

## Information Centre on Asylum and Migration

# Briefing Notes

4 March 2013

### Afghanistan

#### Security situation

On 25 February 2013, at least four civilians were killed by roadside explosions in the southern provinces of Helmand and Uruzgan. On 26 February 2013, ten policemen and seven civilians lost their lives in a Taliban attack on a police post in the district of Andar (province of Ghazni, eastern Afghanistan). Six soldiers and a civilian were injured in a suicide attack on a military vehicle in Kabul on 27 February 2013. On 28 February 2013, Australian ISAF soldiers mistakenly shot two boys in the central Afghan province of Uruzgan. On the same day, at least ten people (among them eight policemen) died in a roadside bomb explosion in the district of Dangan in the north-eastern province of Kunar.

The Chairman of the Pakistan Ulema Council (a clerics council) said on 2 March 2013 that suicide attacks in Afghanistan, Palestine and Kashmir were a pious act. As long as Afghanistan was occupied by the Americans, Muslims should “sacrifice their lives”. There is a real risk that this statement will promote violence.

#### ISAF revises figures for security-relevant incidents

After having initially claimed that the number of attacks by rebels had declined by 7% year-on-year in 2012, ISAF announced now that the number of attacks had not fallen, but roughly remained unchanged.

### Pakistan

#### Sindh: More than 50 killed in Karachi/attack on saint's shrine

On 3 March 2013, twelve people died in a number of attacks in Karachi. The police regarded the incidents as sectarian. In the evening of the same day, bombs exploded near a Shia mosque in Abbas Town. So far, 45 people have died; 135 are believed to have been injured. The explosion destroyed ten shops and more than 40 apartments.

On 25 February 2013, a bomb exploded in Dargah Hajan Shah Mauri, a shrine named after a Sufi saint, in the village of Marri, near the city of Shikarpur. Three people were killed and up to 27 injured. In response, there were protests and demonstrations in several cities in Sindh.

#### Province of Belujistan: several people killed

On 3 March 2013, a vehicle was attacked by armed men in Tump (district of Turbat). The four passengers were shot, and the vehicle was torched. Reportedly, the incident was triggered by disputes between different tribes.

On 1 March 2013, Mehmood Afridi, a journalist who worked as a teacher at a state school and was the president of the Qalat Press Club, was shot by unknown killers in Qalat.

On 24 February 2013, unknown gunmen on motorcycles shot six road workers in the area of Shadi Kaur (district of Gwadar, province of Belujistan).

### Iraq

#### Security situation

On 28 February 2013, at least 26 people were killed in attacks. In Baghdad alone, 23 died; the remaining three victims lost their lives in Kirkuk. On 1 March 2013, two car bomb explosions killed at least nine people and injured 80 in the city of Diwaniya (province of Qadisiya, about 150 km south of Baghdad). On 2 March 2013, at least eight people were killed and nine others wounded. On 3 March 2013, at least ten people died and more than 20 were injured in several attacks. Baghdad, Kerbala (province of Kerbala) and Tal Afar (province of Niniveh) were hit hardest. Many attacks targeted the security forces and Shia Muslims.

The news agency Reuters reported that, according to the Iraqi Ministry of Health, 136 Iraqis were killed in February. 88 of them were civilians. 228 people were reportedly injured. In January, 177 people were killed. According to Iraq Body Count, 316 civilians lost their lives in February 2013 (as of 27 February 2013). In January, 341 civilians were killed.

### **Renewed protests**

On 1 March 2013, protests flared up again in Mosul, Kirkuk, Baquba and the provinces of Anbar and Salahaddin. Many clerics and tribal leaders participated.

### **Minister of Finance resigns**

Sunni Minister of Finance Rafai al-Essawi stepped down at an anti-government protest on 1 March 2013. He said he did so because Shia Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki had not complied with the protesters' demands. Since December 2012, the Sunnis have been demonstrating for the release of prisoners who have been detained – sometimes for years –without a sentence.

## **Syria**

### **Violence continues**

After about eight days of fighting with the Syrian army, the rebels allegedly brought a police academy in Khan al-Assal (province of Aleppo) under their control on 3 March 2013. Reportedly, about 200 people died in the fights. According to unconfirmed reports, opposition members stormed the central prison in Raqqa on 3 March 2013 and released prisoners. The Syrian army announced on 2 March 2013 that it had taken control of a road from the northern province of Hama to the airport of Aleppo.

The rebels are reported to control all border checkpoints to Turkey by now. On 1 March 2013, the Free Syrian Army and the Islamist al-Nusra front (Jabhat al-Nusra) reportedly captured Yarubiya, a checkpoint on the Iraqi border. The Iraqi army is said to have attacked the checkpoint from a helicopter on 2 March 2013.

### **“Friends of Syria” promise support to regime opponents/EU may send military trainers**

The “Friends of Syria” promised more support to the Syrian National Coalition, which they recognised as the only legitimate representative of the Syrian people, after their meeting in Rome on 28 February 2013. US Secretary of State John Kerry promised about EUR 46 million in aid to improve the situation of people who live in the areas controlled by the rebels. Kerry also called for a political solution to the conflict and asked the opposition to form a transitional government. A spokesman of the Syrian National Coalition confirmed that the election of a Prime Minister for a transitional government in the areas controlled by the rebels had been delayed; initially, it had been scheduled for last weekend in Istanbul. On 28 February 2013, the EU loosened the weapons embargo agreed one week before in Brussels. In the future, the “provision of non-lethal equipment and technical assistance for the protection of civilians” are to be allowed. Reportedly, the EU governments have unofficially agreed to offer the rebels technical support and military training. On 27 February 2013, the French President travelled to Russia and made new proposals for a resolution of the conflict.

### **Assad willing to talk/UN offers to act as mediator**

Syrian President Bashar al-Assad is still not willing to step down, but signalled that he was willing to negotiate with the opposition, provided the rebels put down their arms first. He said in an interview with the British newspaper “Sunday Times” that he would not negotiate with terrorists. After having met Lakhdar Brahimi, the UN and Arab League Special Envoy to Syria, on 2 March 2010, Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon offered on 3 March 2013 that the UN might act as a mediator in any talks between the opposition and the Assad regime.

## **Libya**

### **Building of General National Congress and office of the Prime Minister occupied**

Since 3 February 2013, veterans have been occupying the assembly chamber of the General National Congress in Tripoli. While most of the occupants have left the building in the meantime, a small group consisting of former militia members and their supporters remains. The occupants, some of whom were wounded during the revolution, demand among other things that the government pay for their treatment abroad. Last week the National Congress already adopted a law on assistance to veterans wounded in the war, which is why Congress members believe that further occupation of the assembly chamber does not make any sense. On the morning of 3 March 2013, security forces tried and failed to remove the occupants from the building. Three security officials were wounded by shots.

On 3 March 2013, the surviving relatives of fallen revolutionaries (most of them women) occupied the Prime Minister's office. They are asking the government for apartments and other types of assistance. The surviving relatives say that the action was not connected to the occupation of the National Congress, but had been inspired by it.

### **Attack on Christian priests in Benghazi/Christians arrested**

The Libyan foreign ministry condemned an attack on a Coptic priest and his assistant in a Benghazi church, which took place on 28 February 2013. The culprits are still unknown. The government called on the public to respect the freedom of religion.

Before, about 100 Coptic Christians had been arrested in Benghazi on charges of proselytising. Reportedly, they had more bibles than necessary for their personal use. According to the police, the detainees were found without identity documents and it was unclear how they had entered the country. There were allegations that the security forces forcefully shaved off the detainees' beards and hair and tried to remove crosses tattooed on their wrists with acid. Photos provided to the press appear to prove only that the men's heads were shaved.

### **Army intervenes in tribal fights**

On 1 March 2013, fights between the Mashashia and Qantrar tribes flared up in Mizdah (about 160 km south of Tripoli). Heavy weapons were used, and a number of people were killed or wounded. The army has sent forces to separate the fighters and mediate between them, but has not had any success so far. In August 2012, six people lost their lives in clashes between the two tribes. Also in that year, members of the Mashashia tribe and militia from Zintan clashed.

### **Crisis in Tripoli quickly resolved**

According to a report dated 2 March 2013, doctor-entrepreneur and pharmacist Hassan Triki was captured and tortured by the so-called "Support Unit 2". Relatives and friends of the victim attacked the militia headquarters, seized the culprits and handed them over to the military police. Before, there had been fights in the Suq al-Juma and Ain Zara districts of Tripoli. The deputy minister of defence disbanded the unit and transferred its members to other units. He announced that the culprits would be held responsible for Triki's death. The situation remained calm.

## **Tunisia**

### **Arrests in the Belaid case**

Last week, four suspects in the murder of Tunisian opposition politician Chokri Belaid on 6 February 2013 were arrested. They are said to be members of the radical Islamist Salafist movement. The government announced that the suspected murderer has been identified, but is still at large. The press reported that one of those arrested admitted to have accompanied the murderer during his deed. Reportedly, the murderer justified his act by a fatwa (Muslim legal opinion) which said that Belaid should be killed.

## **Egypt**

### **Serious unrest in Port Said**

At least four people were killed in violent fights in Port Said on 3 March 2013. According to different sources, between 250 and 320 people were wounded. The police used tear gas and bird-shot against about 5,000 protesters who demonstrated against the removal of 39 prisoners from Port Said to Beheira. The prisoners are to be tried for their role in riots at a football game in Port Said last year, which claimed 74 lives (see BN of 28 January 2013). Army units transferred to Port Said separated the protesters and the police.

### **Turmoil in Cairo**

Efforts by the police to remove protesters from the Tahrir square, which the opponents of President Mursi have been occupying for weeks, resulted in violent clashes with the protesters on 3 March 2013. The fighting overshadowed a visit of US Secretary of State John Kerry to President Mursi.

## **Mali**

### **Islamist leader killed**

The General Staff of the Chadian army announced that Mokhtar Belmokhtar was killed on 2 March 2013 in an attack on an Islamist base in the Ifoghas mountains. Until the end of last year, Belmokhtar was a leader of al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (Aqmi) and then founded his own organisation al-Mulathamini ("the signers in blood"). He reportedly was responsible for the attack on a gas plant in east Algeria, in which more than 40 foreign hostages were killed in mid-January.

On 1 March 2013, Chad announced that Algerian-born Islamist leader Abdelhamid Abou Zeid had been killed. President Idriss Deby Itno claimed that Chadian soldiers had killed Abou Zeid in the Ifoghas mountains, too, on 22 February 2013. In contrast, the Mauritanian news agency Sahara Medias reported that Abou Zeid died in a French air raid. Abou Zeid was one of the most wanted men in Africa.

### **Army operation on island in the Niger river**

In northern Mali, the army arrested about 50 people on an island in the Niger river, which is well known as an Islamist hideout. The island belongs to Kadji, which is about 10 km from Gao.

### **Army withdraws soldiers from fighting area in the north**

Following reports of violent acts by Malian soldiers, several army members were withdrawn from the area of the fights in the north of the country. A spokesman of the Malian army said on state TV on 25 February 2013 that some soldiers had not shown the required tact in certain situations and that the General Chief of Staff had taken the necessary measures. The soldiers would be handed over to the courts.

## **Somalia**

### **Sentence against suspected rape victim reversed**

On 3 March 2013, an appeals court reversed the sentence against a 27-year-old woman who had accused members of the Somalian security forces of rape. The court said there was insufficient evidence for the sentence. On 5 February 2013, the woman had been sentenced to a year in prison on charges of having insulted national institutions and having made wrongful accusations (see BN of 11 February 2013). A journalist who had interviewed the woman and been sentenced to a year on prison, also on charges of having insulted national institutions, had his sentence cut in half.

### **Attacks in Mogadishu**

Eyewitnesses claimed that at least two people were killed in Mogadishu on 1 March 2013 when a car bomb exploded in front of a restaurant and a suicide attacker blew himself up in the crowd which had gathered after the attack.

### **German ambassador to Somalia**

On 26 February 2013, Margit Hellwig-Boette, the German ambassador to Kenya, was accredited as ambassador to Somalia. Together with her, the ambassadors of Belgium, France, Spain and Finland presented their accreditation documents to President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud. Just like the representatives of the UK and Italy, these ambassadors will be based in Nairobi. Only a few countries, among them Turkey, Iran, Yemen and Ethiopia, have embassies in Mogadishu.

## **Sudan**

### **Sharia punishment executed**

According to the human-rights organisation Human Rights Watch (HRW), which says its information comes from reliable sources, doctors in a hospital run by the ministry of the interior in Khartoum amputated the right hand and the left foot of a 30-year-old man in mid-February. The amputee had been sentenced for armed robbery related to a vehicle.

### **More than 500 Beni Hussein reported dead in North Darfur**

A member of parliament and member of the Arab Beni Hussein tribe, which is fighting with the Arab Rezeigat tribe for control of a gold mine in North Darfur (see BN of 25 February 2013), said that the clashes between the two tribes have claimed the lives of more than 510 Beni Hussein since the beginning of 2013, many of them women and children. Reportedly, at least 865 people were injured. The Rezeigat have not said anything about the number of victims on their side.

At the end of January 2013, amnesty international put the number of victims to violence in the region at about 200.

## **Nigeria**

### **20 Boko Haram fighters killed**

According to an army spokesman, fighters in off-road vehicles and on motorbikes attacked the army barracks in the city of Monguno (about 200 km north of Maiduguri) on 3 March 2013. The attackers are believed to be members of the Islamist terrorist organisation Boko Haram. 20 of them were killed in the fight.

### **No peace talks between Boko Haram and the government**

On 28 January 2013, Sheikh Abu Mohammed Ibn Abdulazeez Ibn Idrisan, a self-styled commander of the radical Islamist terrorist organisation Boko Haram, had declared an armistice on behalf of Boko Haram leader Abubakar Shekau. In response, Shekau said in a video released on 3 March 2013 that Abdulazeez had not spoken in his name and that he did not have anything to do with him. Shekau claimed that Boko Haram had never offered an armistice and had not entered into a dialogue with the government.

## **Cameroon/Nigeria**

### **Blackmailer video by the kidnapers of the French citizens**

After a video showing the kidnapped French family and their four children was published on YouTube, France refused to negotiate with the kidnapers. The Islamist Boko Haram group from Nigeria kidnapped the French citizens in the north of Cameroon and brought them to Nigeria. The kidnapers demand that members of their group who are in prison in Cameroon and Nigeria be released.

It is doubtful whether Boko Haram is indeed responsible for the kidnapping, as the group (in contrast to Ansaru, which is probably a split-away from Boko Haram) has not been known to kidnap foreigners before. Moreover, so far only its leader Shekau has spoken in video messages. It is quite possible that criminals kidnapped the French in order to sell them to other criminal groups or ask for ransom.

## **DR of the Congo**

### **M23 split**

On 27 February 2013, Jean-Marie Runiga, the president of the M23 (“March 23 Movement”) rebels who are active in North Kivu, was deposed by M23 military chief Sultani Makenga. Runiga is accused of having collaborated with former army general Bosco Ntaganda, who is wanted by the International Criminal Court. Ntaganda is a former military leader of the Tutsi rebel organisation CNDP (“National Congress for the Defence of the People”), which was integrated into the national army in spring 2009. When Congolese President Kabila threatened to arrest General Ntaganda in April 2012, he and other Tutsi officers deserted and formed M23 shortly afterwards.

### **Internal clashes between M23 factions**

In the night between 28 February and 1 March 2013, the two rival M23 factions fought for several hours. A number of M23 members were killed. More than 4,000 people fled from Bunagana, a Congolese border town, to Uganda.

The M23 fighters of the Makenga faction left the district capital Rutshuru (about 100,000 inhabitants), which M23 had captured in July 2012, and the neighbouring city of Kiwanja on 28 February 2013 in order to strengthen their allies' positions in the fight against the Runiga/Ntaganda faction. Directly afterwards, criminal groups and members of different militia entered the cities and started to plunder them. Government troops entered the cities without a fight in the night between 1 and 2 March 2013 in order to protect the civilians. On 3 March 2013, they handed both cities back over to the Makenga faction of M23 in order not to endanger negotiations in the aftermath of the framework agreement on peace, security and cooperation for the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which was signed on 24 February 2013 by eleven central and south African states. The talks between the M23 rebels and the Congolese government, which are being held in Kampala (Uganda) since December, were not to be interrupted either.

## **Togo**

### **OBUTS President Kodjo released on bail**

Opposition member of parliament Agbéyomé Messan Kodjo was released on bail on 25 February 2013. Kodjo, who is the president of the OBUTS party (Organisation pour Bâtir dans l'Union un Togo Solidaire), had been arrested on 16 January 2013. Government institutions claim that he and at least 20 other opposition politicians, who have been arrested as well, were involved in arson attacks on two markets in Lomé and Kara in January. Representatives of the opposition said the arrests had political motives.