

## Information Centre on Asylum and Migration

# Briefing Notes

11 February 2013

### **Afghanistan**

#### **Security situation**

On 4 February 2013, two bomb attacks in southern Afghanistan killed three civilians and injured four. In the province of Kandahar, a wedding convoy tripped an explosives trap, and in the province of Uruzgan, two villagers who worked for a state rural development project lost their lives when a bomb exploded. On 9 February 2013, a civilian vehicle was blasted by a bomb hidden near the road in the southern province of Helmand (district of Nad Ali). Six civilians were killed.

#### **Afghan government admits torture of prisoners**

Following a UN report on torture in Afghan prisons (see BN of 21 January 2013) an investigation delegation assigned by President Karzai confirmed the results. According to the delegation's report, half of the prisoners they talked to said they had been badly treated, ill-treated or even tortured. Moreover, contact with their lawyers was difficult.

#### **E-Tazkira to be introduced in March 2013**

Pursuant to a decree by President Karzai, the distribution of the new, electronic identity card (e-Tazkira) is to start on 21 March 2013. The first of a total of about 400 registration teams are being formed; these teams are to collect the required information across the country.

#### **Corruption**

According to a recent UN report, corruption is still widespread in Afghanistan. The report says that half of all Afghans had to pay bribes for public-sector services and about one-third for private sector services. Bribery in the public sector was particularly common in the west and north-east of the country, whereas in the south it is mainly village elders, mullahs and Taliban groups who collect bribes.

### **Pakistan**

#### **People killed and injured in the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa**

On 8 February 2013, a car bomb exploded on a market in Ferozkhel (FATA agency Orakzai) and killed ten people. 31 others were wounded. In June 2011, the army had driven out the Pakistani Taliban from the region and permitted the local population to return. The Pakistani Taliban claimed responsibility for the attack, which, they said, had been directed against members of the peace committees. That is what the anti-Taliban militia call themselves.

On the same day, two men shot at and wounded lawyer and human-rights activist Malik Jarrar in the quarter of Gulbahar in Peshawar. He died on his way to hospital. Malik Jarrar was a former vice-chairman of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa section of the well-known human-rights organisation Human Rights Watch Pakistan. He was a Shia muslim, and his community believes that this was the reason for the attack.

### **Iraq**

#### **Security situation**

On 4 February 2013, a suicide bomber killed 22 people and injured more than 45 in an attack on the headquarters of the Sunni Sahwa militia in Taji. On 5 February 2013, at least ten people were killed and more than 19 wounded. At least eight died in a suicide attack in Taji on that day. At least 36 people died in other bombings on 8 February 2013 in the Baghdad suburb of Chadimija, the city of Hilla (about 100 km south of Baghdad), the city of Shomali (province of Babil) and the Shia pilgrim centre Kerbela.

Observers say that the wave of violence was triggered by rising tensions between Shia and Sunni Muslims and Kurds. According to Iraq Body Count, the number of dead victims rose already in 2011, from 4,073 (2010) to 4,144. In 2012, another increase to 4,568 was registered.

### **Missile attack on People's Mujahedin camp**

A missile attack on the refugee camp Camp Liberty, which houses members of the Iranian opposition (People's Mujahedin), killed at least five people and injured dozens on 9 February 2013. The People's Mujahedin believe that the attack was organised by an elite unit of the Iranian army which is specialised on attacks abroad.

## **Syria**

### **Opposition and government offer talks/fights continue**

On 10 February 2013, the Syrian opposition declared it was willing to talk to representatives of President Bashar al-Assad under certain conditions. Moas al-Khatib, the chairman of the Syrian National Coalition, said that the goal of the talks should be to find a way for Assad to resign from power with a minimum of bloodshed and destruction. UN peace envoy Lakhdar Brahimi, who met al-Khatib on 10 February 2013, welcomed the offer of a dialogue. On 8 February 2013, the Syrian Minister of Information had offered the opposition a dialogue without preconditions. In the meantime, the fights continue; reportedly, more than 200 people were killed during the weekend. Islamist rebels reportedly conquered an army post in the northern province of Raka on 10 February 2013.

### **Cabinet reshuffle**

Reports dated 9 February 2013 say that Assad reshuffled his cabinet in response to the economic crisis. The Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs was split. Assad also appointed new Ministers of Construction, of Public Administration, of Agricultural Affairs, of Oil and Commodities and of Finance. The economy is struggling after two years of unrest, fights and economic sanctions, much of the infrastructure has been destroyed, and fuel, power, water, food and medicine are scarce.

### **Iran and Hizbollah creating a militia network**

Referring to statements from US and Arab officials, the "Washington Post" reported on 10 February 2013 that Iran and its ally, the Shia Hizbollah militia, are building a militia network in Syria in order to protect their interests in case that Bashar al-Assad was forced out of office and the country dissolved along ethnic and sectarian dividing lines.

## **Iran**

### **Minister of Labour dismissed by parliament/Ahmadinejad ally arrested**

The Iranian parliament dismissed Ahmadinejad's Minister of Labour on 3 February 2013, and the President suffered a second defeat in the power struggle with his domestic opponents on 4 February 2013. The news agency IRNA reported that former prosecutor Said Mortazavi, whom Ahmadinejad had appointed as head of the social security fund, had been arrested. No background information was released.

## **Serbia/Kosovo**

### **First summit in Brussels**

On 6 February 2013, the presidents of the two countries (Serb President Nikolic and Kosovar President Jahjaga) surrendered to EU pressure and met in Brussels for the first time since Kosovo's independence in February 2008. The 50-minute discussion was reported to have been constructive. Nikolic emphasised once

again that his country would not recognise Kosovo's independence. He said the talks would continue, provided that the Serbs in North Kosovo (roughly 40,000 people) were granted comprehensive autonomy. Since March 2011, representatives of the two countries and the EU as a mediator have been negotiating about border and customs issues. Most recently, they agreed on establishing a number of joint border posts in December 2012. However, the Serbs in North Kosovo are still opposing the dialogue and its results. There are still road blocks, demonstrations and violent clashes.

## **Libya**

### **Human Rights Watch criticism of conditions in prisons acknowledged**

Libyan Minister of Justice Salah Marghani publicly acknowledged the observations about the human-rights situation made in the Human Rights Watch World Report 2013 on 8 February 2013 and promised to remedy the situation. He mentioned a number of countermeasures which had already been taken or were intended. Human Rights Watch criticised above all the conditions in prisons, in particular irregular prisons, as well as arbitrary arrests, which were not reviewed by courts, and the fact that torture and killings in prisons remain unpunished.

### **Supreme Court: Polygamy legal even without consent of the first wife**

According to a news report dated 8 February 2013, the Constitutional Chamber of the Libyan Supreme Court abolished the Marriage Act, Law 10, from the Gaddafi era because it ran counter to Sharia law. Under the new rules, a husband no longer needs his wife's consent if he wants to marry a second wife. Before, he had to get his wife's consent or, if he failed to do so, obtain a court decision in place of his wife's consent.

## **Egypt**

### **Protests of government opponents continue**

On 8 February 2013, people demonstrated once again against President Mursi's leadership style, police violence and death threats against opposition politicians in Cairo, Alexandria and other cities. One protester died and more than a hundred were wounded in violent clashes with the security forces. 59 people are reported to have lost their lives since the beginning of the demonstrations on 25 January 2013.

## **Tunisia**

### **Government crisis after politician is murdered**

Unknown perpetrators shot Tunisian opposition politician Chokri Belaid on the way to his office in Tunis on 6 February 2013. 48-year-old Belaid was regarded as one of the most serious opponents of the government; he was the leader of the opposition party "Party of Democratic Patriots", which forms part of the Front Populaire, an alliance of liberal and left-wing forces founded shortly after the revolution. Belaid supported a strictly laicist state. His murder triggered mass protests and major unrest all over Tunisia. Some protesters torched party offices of the governing, Islamist Ennahda party, as they blamed Ennahda supporters for the murder.

On 6 February 2013, Prime Minister Hamadi Jebali, a member of Ennahda, announced the dissolution of the government and new elections. The coalition, which is dominated by Islamist/conservative Ennahda, is to be replaced by a transitory government of non-political experts. This new government is to work on the new constitution, ensure public security and reduce high costs of living. President Marzouki terminated his visit to France early and returned to Tunis on 7 February 2013. Marzouki is a member of the secular Congress for the Republic (CPR) party. On 10 February 2013, the party announced to withdraw its three ministers from the government. Despite the tense situation, Marzouki still plans to hold parliamentary and presidential elections this year. It is doubtful whether the government reshuffle will succeed. Prime Minister Jebali has encountered resistance against his plans among conservatives and in his own party.

On 7 and 8 February 2013, hundreds of people once again demonstrated against the government in a number of cities. The protesters clashed with the security forces. The trade unions called a general strike on Friday.

Lawyers and judges went on strike all across the country. After tens of thousands attended Belaid's funeral on 8 February 2013, Ennahda supporters organised a counterdemonstration on 9 February 2013.

## **Sudan**

### **More than 100 dead in Jonglei**

The governor of the state Jonglei in South Sudan announced on 8 February 2013 that heavily armed rebels had killed 103 civilians, including women and children, and 14 soldiers of the South Sudanese army, who had accompanied the Lou Nuer tribe during their cattle migration in the district of Akobo. 17 attackers were reported to have been killed. The rebel leader is said to be David Yau Yau, a former soldier of the South Sudanese army who belongs to the Murle ethnic group. The two ethnic groups have clashed before during their cattle migrations. According to UN reports, 900 people died in similar clashes in 2011.

### **24 killed in fights in the border area between Sudan and South Sudan**

A spokesman of the South Sudanese army said that, on 9 February 2013, seven members of a militia supported by Sudan were shot when they tried to cross the border to South Sudan.

The SPLM-N (Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North), which is active in Sudan, accused a South Sudanese militia which is also supported by Khartoum of having attacked a village in South Kordofan. Reportedly, 17 people were killed and 35 injured.

### **Reports of troops being moved to Abyei**

On 10 February 2013, the South Sudanese government accused the government in Khartoum of moving troops to the disputed region of Abyei and of having members of the Arab nomad Misseriya tribe settle there in order to sabotage the referendum, in which the inhabitants of the region will decide on the country they will belong to.

### **Armistice between group of rebels and Khartoum**

According to press reports, the Darfur rebel organisation JEM (Justice and Equality Movement) and representatives of the Sudanese government signed an armistice in Doha/Qatar in the night between 10 and 11 February 2013. So far, no details of the agreement have been released. According to the Sudan Tribune, the rebel organisation is a split-away from the JEM, the JEM-Military Council led by Mohamed Bashir.

## **Mali**

### **Mass grave of Arabs discovered in Timbuktu**

After Malian and French troops conquered Timbuktu, a mass grave was discovered. The Mauritanian news agency ANI reported the bodies were those of "Arab shopkeepers who had recently been arrested by Malian soldiers and had been not been heard from since". According to ANI, the mass grave was discovered on 8 February 2013. French and Malian troops captured Timbuktu on 28 January 2013 on their way towards the north of the country. Afterwards, hundreds of inhabitants looted Arab shops because they accused their owners of having supported the Muslim occupants during the months of occupation. Human-rights organisations had accused the Malian army of extrajudicial executions of Tuaregs and Arabs and called on the government to protect these groups.

### **First suicide attacks in Mali**

The first suicide attacker in Mali's history blew himself up near an army post in Gao. A Malian soldier was lightly injured. The Islamist Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO) claimed responsibility for the attack. It had already claimed responsibility for an incident on 6 February 2013, when four Malians were killed between Douentza and Gao when their car drove on a mine. The group announced that it was planning to open up a new front with attacks on army convoys and suicide attacks.

### **Rival army units clash**

Several people were injured in fights in Bamako. The background of the clashes is still unclear. There are different reports on who was attacked and who was the attacker. The news agency dpa reported that supporters of former head of state Amadou Touré clashed with rebels. According to the internet site Dépêches du Mali, members of the Malian army wanted to prevent paratroopers who support Touré from meeting at a military camp. The news agency AFP wrote that the clashes were triggered by a TV speech by the army chief of staff, who allegedly said that elite soldiers (who tend to support Touré) have joined the French in their fight against the Islamists.

### **French and Chadian troops control airport in Tessalit**

On 7 February 2013, French and Chadian troops captured the city of Aguelhok between Kidal and Tessalit. According to French reports, paratroopers landed in Tessalit (roughly 90 km from the Algerian border) in the night between 7 and 8 February. The troops reportedly brought the airport of the last Islamist stronghold under their control.

## **Somalia**

### **Potential rape victim sentenced to jail**

On 5 February 2013, a Mogadishu court sentenced a 27-year-old woman to a year in prison on charges of having insulted national institutions and having made wrongful accusations. She had accused members of the security forces of having raped her. The woman will have to go to prison once she has stopped breastfeeding her baby. A journalist who had done research on sexual violence (which is widespread) and interviewed the woman was also sentenced to one year in prison. He, too, allegedly insulted government institutions by the interview. Moreover, he was charged with having entered the family's home while the husband was absent. The interview had not been published.

Human-rights organisations said the sentence was politically motivated. Moreover, fundamental standards of procedure were allegedly not adhered to. The organisations are afraid that even fewer victims of sexual violence will now turn to the authorities. While UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon expressed his disappointment at the sentence and called upon the Somalian government to investigate all charges of sexual violence, President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud and Prime Minister Abdi Farah Shirdon said they would not intervene in court proceedings. However, the Prime Minister has formed an independent 13-member committee, which consists of women's rights activists, lawyers, government officials and members of civil society. This committee is to investigate charges of mistreatment of civilians.

## **Eritrea**

### **Minister of Information remains abroad**

Eritrean Minister of Information Ali Abdu Ahmed did not return to Eritrea from a journey to Germany in November 2012. Reports of Eritrean media according to which Ali Abdu was back in Asmara were belied by an interview he gave to a Swedish newspaper on 30 January 2013. Ali Abdu did not comment on his reasons for this step and on his goals. Concerning the fate of a Swedish journalist imprisoned in Eritrea for years now, he said that only the President and his closest security advisers could comment on that. He claimed that it was taboo to ask questions on issues outside one's own area of work in Eritrea. Ali Abdu was regarded as a close confidant of President Issayas Afwerki. According to reports, Ali Abdu's 15-year-old daughter, his father and one of his brothers have been arrested.

### **Arrests after occupation of the information ministry**

After 100 army members occupied the Ministry of Information for a short time on 21 January 2013 (see BN of 28 January 2013), some arrests are said to have taken place. According to reports, several high-ranking army members and officials were arrested, among them Abdalla Jabir (third-in-command of the sole Eritrean PFDJ) and Mustafa Nurhusein (governor of the most populous province of Eritrea, Zoba Debub). On 15 February 2013, President Afwerki commented on the events for the first time. He said that the people need not worry and that the government had not said anything so far in order to not do the enemies' work. He would provide further information once the time was right. The incident at the ministry is believed to be the

outcome of tensions within the military. However, the very quick crackdown on the uprising shows that Afwerki's position is still secure and that major changes are improbable.

## **Nigeria**

### **Three foreign doctors murdered**

In the night between 9 and 10 February 2013, three North Korean (according to other sources, South Korean or Chinese) doctors who worked in the state general hospital of Potiskum (north-eastern state of Yobe) were killed in their homes by unknown murderers. Two had their throats slit, the third was beheaded. Officials suspect that members of the radical Islamist Boko Haram organisation are the culprits.

### **Nine killed in attacks on polio vaccination teams**

On 8 February 2013, unknown killers shot two members of a polio vaccination team in the Zaria Road in the city of Kano (the capital of the state with the same name in northern Nigeria) and half an hour later seven other polio vaccinators near a healthcare centre outside Kano in the district of Hotoro. On the day before, a Muslim cleric allegedly warned people against polio vaccinations and said that contaminated medicine had caused new cases of polio.

In 2003, several Muslim leaders in northern Nigeria had opposed polio vaccinations which, they claimed, rendered people infertile and spread AIDS. That is regarded as one reason for the fact that Nigeria (121 cases of polio in 2012) is one of the three countries world-wide (the others are Pakistan (58 cases) and Afghanistan (37)) where polio infections are still common.

## **DR of the Congo**

### **First success in peace talks in Kampala**

On 6 February 2013, representatives of the Congolese government and the rebel organisation M23 ("March 23 Movement") signed a preliminary agreement in the framework of the peace talks started in Kampala, the capital of Uganda, in December 2012. Both sides recognise that the peace agreement of 23 March 2009 is still valid in principle. However, twelve provisions of the agreement are to be renegotiated during the peace talks. According to peace agreement between the Congolese government and the Tutsi rebels of the CNDP ("National Congress for the Defence of the People"), the CNDP was to be integrated into the government army, a reform of the army was to be implemented and Congolese refugees were to be brought back from the neighbouring countries. In spring 2012, many former CNDP officers who had been included the national army complained that the government did not fully implement the agreement. They deserted from the army and founded the March 23 Movement. According to UN reports, the M23 movement was supported by Rwanda and Uganda and captured Goma, the capital of North Kivu, a province in eastern Congo, on 20 November 2012. Only after the Congolese government agreed to hold direct talks with the rebels did they retreat to strongholds about 15 km north of the city, which they had held for twelve days.

### **Both M23 and the government army accused of serious war crimes**

According to a Human Rights Watch report, both the government army and the M23 rebels perpetrated serious war crimes during the occupation of Goma from 20 November to 1 December 2012. The Human Rights Watch (HRW) report, which is based on local surveys, says that M23 rebel fighters are guilty of 24 arbitrary executions (of which 21 were civilians) and 36 rapes (of which 18 were wives of government soldiers) between 19 November and 2 December 2012. Moreover, they forced government soldiers, policemen and civilians to fight on their side. After the rebels conquered Goma, the government army retreated to Minova, a city about 50 km to the west. HRW documented at least 76 rapes by government soldiers in Minova and several neighbouring communities between 20 and 30 November 2011. So far, the military prosecution has not ordered any arrests of suspected army members.

### **Congolese insurgents arrested in South Africa**

On 5 February 2013, the South African police arrested 19 members of the Congolese rebel group "Union of Nationalists for Renewal" on their way to a military training camp in South Africa. On 7 February 2013, they were charged in a Pretoria court with illegal mercenary activities aimed at overthrowing Congolese President

Kabila. A South African police informer reported that the defendants planned to buy ground-air missiles, 1,000 grenades and 5,000 AK-47 machine guns. One of the defendants is James Kazongo, a naturalised US citizen who is the leader of the group. According to the prosecution, the group consists of 7,000 – 9,000 rebels overall.

On 8 February 2013, its former leader Etienne Kabila was arrested in Cape Town. Etienne Kabila has been claiming for ten years that he was the oldest son of Laurent-Désiré Kabila, the former Congolese President who was shot in 2001, and a half-brother of current President Joseph Kabila, who became his father's successor.

## **Vietnam**

### **22 people sentenced on charges of subversion**

On 4 February 2013, the People's Court of the central coast province Phu Yen ended a week-long trial and sentenced 22 members of the group “Council for the Laws and Public Affairs of Bia Son” (Bia Son is the name of a mountain in the province) to jail on charges of subversion. The court said that the defendants had aimed at founding a new state with the name “Great Vietnam Kingdom”, with Phan Van Thu, the leader of the group, wanting to reign as king. The group members were also charged with having written documents that criticised the government. Phan Van Thu was sentenced to life in prison; his son and the other defendants received jail terms of between 10 and 17 years and five years of subsequent house arrest.

The group is relatively unknown outside Vietnam (it is unclear whether it pursues political or buddhist/sectarian goals and/or is active in environmental protection); it was founded in the 1960s and was banned in 1975. According to official information, it has about 300 members in central and southern Vietnam.

Analysts believe that the surprisingly severe verdict is meant as a warning to other domestic opponents of the regime. Only on 9 January 2013 were 14 dissidents sentenced to between 3 and 13 years in prison (13 defendants) and a term in jail on probation (one defendant), also on charges of subversion.

## **Myanmar**

### **Committee to identify political prisoners**

The government paper New Light of Myanmar reported on 7 February 2013 that the government had formed a committee to identify remaining political prisoners, which were to be set free afterwards. The make-up of the committee is still unclear; it will, however, consist of representatives of the government, of civil society and of political parties. The government officially recognised for the first time the existence of political prisoners.

Since entering office in 2011, President Thein Sein has announced several amnesties and released about 30,000 prisoners, among them several hundred political prisoners. While observers do not agree on the exact number of still detained political prisoners because they use different definitions, several hundred people are still held in Burmese jails for political reasons.

## **India**

### **Stricter punishments for sexual crimes**

The Indian cabinet has adopted amendments to the laws governing sexual abuse. Under the new law, rapists may face a death sentence if the victim becomes comatose or dies. Rape is therefore becoming a capital offence. The judges will have some discretion in their sentence. The minimum sentence is 20 years in prison; the jail term can be prolonged several times. As President Mukherjee has already signed the bill into law, it has been in effect since 4 February 2013, irrespective of the fact that parliament has not yet voted on it. Voyeurism, stalking, violent attempts to rip off clothes and acid throwing will be punished more severely, too.

For some activists the new rules do not go far enough. They criticise that rape within a marriage is not treated as such. Moreover, women often do not report sexual violence because they are afraid that they might be victimised once again, this time at the hands of the police.

## **Sri Lanka**

At the 65<sup>th</sup> independence celebrations on 4 February 2013, Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapaksa declared that the Tamil population in the north of the island would not get autonomy. Different administrations along ethnic dividing lines were impractical, and people were living in peace anyway. Observers regard this as a clear shift away from the Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission (LLRC), which was established by the government and aimed at granting the ethnic minority (about 18% of the population) more political rights.