

Group 41 – Information Centre Asylum and Migration

Briefing Notes

13 January 2014

Afghanistan

Security situation

A bomb attack on 12 January 2014 in Kabul onto a police bus killed two policemen and the suicide bomber himself. At least 20 people were injured.

During fighting between hostile militia forces in the province of Kunduz in northern Afghanistan a mortar shell hit a residential building. A man and a woman were killed, three other people were injured.

On 10 January 2014 US soldiers shot a little boy dead in the province of Helmand in southern Afghanistan. There was a sandstorm and they reportedly thought the child was an enemy.

Dispute on release of prisoners

After the Afghan government had taken over the prison located on the air base of Bagram (near Kabul), they released 560 out of 648 prisoners. Now, they plan to release another 72 prisoners who are innocent according to Afghan opinion. The USA protested against this. According to their information the prisoners are among others responsible for the killing of foreign soldiers. 25 of the prisoners reportedly executed attacks onto the international troops. In addition, approximately 35 of the prisoners have reportedly been involved in attacks on civilians and Afghan security forces. These releases continue to burden the relationship between the USA and Afghanistan. For some time now there has been a dispute regarding a Status of Forces Agreement for the time when the majority of foreign troops will have left.

Iraq

Security situation

Iraq suffers from continuing bomb attacks. Also last week attacks were made every day. According to counts of Iraq Body Count, the number of civilians killed in the current year (status: 12 January 2014) is at 420.

In connection with this, on 9 January 2014 reports said that 51 people were killed and 45 people were killed on 12 January 2014.

Situation in the province of Anbar

According to a press release of 9 January 2014 Iraqi government troops had reportedly taken action with tanks against camps of fighters belonging to the terror group "The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria" (ISIS which is also called "The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant") between Falluja und Ramadi. According to Human Rights Watch (HRW) all parties involved in the fighting have violated human rights. Iraqi head of government Mr Nouri al-Maliki has announced rigorous measures to fight against Sunni terror groups.

Opposition links participation in Syria peace conference to conditions

The Syrian National Coalition, acting from exile, requested in talks on 12 January 2014 in Paris with representatives of the “Friends of the Syrian People”¹ that the “Friends of the Syrian People” make concessions with regard to a participation of this opposition group in the Geneva peace conference on Syria which is planned to start on 22 January 2014. They mentioned in particular the creation of an interim government, the release of prisoners and the creation of humanitarian passageways. A final decision on the participation is expected to be taken on an internal meeting of the opposition on 17 January 2014.

Fighting continues

The Syrian army was able to take Nakarin on 12 January 2014, a built-up area north of Aleppo. Local activists said that the reason for this is that oppositional militias and units of the terror group “The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria or the Levant” (ISIS or ISIL) reportedly fight against each other. Since the beginning of the year, there has time and again been fighting between them mainly in the north east of Syria where according to informations of the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights more than 700 people have reportedly lost their lives in the past ten days.

Palestinians starving to death in camp

In a Palestinian camp near Damaskus (al-Jarmuk or Yarmouk) which has been under siege by government troops, an elderly man and three children reportedly starved to death on 10 January 2014. Since the beginning of the civil commotions, there have reportedly 39 people starved to death in total. The Syrian regime has so far not allowed humanitarian access to the camp for the Red Cross and other humanitarian organisations; they said the reason for this is that rebels have reportedly been in that area.

Iran**President Rohani wants a cultural reform in Iran**

President Rohani aims at introducing a cultural reform in Iran. According to reports in the Iranian media he declared in a meeting with artists on 9 January 2014 neither he himself nor his Minister of Cultural Affairs would accept any pressure in form of warnings from the conservative side. All his campaign promises would be implemented, also those in the cultural field. As a first step Mr Rohani promised to revitalise the symphonic orchestra which his predecessor Mr Ahmadinejad had dissolved. In this context, the Minister of Cultural Affairs Mr Ali Jannati had been ordered to appear in the conservative dominated parliament last week and threatened with a vote of no confidence because he speaks up among others for cancelling internet censorship and because he had said that some cultural restrictions are ridiculous.

Revolutionary leader Ayatollah Chamenei prohibits chats between men and women

Chats between men and women will be prohibited from now on according to an order given by Ayatollah Chamenei if they are not married to each other. “This form of communication will no longer be allowed due to immorality which is often connected therewith“, this is how the [German newspaper] FAZ cites Chamenei’s order on its website. The English and German versions, however, have no such announcement of the new rule. This prohibition is mainly intended for chat programmes on smartphones. Just recently the authorities have closed the app “WeChat“ which is the Chinese counterpart to “WhatsApp“.

President Rohani in favour of a multi party system

Mr Hassan Rohani has come out in favour of the introduction of a democratic multi party system in Iran. According to the official news agency “Irna“ on 7 January 2014 in Teheran Mr Rohani said that it is impossible to govern the political interests of a country with a population of more than 70 million people without any political parties. There are several parliamentary groups, political wings and/or electoral alliances in Iran, however, there is no typical system of parties. In the meantime all activities of the few reformatory parties have been prohibited.

¹ A union of more than 100 states and organisations which supports the opposition party National Coalition as legitimate representation of the Syrian people; among them are the Foreign Ministers of America, France, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Great Britain and Germany.

Several attempts to introduce a classical system of parties have so far failed owing to conservative resistance. They think that parties are anti Islamist and a western pattern and therefore refuse them.

Pakistan

Security situation

On 9 January 2014 the Pakistani Taliban carried out a suicide bombing in Karachi which killed three policemen, among them a police officer who was known to take action against extremists.

On 10 January 2014 a schoolboy prevented a suicide bombing onto a school in the district of Hangu in the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in north-west Pakistan. The schoolboy and the suicide bomber were killed. The terror organisation Lashkar-e-Jhangvi said that they were responsible for this attack.

Israel/ Palestinian Autonomous Areas

Israel increases troops in the West Bank

Owing to violent Jewish settlers Israel sent more troops into the West Bank on 8 January 2014. According to Palestinian sources the settlers had invaded the village of Kfar Kusra in the region of Nablus on 7 January 2014 in order to destroy Palestinian property. Minister of Defense Mr Moshe Yaalon condemned the attacks onto Palestinians as "terror". Fighting began between the inhabitants of Kfar Kusra and some 20 right-wing Israelis. Only some brave elderly Palestinians were able to protect the Israelis from the furious crowd.

Israel plans to build additional 1,900 flats for settlers

According to a message of the extra-parliamentary peace movement "Shalom Achshav" ("Peace Now") the Israeli government plans to build some additional 1,900 flats in settlements located in the West Bank. On 10 January 2014 the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development announced to build 1,076 flats in East Jerusalem and 801 flats in the West Bank, so the Israeli organisation said. Many of these flats are reportedly to be built in existing settlements.

Yemen

Heavy fighting between al-Houthi rebels and Sunni

Shiite rebels and the powerful Hashid tribe have had heavy fighting. The battles in the northern province of Onran had reportedly begun on 6 January 2014 when Houthi rebels attacked the towns of Wadi Khaywan and Uzaimat, said sources from the tribes on 8 January 2014. The rebels reportedly wanted to seek revenge for the fact that the Hashid had supported radical Sunni in their fight against Shiites in the province of Saada. Head of state Mr Abd Rabbo Mansour Hadi sent a delegation into the region in order to mediate between the fighting groups. The Houthi rebels have been fighting in the remote province of Saada against the government in Sanaa for almost one decade. The conflict has aggravated since the escalation of fighting with the radical Salafi.

Turkey

Corruption affair

In connection with the corruption investigations regarding the environment of his government, Prime Minister Erdogan has in the meantime accused the judicial system and the police to have created a "state within the state". Since the corruption allegations against the government had become known on 17 December 2013, more than thousand police officers have been relocated or have lost their jobs, among them almost all officers who were involved in the corruption investigations. On 8 January 2014 the Chief Police Officers in the 16 most important provinces were relocated, among them the Chief Police Officer of the capital Ankara, Mr Kadir Ay and his colleague Mr Ali Bilkay from Izmir. The Head of the Istanbul police forces Mr Hüseyin Capkin had already been recalled in the middle of December. The EU reacted with concern regarding the disciplinary transfers and advised Turkey to respect the rule of law.

Egypt

Constitutional referendum in Egypt

On 14 and 15 January 2014 the Egyptians will vote by referendum on the new constitution which shall replace the laws implemented by the Muslim Brotherhood in December 2012. The new constitution shall ease the way for new presidential and parliamentary elections. Owing to unrest and attacks in connection with this, the police forces were placed on increased alert weeks ago. This state of exception shall reportedly prevail until after 25 January 2014. Hundreds of protesting Muslim Brothers have already been arrested; they are facing high fines. On 7 January 2014 three members of the “Strong Egypt Party“ were arrested when they affixed posters calling to vote against the constitution. Military chief Mr Abd al-Fattah al-Sisi reportedly declared according to the newspaper “Al-Ahram“ on 11 January 2014 in public and for the first time that he will be prepared to run for office if the people wish so.

Morsi proceedings postponed

The second sitting in the proceedings against the former Egyptian President Mohamed Morsi on 8 January 2014 was cancelled. The reason brought forward was that Mr Morsi could not be taken to the court in Cairo by helicopter owing to bad weather. The proceedings will continue on 1 February 2014 reported the Egyptian newspaper ”Al-Dostour al-Asly“.

Tunisia

Change at the head of government

Tunesian Prime Minister Mr Ali Larayedh resigned on 9 January 2014. In accordance with the transitional plan for the solution of the political crisis, this office is reportedly to be handed over to Mr Jomaa who until then had been the (non-partisan) Minister of Economic Affairs and Industry. On 10 January 2014 President Moncef Marzouki officially appointed him as Prime Minister. He shall now govern the country as head of a technocratic interim government until early parliamentary elections. By 14 January 2014 the interim government shall adopt the new constitution as planned.

Nigeria

38 aggressors of the Boko Haram organisation killed

According to military sources the Islamist organisation Boko Haram carried out an attack onto civilians and a military camp on 9 January 2014 around one o’clock a.m. in the town Damboa (approximately 85 km south of Maiduguri, the capital of the north eastern federal state Borno) and they were beaten back. 38 of the aggressors as well as one soldier were reportedly killed.

Democratic Republic of Congo

In the night from 6 to 7 January 2014 fighters of the rebel group “Mai Mai Kata Katanga“ under the leadership of Gedeon Kyungu Mutanga attacked the capital Lubumbashi in the province of Katanga in southern Congo which is rich in cobalt and copper. After heavy fighting for more than eight hours in the morning of 7 January 2014 government troops pushed the rebels out of town. At least 26 rebels and soldiers had died in the fighting. The rebel group is fighting for the independence of Katanga.

Central African Republic

President and head of government resigned

Both the President of the Central African Republic Mr Michel Djotodia as well as the country's Prime Minister Mr Nicolas Tiangaye have resigned. This became public on 10 January 2014 in N'Djamena, the capital of the neighbouring country Chad, on the occasion of a two-day summit of the Economic Community of Central African States CEEAC on the situation of the Central African Republic which had begun on 9 January 2014. This step was made owing to pressure exercised by the neighbouring states after the heads of government and state had not been successful in putting an end to the violent conflict in the country. It is still not known who in future will take over the country's leadership. On 11 January 2014 Mr Djotodia went to Benin in exile.

After Mr Djotodia had resigned there were attacks in Bangui onto Muslims and their institutions. Around half of the approximately 60,000 inhabitants coming from other African countries have left the capital. Prior to this, about half of the approximately 500,000 inhabitants had already fled, about 100,000 people ran for shelter into an unofficial refugee camp located at the airport. According to UN information approximately 785,000 people are on the run across the country; 2.2 million people out of the number of approximately five million inhabitants reportedly need emergency assistance.

Mr Jeffrey Feltman, United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs said that there is the danger of "widespread intensive fighting between Christians and Muslims" which could flash over to other countries and could continue to destabilise the whole region.

Somalia

Air raid on training camp of the al-Shabaab militia

In the evening of 9 January 2014 the Kenian army made an air raid onto a training camp of the al-Shabaab militia. This air raid killed reportedly more than 30 fighters, among them leading commanders. An al-Shabaab militia spokesperson, however, has denied reports regarding this incident.

Russian Federation

Security situation in northern Caucasus

The Russian Ministry of the Interior in Moscow at present estimates the number of guerilla fighters to 600 in the northern Caucasus region who are organised in approximately 40 groups with their focus on Dagestan. Additional 400 extremists from northern Caucasus have according to Russian domestic intelligence FSB reportedly joined Islamist groupings in Syria at present. The FSB monitors all flights and travelling activities in order to prevent that part of these extremists will return in the next few weeks in order to commit terror attacks prior to the Olympic Games in Sochi. At the end of 2013 Mr Alexander Bortnikow, head of the FSB, said that "more than 260 outlaws" were killed in 70 anti terror measures carried in the northern Caucasus in 2013.

Six dead persons found in the region of Stavropol

Six male bodies were found during the day of 9 January 2014 at different places and in four cars in the region of Stavropol in southern Russia. All six men seemed to have been shot. A bomb exploded in the vicinity of one of the cars. Nobody was injured in this explosion. Reportedly a bomb has also been found fixed to another car which could be deactivated in time. The bomb had been designed according to the technology which the terror groups in northern Caucasus usually apply.

Now the authorities have ordered a temporary state of exception in the districts of Predgorny and Kirovski in the region of Stavropol and they have initiated an anti terror operation in order to maintain local security and to find the delinquents.

European Court of Human Rights convicts Moscow

On 9 January 2014 the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) convicted Russia to pay compensation of more than 1.9 million euros in total to family members of Chechnyans who had disappeared (Judgment of 9 January 2014 – 53036/08 among others). The ECHR said that this case concerns the disappearances of 36

men in the northern Caucasus who have been missing since years. The judges saw evidence for the fact that the men were displaced during military missions of the Russian army in Chechnya. These events happened between 2000 and 2006; since then there has been no hint regarding the whereabouts of the men. Therefore it must be assumed that they have died in the meantime, so the judgment. The 90 applicants, the majority of whom still live in Chechnya, said all alike that armed servicemen wearing camouflage uniforms broke into their homes at night and took their relatives away. All servicemen reportedly spoke unaccented Russian. All attempts to find the missing men have reportedly failed. Moscow, however, denies that Russian servicemen are responsible for the abductions. Although the Russian judiciary opened criminal investigations, these were subsequently suspended on several occasions. Some of them are still pending to the present day. Therefore the Court in Strasbourg in particular criticised that neither an offender could be found nor made responsible. Therefore, Moscow had not provided the Court with a satisfactory and convincing explanation for the abduction of the men. In addition, the judgment concluded that all criminal investigations showed the same defects: delayed opening of the proceedings, no proper proceeds to take evidence, possible witnesses had not been questioned. Therefore, Russia not only violated the basic rights to life and liberty, but also the right to effective legal proceedings. In addition and for many years now Moscow has left the applicants in uncertainty as to what had happened to their relatives who had disappeared. This is a violation of the prohibition of inhuman or degrading treatment.

Ukraine

Mass protests in Kiev continue

In Ukraine some ten thousand people demonstrated in public against the mistreatment of opposition politician Juri Luzenko by police forces on 12 January 2014. Approximately 50,000 supporters of the pro European opposition came together on Maidan square. In the evening of 10 January 2014 during demonstrations in front of a court building in Kiev 49 year old Juri Luzenko was beaten by police forces and then taken to an intensive care unit with head injuries. He was reportedly able to leave the intensive care unit the next day, however, only closest relatives have been allowed to visit him for the time being. Mr Luzenko was Minister of the Interior under former Prime Minister Julia Tymoshenko who is under arrest now. In a common declaration with other opposition politicians, opposition leader Mr Vitali Klitschko requested to step up protesting against President Viktor Yanukovich. Mr Klitschko called for strikes across the country and requested early presidential and parliamentary elections.

Bangladesh

Ms Sheikh Hasina again sworn as Prime Minister

One week after her election, the acting Prime Minister and President of the Awami League party, Ms Sheikh Hasina was sworn on 12 January 2014 for a third period of office.

Myanmar

Political prisoners

In connection with an act of grace which was announced on 30 December 2013, all political prisoners who are still under arrest shall reportedly be released as of 31 December 2013. Five prisoners have already been released. In addition, a number of pending proceedings for political offenses shall be terminated and defendants shall be released. In Juli 2013 President Thein Sein had announced to release all political prisoners by the end of the year. However, several laws continue to be effective according to which until recently people have been judged and/or accused owing to political offenses. On 6 January 2014 thousands demonstrated in Rangun for the abolition of these laws.