Most of the attacks were launched in quarters inhabited mainly by Shia Muslims. One blast went off near the Sunni Muslim Abu Hanifa mosque.

On 30.08.13, a car bomb attack on a lively market in the city of Samarra (Salah al-Din province) claimed the lives of at least 16 people and injured another 25.

In Ramadi, twelve people died when a car bomb detonated near a checkpoint on 01.09.13.

According to estimates of AFP news agency, more than 3,600 people have been killed in attacks and ambushes so far this year; Reuters reports approx. 5,000 fatalities and around 12,000 people injured.

### **Attack on refugee Camp Ashraf**

On 01.09.13, an assault on Camp Ashraf, where Iranian dissidents belonging to the exiled People's Mujahideen Organisation of Iran are residing, apparently killed several Iranians, with varying information on the number of victims and the circumstances of the attack. Press reports state 51 or 35 victims, whereas the Iraqi interior ministry has released the number of nine fatalities. The Iranian Mujahideen blame the Iraqi army for the attack, while the official responsible for Camp Ashraf (located in Diyala province) has said that there was no attack from outside. According to police insiders, some camp inhabitants attacked Iraqi soldiers guarding Camp Ashraf after five mortars had been fired on the camp.

### **Protest rallies against high allowances for lawmakers**

On 31.08.13, thousands protested in Baghdad and elsewhere against high allowances and pensions of parliamentarians. In Nassiriya, police quelled an unauthorised rally with water cannons and tear gas and fired warning shots.

## **Syria**

### **President Obama will seek congressional approval before military action**

On 30.08.13, U.S. Secretary of State Kerry said that U.S. intelligence had 'high confidence' that the government of Syrian President Assad was responsible for the poison gas attack on 21.08.13 which apparently killed more than 1,400 Menschen, among them at least 400 children. On 31.08.13, President Obama insisted that the US should take military action against Bashar al-Assad whom he accused of being responsible for the 'worst chemical attack in the 21<sup>st</sup> century'; however, the President also said that he was mindful of the need for democratic backing and that he would seek authorisation from the Congress for a military air attack limited in duration and scope. Congress members will take a decision after the summer break ending on 09.09.13.

### **Arab League members disagree on US military strike**

The Arab League member states, having held Assad's regime 'fully responsible' for the poison gas attack of 21.08.13 and having urged the UN Security Council to take 'detering measures' only last week, were in disagreement on what the deterrence should look like during a meeting of the foreign ministers on 01.09.13. The Gulf States, in particular Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates want to overthrow the Assad regime in order to lessen the influence of Iran on the Shia Muslim Arabs. Syria's neighbouring countries Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq, however, are campaigning against any military action from outside. On 01.09.13, Al-Azhar University, Sunni Islam's highest authority, expressed its 'categorical rejection and condemnation of the decision by the American President to launch military strikes in order to punish President Bashar

al-Assad for an alleged chemical weapons attack' saying this would amount to 'an aggression against the whole Arab and Islamic world'.

Syria's membership in the Arab League has been suspended since November 2011; its place is temporarily taken by the exile roof organisation of the Syrian opposition.

## **Tunisia**

### **Ansar al-Sharia classed as a terrorist group**

On 27.08.13, the Tunisian government blamed the extremist Salafist movement Ansar al-Sharia for the assassinations of prominent opposition politicians Mohamed Brahmi and Chokri Belaid and put the movement on the list of terrorist organisations. The movement had close ties to the AQIM terror network (Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb) and to other militant Islamists, and it had also been involved in attacks on soldiers, the government stated. With this move, the government is distancing itself from its former ally, stating that it had obtained proof against the Salafists.

## **Libya**

### **Military prosecutor assassinated**

According to security insiders, a military prosecutor was assassinated by a car bomb in eastern Benghazi city on 29.08.13. He was in charge of several judicial proceedings against loyalists of former dictator Muammar al-Gaddafi.

## **Egypt**

### **Riots claim more lives**

After some days of comparative calm, violent clashes between supporters and opponents of ousted President Morsi claimed several lives on 30.08.13. Apparently, at least six people were killed and more than 50 injured, when fierce fights erupted in Cairo and other cities, among them Alexandria and Morsi's hometown Zagazig, after the Muslim Brotherhood had called for peaceful protests on a 'Friday of determination'. Numerous supporters of Morsi were detained by the security forces. In Cairo, two police officers were shot dead at a road block and two others injured, the interior ministry stated.

### **Morsi referred to criminal court**

On 01.09.13, the Egyptian prosecution in Cairo referred Mohammed Morsi to a criminal court for incitement to murder. Together with 14 leading Muslim Brotherhood members, he is charged with the killing of at least ten protesters in rallies that were staged when he was holding office. A date has not yet been set for the trial.

### **Members of Constitutional Committee announced**

Interim president Adli Mansour has announced that the 50-member committee tasked with drawing up a new constitution will mainly consist of members of the political liberal and left spectrum including the spheres of religion, armed forces, police, trade unions, students, civil society and tourism. The new panel has 60 days to assess the proposals submitted by a commission set up by the government. A referendum will be held on the draft constitution. Also, parliamentary and presidential elections have been announced for next year.

### **Suspected al-Qaeda leader arrested**

Egyptian police said they arrested the suspected al-Qaeda leader on the Sinai peninsula Adel Mohammed Ibrahim (also known as Adel Habara) and two other leading figures on 31.08.13 in the city of al-Arish. Habara is being blamed for the killing of at least 42 police officers and soldiers on Sinai. He is also suspected of having been involved in the plans for attacks on tourists in Sharm el-Sheikh and Taba.

### **Attack on Suez Canal foiled**

The Suez Canal authority has informed that a terrorist element tried to block the canal by targeting a container ship on 31.08.13. Neither the Panama-flagged vessel nor its freight were damaged in the incident, it was reported. Three persons were arrested. There were reports of two blasts on the ship when passing the canal.

### **Curfew further eased**

On 31.08.13, the government further eased the curfew in 14 of the 27 provinces that had been imposed on 14.08.13 and reduced on 24.08.13. Now, the curfew begins at 11 p.m. instead of 9 p.m. and lasts until 6 a.m. On Fridays, however, the full 7 p.m. to 6 a.m. curfew will remain in place.

## **Yemen**

### **Al-Qaeda leading figure killed**

On 30.08.13, a drone strike appears to have killed Quaeed al-Dhabab, a local leader of the Yemeni Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, and two other men in Manasseh village (al-Bayda province). Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) was formed in 2009 from a merger of al-Qaeda's Yemeni and Saudi branches and is considered the most active unit of the terror network operating worldwide. The group and its leader Nasir al-Wuhaysi are being held responsible for numerous attacks. Since the end of July 2013, more than 40 people have apparently been killed in drone attacks. In the region, only the U.S. armed forces use drones in combat.

## **Russian Federation / North Caucasus**

### **Hostage-taking in North Caucasus**

On 30.08.13 the general prosecutor's office in the North-Caucasian Federal District presented a report dealing with the fate of people missing in the region. According to the report, 12 of a total of 133 missing persons have been found in the first half of 2013. More than half of the abductions have taken place in Chechnya and North Ossetia. In 60 cases, police opened investigation and/or criminal prosecution for abduction and/or enforced disappearance. Since the mid-1990ies, a total of 2,909 people have been registered as missing in North Caucasus, the prosecutor said, more than half of them (1,611) in Chechnya. In most cases, kidnappings and enforced disappearances are carried out in order to extort money, to force women into marriage or to force men to enter illegal armed groups.

Human rights activists give the number of around 20,000 missing people in nearly 20 years.

## **Sudan**

### **Half a million affected by floods**

So far, the flashfloods that started in the beginning of August have affected roughly 575,000 people in more than half of the provinces. Over 180,000 flood victims are living in the Khartoum region. Around 50 people have lost their lives so far.

## **Nigeria**

### **Boko Haram: attacks on vigilante groups**

On 01.09.13, suspected radical Islamist Boko Haram fighters wearing army uniforms attacked more than 100 vigilantes in the outskirts of Monguno town (northeastern Borno State, approx. 160 km northeast of Borno's capital Maiduguri), killing at least 24 vigilante members. In co-operation with the military, the vigilante group had gone to Monguno in order to find and arrest Boko Haram militants. On 26.08.13, six vigilante members had been killed in Damasak village (Borno State, close to the border with Niger). The day before, another 14 vigilantes had died in Bama city (Borno State, near the border with Cameroon), when they were ambushed by Boko Harm fighters wearing army uniforms.

## **Côte d’Ivoire**

### **New immigration law**

The Ivorian government has adopted a law facilitating non-nationals to obtain Ivorian citizenship by a unilateral declaration. This step addresses the disputed status of many immigrants from northern neighbouring countries, who have been living in Côte d’Ivoire partly for decades. This minority has been met with hostility for a long time.

### **Background**

In the middle of the 1990ies, the then President Henri Konan Bédié coined the term of ‘Ivoirité’ identity, which substantially contributed to the exclusion of immigrants. Protests followed, leading to a civil war in 2002. Subsequently, the country was split into a Muslim-dominated northern part and a Christian-dominated southern part. This separation still exists today, although the domestic situation has calmed down considerably since mid-2011.

## **Ghana**

### **Supreme Court upholds results of presidential elections**

On 29.08.13, Ghana’s Supreme Court confirmed the victory of President John Dramani Mahama in the elections held on 07.12.12. Mahama’s ruling party National Democratic Congress (NDC) had beaten his major rival Nana Akufo-Addo (New Patriotic Party – NPP) by 50.7 percent to 47.7 percent (see BN of 10.12.12). Subsequently, NPP alleged that Mr Mahama had won the election fraudulently and lodged an appeal; the procedure has dominated domestic policies ever since. On the day of the verdict, most of the shops in Accra remained closed for fear of violent eruptions. However, the situation remained calm, with defeated Akufo-Addo accepting the verdict.

## **DR Congo**

### **Retreat of M23 rebels**

On 29.08.13, a direct military intervention of Rwanda was imminent when Rwandan foreign minister Louise Mushikiwabo stated that a total of 34 projectiles had been fired from DRC into Rwanda in August, 23 of them in the previous two days. She said this could no longer be tolerated. At the same time, Rwanda started to reinforce its troops along the border. Both the Congolese military and the UN peacekeeping mission in DR Congo MONUSCO, which is supporting the army in the fight against the M23 rebels, have confirmed that Rwandan territory was attacked from the area occupied by the M23 rebels.

In a surprise move, the M23 fighters left the strategically important Kibati hills (roughly 15 km north of Goma, capital of eastern North Kivu province), that were a major battle ground only a few days before, and retreated some 15 km further north towards Kibumba on 30.08.13. M23 leader Bisimwa stated that they wanted to find a political solution to the conflict and to allow an independent investigation into the shelling of Goma and neighbouring Rwandan city of Gisenyi. At the same time, he declared a unilateral ceasefire. Meanwhile, Congolese government spokesman Mende has announced that negotiations with the M23 rebels would only be conducted after the rebels had disarmed, demobilised and become a political party.

On 31.08., new fights erupted between the rebels and the government forces. Military officials have said they would continue their offensive until the whole area controlled by the M23 rebels was re-occupied.

## **Nepal**

### **Last Maoist fighters join army**

Seven years after the end of the civil war, the last Maoist fighters have formally entered the Nepalese army. With this, the integration of the rebels has finally come to an end after various delays. The bloody conflict between the Maoists and the armed forces had lasted for ten years, claiming the lives of roughly 16,000 before a peace treaty was negotiated in 2006. Of the total of 19,000 Maoist fighters, nearly 1,500 decided to join the army, while the others participated in rehabilitation programmes or found other activities.

## **India**

### **Maoist rebel attack leaves several dead and injured**

On 26.08.13, Maoist rebels attacked a border police convoy in northeastern Orissa State, killing five police officers and wounding several others (see BN of 08.07.13).

### **Food aid**

On 26.08.13, the Indian parliament adopted a new law to expand food welfare, providing for the distribution of subsidised wheat and rice to two thirds of the population. People qualifying for the scheme will receive five kilograms of wheat per month, pregnant women, lactating mothers and school children will be entitled to free meals.

### **Top terrorist arrested**

On 29.08.13, Yasin Bhatkal, one of the most wanted terrorists in India, was arrested near the Indian-Nepalese border. He is the founder of the terror group Indian Mujahideen, who are held responsible for numerous attacks claiming the lives of hundreds of people in the last years. Only recently, Abdul Karim Tunda, another top militant and high-rank member of the extremist Lashkar-e-Taiba group was also arrested near the Nepalese border.

## **Bangladesh**

### **Islamists attack red light district**

On 27.08.13, several thousands of Islamists armed with sticks stormed Puranbazar area, the red light district of Madaripur town, some 60 km south of Dhaka, forcing roughly 500 prostitutes to flee. At least 30 women were injured. The background to this incident may not have been of moral nature alone; also, business interests may have played a role, since an entrepreneur wants to build offices on the premises.

## **Colombia**

### **Farmers' protests turn violent**

For about two weeks now, Colombia's farmers are on strike for an indefinite period in protest against cheap agricultural imports. The farmers are demanding subsidies and minimum prices for their products. Students as well as mine and transport workers have joined the protests. On 29.08.13, around 20,000 people staged a protest rally in the capital Bogota. Clashes between police forces and protesters killed two people and injured another 196, including 37 policemen. Also in other cities, rallies were held, claiming two lives. In a nationwide TV address, President Juan Manuel Santos announced on 30.08.13 to deploy the military in order to restore security in the capital. Besides, he ordered 50,000 soldiers to disperse the farmers' road blocks and to deliver food supplies by air and road to cities running low. Subsequently, the farmers decided to lift the road blocks themselves, but are still determined to continue with the strike.

### **Background**

Within the framework of various free trade agreements (including agreements with the U.S. and since 01.08.13 also with the EU), cheap imports are displacing the products of the Colombian farmers. Rising prices for imported fertilizers and pesticides are aggravating the situation. Following months of attempts by the farmers to enter negotiations with the government, the farmers decided to go on strike for an indefinite time period. Recent talks have failed. Key strike points include the provinces of Boyacá, Narino and Cundinamarca.

Agricultural reforms are also a key issue in the peace negotiations between the government and the rebel organisation Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC). Last week, the 13<sup>th</sup> round of peace talks ended with the main issues unresolved. The negotiations which had started at the end of 2012 are scheduled to continue in Havana on 09.09.13.