

## Group 22 - Information Centre Asylum and Migration

# Briefing Notes

8 February 2016

### Afghanistan

#### Military confrontations

Fighting, airstrikes and cleansing operations have been carried out by the Army in the past few weeks in Helmand, Zabul, Uruzgan (southern Afghanistan), Maidan Wardak (central Afghanistan), Sar-I-Pul (northern Afghanistan) and Baghlan (north-eastern Afghanistan). Nangarhar, Kunar (eastern Afghanistan), Paktika und Paktia (south-eastern Afghanistan).

#### Targeted bombings and attacks

Insurgents have continued to carry out attacks in recent weeks. They targeted government representatives or security forces. Innocent civilians were also wounded in several of the attacks. Three Afghan troops were killed in a suicide bombing on an army bus in Balkh province (northern Afghanistan) on 8 February 2016, another 18 troops were wounded. A guard of the Presidential Palace was killed in Nangarhar (eastern Afghanistan).

One person was killed and another four were wounded in a suicide bombing in Sar-i-Pul (northern Afghanistan) on 7 February 2015. The dead bodies of three members of a vaccination team were found in Kunar (eastern Afghanistan). They had been abducted previously. In Logar (central Afghanistan), four judges and four civilians were killed in a suicide bombing.

On 4 February 2016, four radio journalists came under gunfire in Baghlan (north-eastern Afghanistan). Sixteen civilians were also killed in Nangarhar (eastern Afghanistan) on 4 February 2016.

Four police officers were shot dead by their colleagues in a so-called insider attack in Badghis (western Afghanistan) on 2 February 2014. A ten-year-old boy was shot in the head twice by Taliban and died on 2 February 2016. The boy had been hailed a hero after he helped lead a militia fighting the Taliban in Uruzgan (southern Afghanistan).

On 1 February 2016, 20 civilians were killed and 29 were wounded in a suicide bombing on a police station in Kabul.

### Iraq

...

#### Number of casualties

According to Iraq Body Count (IBC), 1,195 civilians were killed in 2016.

According to the UN Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI), 490 civilians were killed and 1,157 were wounded in January 2016. 359 Iraqi army troops, Peshmerga fighters and other allies (not including those killed in Anbar operations) and 293 other allies were wounded.

Baghdad was the province hit the hardest with 1,084 civilian casualties (299 of whom were killed and 785 of whom were wounded). In Diyala province, 61 persons were killed and 79 were wounded, in Niniveh province 55 persons were killed and 24 were wounded, in Kurkuk 12 persons were killed and 3 were wounded and in Salahaddin province 2 persons were killed and 14 were wounded.

According to the Health Directorate in Anbar, 56 persons were killed and 248 were wounded between 1 January and 30 January 2016.

UNAMI has pointed out that these figures merely reflect the minimum number of casualties as the number of casualties could not be verified in the conflict-ridden areas.

### **Suicide bombing in Ramadi**

At least 18 Iraqi soldiers were killed in a suicide car attack north of Ramadi (Anbar province) on 2 February 2016. So far, no one has claimed responsibility for the attack. The Iraqi Army is blaming ISIS for the attack.

### **Mass grave discovered in Ramadi**

Iraqi authorities discovered a mass grave containing at least 40 dead bodies in the city of Ramadi where ISIS have been driven out. Children were reportedly among the casualties. Many residents have been unable to return to the city so far because of the wide-scale destruction and many explosive attacks.

### **Wall being built to protect Baghdad**

According to a press report issued on 4 February 2016, Iraqi security forces have begun building a concrete wall that is 3 metres high and a trench that is 2 metres deep in a bid to prevent attacks by Islamic State militants.

### **Fewer ISIS militants**

The U.S. estimates that there are currently between 19,000 and 25,000 ISIS militants in Syria and Iraq. It was assumed in previous estimates that there were up to 31,000 militants there. The U.S. attributes this to military successes. However, it has not provided any estimates for the number of ISIS militants in other countries such as Libya.

### **Referendum on independence announced**

The President of the Kurdistan Region in Iraq, Masoud Barzani, announced in a statement issued on 2 February 2016 that a referendum is to be held on the independence of the Kurdistan region. According to Barzani's office, the referendum would not "necessarily lead to the immediate proclamation of independence". He said it is a matter of finding out what people think about their future.

## **Yemen/Saudi Arabia**

...

### **Two persons from Saudi Arabia killed by bullets fired in Yemen**

Two persons, a soldier and a civilian, were killed in southern Saudi Arabia by bullets fired from Yemen. A Saudi Arabian border patrol came under fire in Assir region in the early hours of 6 February 2016, a missile hit Najran in southern Saudi Arabia in the evening of 6 February 2016. More than 90 persons have been killed by missiles launched from Yemen since the Sunni Kingdom intervened in the conflict between the Houthi rebels and the Yemeni government in the spring of 2015. According to UN sources, more than 6,100 persons have already been killed in the conflict, half of them civilians.

## **Syria**

...

### **Geneva peace talks suspended**

On 3 February 2016, the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, Staffan de Mistura, announced that the peace talks in Geneva would be suspended on 25 February 2016. A lot of work remains to be done for the United Nations and the conflicting parties. De Mistura has been endeavouring since 29 January 2016 to get the indirect negotiations going to end the civil war in Syria at separate meetings with representatives of the Syrian government and its opponents. Resolution 2254 that was adopted by the UN Security Council on 18 December 2016 provides the basis for the talks. It sets out a road map for ending the conflict which will culminate in the establishment of an interim government.

### **Government troops attack Aleppo and other targets**

On 4 February 2016, field commanders of the Free Syrian Army (FSA) and other rebel groups from locations north of Aleppo announced they would join forces under a common military command in response to attacks by Syrian government troops, backed by the Lebanese Shia militia Hezbollah, officers of the

Iranian Revolutionary Guard, mercenaries from Iraq and Afghanistan as well as Russian airstrikes. The only remaining supply route to the Turkish border and the only access to humanitarian aid have been cut off by airstrikes since 3 February 2016. The Syrian regime is trying to encircle Aleppo which is the opposition's last stronghold in a major city. 350,000 persons are reportedly still in the districts held by rebels. The Syrian regime has once again been on the offensive on other fronts with the backing of the Russian air force for more than a year. In Lattakia province, the rebels fought back and advanced on Idlib province which opposition groups had seized in 2015. In the south, government troops seized Ataman, a strategically important location near the city of Daraa. In the west, they have seized an area north of Homs that is being held by militants which is blocking the road to Hama and hence the direct route from Damascus to Aleppo.

### **Donor conference pledges EUR 9 billion aid for Syria**

At a donors' conference in London, delegates from more than 70 countries committed to help reach the target of more than \$10 billion (EUR 9 billion). Concrete initiatives were discussed at the conference which focused on more schools and training places for refugees and for the national population of the regional host countries of Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan and Egypt. They are also trying to ensure humanitarian aid reaches the starving and freezing people fleeing Syria.

## **Syria/Turkey** . . .

### **Tens of thousands of Syrian refugees at the Turkish border**

The attacks launched by the Syrian army on Aleppo and its surroundings has caused tens of thousands of people to flee the city which is only around 60 km from the Turkish border. Between 30,000 and 50,000 Syrian refugees are waiting at the border with Turkey on the Syrian side, above all in the border town of Bab al-Salama in the Syrian district of Asas, in the hope of entering Turkey. However, the Turkish border crossing Öncüpınar has remained closed. According to the organisation Médecins Sans Frontières, there is no accommodation, water or sanitary facilities available in the entire district. If Aleppo was seized by government troops, Turkey would expect more than 1 million additional refugees to be seeking entry to its soil.

## **Egypt** . . .

### **Death sentences against Islamists overturned.**

An Egyptian appeals court has overturned death sentences for 149 pro-Islamists and has ordered a retrial. The defendants were found guilty in a mass trial held in February 2015 of raiding a police station at a location near Cairo and of killing eleven police officers and two civilians.

### **Prison sentence against activists upheld**

A court in Cairo upheld two-year prison sentences for five activists who had been convicted of allegedly taking part in an illegal protest in December 2015. The defendants had taken part in a rally of around 30 persons in November 2015 staged in memory of protests against those killed after President Mohammed Morsi was overthrown. One of the convicted is an Egyptian doctor who had worked at the University Clinic in Frankfurt am Main in the past as a guest doctor.

### **Italian student murdered**

The body of the Italian PhD student Giulio Regeni who had disappeared was discovered in Cairo on 3 February 2016. An autopsy report revealed injuries indicating he had been tortured. The 28-year-old PhD student of Cambridge University, who had been freelancing for the online portal of an Italian daily newspaper, had criticized the Egyptian government in his Internet contributions. The Italian government has condemned the man's death. The Minister of Economic Development, Federica Guidi, and a delegation of economists cut short a visit to Egypt. The Italian Foreign Minister summoned the Egyptian Ambassador to Italy. It is still unclear whether Regeni was the victim of a crime or was abducted by state security officials.

## **Algeria** . . .

### **Secret service dismantled**

Algeria's President Abdelaziz Bouteflika passed a decree to dismantle and replace the Department of Intelligence and Security (DRS) on 24 January 2016. The DRS will be led in future by a Directorate for Security Issues subject to the control of the presidential office. It is to be led by General Athman Tartag. This means the Algerian Defence Ministry will no longer have control over the new intelligence service.

### **Parliament adopts constitutional reforms**

Algeria's parliament adopted a package of constitutional reforms on 7 February 2016. The new Constitution will reintroduce a two-term limit on the presidency meaning the president can serve a maximum of two five-year terms. This limit had been lifted in 2008 to allow President Bouteflika to run for a third time. The Members of Parliament will vote for the Prime Minister in future. An independent electoral commission will be created and the Amazigh language spoken by the indigenous Berber population will also be recognised as official. Freedoms of assembly and the press will be explicitly guaranteed. The opposition have criticised the constitutional amendments, saying the reforms are little more than a show, several opposition parties boycotted the vote.

## **Sudan**

### **Humanitarian situation in Darfur disastrous**

The UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator in Sudan, Ms. Marta Ruedas, said the humanitarian situation in Darfur is disastrous. At least 38,000 persons reportedly fled to northern Darfur and 50,000 fled to central Darfur following heavy clashes between government troops and rebels belonging to the Sudanese Liberation Army led by Abdel Wahid (SLA-AW) in the inaccessible mountainous region of Jebel Marra in January 2016. It is one of the largest exoduses Darfur has witnessed in the past ten years. Since the UN organisations have not had any access to the region, it is not possible to provide more accurate figures on the number of persons who have fled.

## **South Sudan:**

### **The world's worst humanitarian crisis in South Sudan**

The civil war which has been raging on in South Sudan since December 2013 has led to what the UN says is currently the world's worst humanitarian crisis. A confidential report by the UN body responsible for sanctions has urged the UN Security Council to impose an immediate arms embargo for South Sudan. An international travel ban is to be imposed on leading South Sudanese politicians and assets are to be frozen. According to the report, President Salva Kiir and rebel leader Riek Machar, the former Vice-President of South Sudan have their armies fully under their control and are directly responsible for the slaughter of civilians. It quotes the report as saying: "There is unequivocal and credible proof that most of the acts of violence committed during the war including attacks on civilians ... were carried out on instructions given by the top echelons of the government and opposition."

## **Somalia**

### **Mogadishu suspends flights to Somaliland**

According to media reports, the head of the immigration authorities in Mogadishu instructed all airlines on 1 February 2016 to temporarily suspend all domestic flights from Hargeisa bound for Mogadishu on 22 February 2016. The reason is reportedly a statement issued by the Minister of the Interior of Somaliland that all Somalians and other foreigners were to be refused entry unless they were in possession of a visa or work permit.

### **Attack on presidential palace claims civilians casualties**

A child was killed in a grenade attack on 1 February 2016 which was apparently targeting the presidential palace in Mogadishu when a hand grenade was thrown into a house in the neighbourhood. Several other persons were wounded. Al-Shabaab is being held responsible for the attack.

### **Bomb blast on aircraft**

A mid-air explosion that forced an Airbus A321 to return to the Somali capital for an emergency landing shortly after take-off on 2 February 2016 was caused by a suicide bomber. The man, who is thought to have had an explosive device inside a laptop, was sucked through a hole in the fuselage made by the blast. Only two of the 74 passengers sustained injuries. The pilot managed to make an emergency landing in Mogadishu. Several members of the security staff at Mogadishu airport were arrested. It is not known whether the suicide bomber has any links with al-Shabaab.

### **Al-Shabaab seize Merka briefly**

Al-Shabaab insurgents seized control of the key port of Merka in southern Somalia (Lower Shabelle region, approx. 90 km from Mogadishu) on 5 February 2016. They took the port without engaging in clashes after units of African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) had withdrawn from the port. However, the Somali Army and AMISON retook the port on 6 February 2016. The Al-Shabaab insurgents reportedly fled after a brief gunfire exchange. Merka has been under the control of government troops and AMISOM since 2012.

## **Côte d'Ivoire**

### **Former President on trial in the Hague**

The trial against the former President of Côte d'Ivoire, Laurent Gbagbo, began at the International Criminal Court (ICC) in the Hague on 28 January 2016. The 70-year-old entered not guilty pleas after the charges were read out. His co-accused, former militia leader and Minister of Youth Affairs, Charles Blé Goudé, also entered not guilty pleas. They are accused of crimes against humanity in the wake of the controversial presidential elections that took place in 2010. Gbagbo has been detained in the ICC's jail since November 2011. Goudé was arrested in Ghana in January 2013 and was then extradited.

Gbagbo lost the presidential elections in 2010 but refused to accept defeat and make way for his opponent, today's President Alassane Ouattara. Around 3,000 persons were killed during post-election violence that went on until April 2011. Hundreds of supporters gathered in front of the court building demanding the release of both defendants, accusing the ICC of partisanship because it was not investigating Ouattara's lobby. Human rights organisations claim both sides committed crimes.

## **Nigeria**

...

### **Boko Haram attacks in northern Nigeria**

In the evening hours of 30 January 2016, militants of the Islamist terrorist organisation Boko Haram attacked the Nigerian village of Dolori east of Maiduguri, the capital Borno state, in several vehicles. One suicide bomber also blew himself up in the midst of villagers attempting to flee. According to the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA), 65 villagers were killed and 136 were wounded. The majority of homes in the village were set on fire.

On 29 January 2016, a male teenager blew himself up at midday at a market in the town and Local Government Area of Gombi, Adamawa State, north-eastern Nigeria. At least ten persons were killed in the blast.

On 27 January 2016, two female suicide bombers blew themselves up at the market in the town of Chibok, the administrative seat of Chibok Local Government Area. At least 14 persons were killed and another 24 persons were wounded in the blast. The suicide bombing took place the day after the market, which had been closed down in April 2014 following the abduction of over 200 schoolgirls in Chibok by the Islamist terrorist organisation Boko Haram, was reopened.

## **Cameroon**

...

### **Attack on shelter for Nigerian refugees**

On 28 January 2016, two women suspected of being members of the terrorist organisation Boko Haram blew themselves up in front of a school in the town of Kerawa close to the Nigerian border in the Far North Region. Nigerians who had fled Boko Haram were being sheltered at the school. The two suicide bombers and a number of other persons were killed in the blast.

### **Over 30 killed in suicide attacks in Bodo**

On 25 January 2016, four women suspected of being members of the terrorist organisation Boko Haram blew themselves up at the market while others hit the town's main entrance and exit points in the village of Bodo, Far North Region. For the first time they used sacks of grain containing explosive devices rather than belts containing explosives. At least 30 persons were killed and more than 60 were wounded in the attacks.

## **Democratic Republic of Congo**

...

### **Clashes between UN troops and Nande militia**

According to Edgar Mateso, the representative of a regional civil rights organisation, Hutu rebels belonging to the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR) operating in eastern Congo attacked a camp of the Popular Union for the Defence of the Innocent (UPDI) which defends the ethnic group of the Nande on 7 February 2016. 25 FDLR rebels and four UPDI members were killed.

### **Military cooperation between MONUSCO and the Army resumes**

On 28 January 2016, the Congolese government and the United Nations' peacekeeping mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, MONUSCO, concluded an agreement to resume military cooperation. MONUSCO will support the Congolese army in military operations against armed groups which are still operating in eastern Congo in future, in particular the Rwandan Hutu rebel organisation FDLR as well as the ADF Islamist Ugandan group. Cooperation between the army and MONUSCO had been suspended by MONUSCO in February 2015 as the Congolese General responsible for fighting the rebels in Eastern Congo had been blamed for committing war crimes in the past.

## **Central African Republic**

### **Parliamentary elections annulled**

The Constitutional Court announced on 25 January 2016 that the results of the parliamentary elections held on 30 January 2016 were invalid owing to a number of inconsistencies. The elections are to be held again on 14 February 2016. The presidential elections held on 25 January 2016 will not be affected. A run-off is to be held on 14 February 2016 since no candidate managed to win the required majority.

### **Sexual abuse by UN peacekeepers**

The multidimensional United Nations peacekeeping operation MINUSCA confirmed on 4 February 2016 that UN peacekeepers from the Republic of the Congo and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) have been accused of acts of sexual abuse of several women and girls in the city of Bambari between October and December 2015. 120 UN peacekeepers from the Republic of the Congo will be detained at their barracks and will be returned home once investigations have been carried out. Since 2015, several similar accusations have been made, inter alia, against French UN peacekeepers.

## **Chad**

### **Suicide bombings**

At least five persons were killed and around 60 persons were wounded in two suicide attacks carried out by Boko Haram in the villages of Guie and Miterine on Lake Chad on 31 January 2016.

## **Albania**

...

### **Judicial reform**

The judicial system is to be reformed by mid-year as part of ongoing EU rapprochement. Five articles in the Constitution and 70 additional laws are to be amended as part of the process. A Supreme Judicial Council is to limit the political influence of judges. New powers are also to be bestowed on the Supreme Courts and the Constitutional Court. The public prosecutor is to focus more on fighting corruption. The role of the President in nominations is to be changed.

The package of laws is being drawn up with the help of the EU, the U.S. and the Council of Europe. The judicial reform is intended to be a means against widespread corruption which is rampant in Albania - especially in the judiciary. In its annual Corruption Perceptions Index which ranks 167 countries/territories by their perceived levels of public sector corruption, Albania ranks 88th with a score of just 36. Albania applied for EU accession in April 2009. In June 2014, it was granted candidate status for membership in the EU.

### **Voluntary returns**

More and more Albanians - around 100 daily - are returning to Albania via Frankfurt airport, also in a bid to avoid a ban on re-entry linked to compulsory repatriation. In 2015, over 50,000 Albanians filed an application for asylum in Germany. In October 2015, Albania was classified as a safe country of origin.

## **Moldova**

...

### **Mass anti-government rallies**

Protests erupted in the capital of Chişinău, some of them violent, following the appointment of the new prime minister Pavel Filip on 20 January 2016. Both pro-European and pro-Russian protestors are calling for a re-election.

The country has been in the throes of a political crisis and has been plagued by protests for months now. Following a corruption scandal in April 2015 (the so-called "theft of the century"), the pro-European government was overthrown in October 2015 by a vote of no confidence and ex-prime minister Vlad Filat was arrested. Moldova is considered to be the poorhouse of Europe. Oligarchical power structures, corruption and legal uncertainty are widespread and the political landscape is divided into a pro-Russian and a pro-Western lobby. The country signed an association agreement with the EU in 2014 - despite Russian opposition.

## **India**

### **Seven killed in attack by suspected Maoists**

Suspected Maoist rebels attacked a police convoy in a remote part of eastern India on 27 January 2016, killing seven persons. The attackers set off a powerful landmine blast before opening fire on the convoy in a forests of Jharkhand state.

The security forces were involved in an anti-Maoist operation. Maoists have waged a decades-long battle across central and eastern Indian states to overthrow government authorities. The rebels claim to be fighting for the rights of farmers and poverty-stricken minorities. The Maoist insurgency has claimed thousands of lives, and was described by the government as the country's most serious internal security threat.

## **Vietnam**

...

### **Party Convention confirms General Secretary**

A new party leadership was nominated at the 12th Party Convention of the Communist Party held in Hanoi between 21 and 28 January 2016. The Central Committee of the Party was elected which in turn elected the members of the Politbüro which determines the political guidelines. General Secretary Nguyen Phu Trong was also re-elected. His rival, outgoing Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung, failed to garner enough votes, he will now have to resign after two terms in office.