

Group 22 - Information Centre Asylum and Migration

Briefing Notes

17 February 2014

Iraq

Fighting and attacks

Islamists seem to conquer another town in the north of Iraq in the near future. Reports say that the organisation “The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant” (ISIL) has taken over parts of Sulaiman Bek Salah in al-Din province. Attacks in different parts of the country on 16 February 2014 killed at least 17 people.

Pakistan

Attacks

A bomb attack onto a passenger train on 16 February 2014 in Sindh province in southern Pakistan killed at least five and wounded more than 30.

One policeman died in Peshawar (Khyber Pakhtoonkwa province) in an attack on members of a vaccination team.

On 15 February 2014 a bomb attack was carried out onto a school in Hangu (FATA, Federally Administered Tribal Areas). One security man was wounded.

An attack onto a police bus in Karachi (Sindh province) killed at least 13 officers and wounded more than 50.

So far, nobody has taken responsibility for the attacks.

Syria

Syria peace talks end without any result

On 15 February 2014 the second round of negotiations in Geneva between the Syrian government and the opposition came to an end without any result. The opposition wanted to focus the discussions on the creation of a transitional government, the government wanted to speak about fighting against terror.

Ceasefire for Homs renewed

The ceasefire for Homs was renewed by another two days by 12 February 2014 in order to guarantee that more inhabitants could be evacuated. Reportedly, approximately 1,200 to 1,400 people have fled from the city of Homs which has been under siege for 15 months. The government arrested approximately 200 men, among them young people who had been separated from their families during the evacuation. On 15 February 2014 the province governor Mr Talal Barasi said that they will be instructed in order to change their “false interpretation of Islam” and they will receive support for their social reintegration.

Humanitarian situation

According to estimates of the United Nations, reportedly more than 250,000 people are trapped in areas where they do not have enough food such as Homs but above all in Aleppo and Deir ez-Zor as well as in the Palestinian refugee camp of Yarmouk in Damascus. There are reportedly a total of approximately 40 besieged areas where the inhabitants have been cut off from any relief supplies for months. Ms Valerie Amos, UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief assumes that both the

government and the rebels break the international law “continuously and shamelessly”. The UN estimates that out of the approximately 22.5 million inhabitants Syria had before the beginning of the fighting, about ten million are refugees. About seven million are reportedly staying within the country; approximately 2.5 million have fled abroad.

Lebanon

Lebanon forms new government

According to reports of 15 February 2014 and approximately eleven months after his predecessor Mr Mikati had resigned, the incoming Lebanese Prime Minister Mr Tammam Salam was successful in forming a cabinet which includes representatives of all parties, with the exception of the former Christian militia chief Mr Samir Geagea. The formation of a cabinet in Lebanon had so far not been possible owing to a conflict between the Sunni alliance called “March 14 alliance” of Mr Saad Hariri and the Shiite Hezbollah. Above all, considerable pressure from abroad which had the intention to prevent that the country breaks apart and glides into Syria's civil war, was the reason for the fact that the parties to the conflict found an agreement. In future, the 24 ministries will be divided to one third each among the Hezbollah and their allies (among them will be the Foreign Minister), the “March 14 alliance” (among others the Minister of the Interior) and intimate friends of the President and rebel leader Walid Joumblatt.

Iran

Freedom of the press

On 12 February 2014, the organisation “Reporters without Borders” published the current ranking list of countries in terms of freedom of the press. On this list, Iran has rank no. 173 (it had rank no. 175 on the previous list). At the end of last year, 50 journalists and bloggers were in prison. Censorship is as intensive as before and sets its focus on topics such as the nuclear programme and the support of Syria's government. This ranking list regarding the freedom of the press compares the situation of the media in 180 states and regions for the period from December 2012 to the middle of October 2013.

Transsexualism and homosexuality

The [*British newspaper*] Guardian says that between 15,000 and 20,000 transgender people live in Iran in accordance with official statistics. Unofficial estimates assume a number of up to 150,000 people. After Thailand, the country has the highest number of sex change surgeries; people from the whole Middle East come to Iran in order to have an operation of this kind. This is legal practice and is supported by the state in spite of its restrictive and heavily controlled sexual morals. In case of a positive decision on a doctor's examination, the public welfare organisation pays approximately half of the costs, including the operation itself, a hormonal therapy and psychological treatment. At the end of this process a new birth certificate will be issued. As early as in the middle of the nineteen eighties, the leader of the Iranian Revolution at that time Mr Ayatollah Ruhollah Chomeini had decided so in a fatwa. Mr Chomeini thought that transsexualism was a disease as well as homosexuality which both were sentenced with death. There is a religious reason for the fact that the one thing was forbidden and the other not. The reason is that the Quran does not mention sexual transformation and therefore it cannot be a sin. Homosexuality in contrast is according to the Sharia criminal law regarded as a “disgraceful act” (crime according to the Hadd [*Islamic law*]; art. 108 - 113 IStGB).

Yemen

New federalist constitution

The future constitution shall create a national federal state consisting of six federal states and the capital district of Sanaa. The new constitution shall be drafted by the end of the year based on guidelines which had been decided on in a national dialogue. The reign of President Ali Abdallah Saleh - thrown over at the beginning of 2012 - had provoked a heavy denial of the centralism among large sections of the population. The president and his administration were accused of corruption to the disadvantage of the provinces. A special status is planned for Sanaa as capital of the country and for Aden (former capital of the independent

South Yemen). The new structure however does not give any information on the distribution of resources among the regions. In addition, it cannot be determined whether the new constitution will be a pacifier for the domestic political situation. The separatist forces in south Yemen and the al-Houthi rebels who dominate the north of the country, have already announced their resistance against the new form of government. They criticise above all that the planned structure cuts historic, cultural and economic ties.

Prison break in Sanaa

Ten people (seven policemen and three attackers) were killed in a prison break supported from outside in the capital of Sanaa on 13 February 2014. 14 detainees could flee, most of them members of the al Qaida network. Official sources say that about 5,000 detainees are arrested in this prison.

Egypt

Attack on tourists

On 16 February 2014 a bomb on a tourist bus with about 30 South Korean tourists killed at least three passengers and the driver in the seaside resort Taba near an Egyptian border crossing with Israel on the Sinai Peninsula. 13 people were wounded. The bus was travelling from Cairo to Israel. So far, nobody has taken responsibility for the attack.

There have not been any attacks on tourists in the past few years. The last incident was in 2009 when a French woman was killed in the old town of Cairo in a grenade attack. In the years from 2004 to 2006 attacks in the seaside resorts in the south of the Sinai Peninsula had killed a number of tourists and local people.

Turkey

Judicial reform

Turkish MPs brawled in parliament in a debate on 15 February 2014 when the parliament passed the controversial law on reforming the judiciary. With this new law the government will be given more influence in the appointment of judges and public prosecutors. The new law mainly affects the higher council of judges and prosecutors (HSYK) which as an independent control body controls, appoints and oversees judges and prosecutors and is responsible for their promotion. The new legislation gives the justice minister increased powers as he will be the president of the body.

Corruption affair

On 11 February 2014 and in connection with the corruption affair, the Turkish government suspended additional public officers from their jobs. Turkish press reports said that 166 prosecutors and judges were dismissed or relocated on the order of the higher council of judges and prosecutors (HSYK), among them several well-known prosecutors from Istanbul, Ankara and Izmir. Media reports said that in addition the police chiefs of 27 provinces and some members of the secret service were exchanged against other officers. Since the beginning of the corruption investigations by the judiciary in the middle of December 2013, the Turkish media have counted more than 6,000 policemen as well as hundreds of judges and prosecutors who have lost their jobs.

Freedom of the press

Following the publication of the ranking list of the "Reporters without Borders" (ROG) on 12 February 2014, Turkey has not achieved a better ranking in contrast to the previous year in terms of freedom of the press. Among the 180 countries on the "World Press Freedom Index" which were assessed, Turkey is again on rank 154. At the end of 2013 reportedly approximately 60 journalists were sitting in Turkish prisons, in most cases due to their work for pro Kurdish media or owing to assumed contacts to secret organisations.

Democratic Republic of the Congo

Act of grace for M23 rebels

On 12 February 2013 President of state Mr Kabila had announced an act of grace for the former M23 rebels. This act of grace includes riots and acts of war as well as political crimes which had been committed on the territory of the Democratic Republic of the Congo by 20 December 2013, the day when the government adopted the law on the act of grace. What is excluded from this law are serious crimes such as tribal genocide, crimes against humanity, acts of terror, torture, sexual violence, recruiting of children, misappropriation of funds and plundering. In order to fall under the act of grace, the former rebels must declare in writing to the Congolese government that in future they will not commit any acts which fall under the act of grace regulation. At the beginning of November 2013 the armed forces of the government defeated the M23 rebel organisation with the support of the intervention brigade of the UN peacekeeping mission in the Congo. Almost 1,300 rebels fled over the border to Uganda where they have since then been detained in a camp.

Nigeria

Boko Haram: Massacre in the federal state of Borno

On the evening of 15 February 2014 presumed members of the militant Islamist terror organisation Boko Haram attacked the village of Izghe (Gwoza LGA, north eastern federal state of Borno on the border to Cameroon) and killed approximately 90 people.

Three days before, the terrorists had killed nine soldiers in an ambush near Izghe.

On the evening of 11 February 2014 gunmen attacked the town of Konduga in Borno (about 25 km south west of the province capital of Maiduguri) and killed more than 30 inhabitants. In addition, they burnt down several hundreds of houses, schools, a hospital as well as the main mosque. The attackers are presumably members of the Boko Haram.

Eritrea

Ranking list for the freedom of the press: lowest rank for Eritrea

According to the ranking list published by the "Reporters without Borders" on 12 February 2014 on the freedom of the press Eritrea is on rank 180 and therefore on the lowest rank for the seventh time in a row. The reason for this is reportedly the fact that the dictatorship of President Issayas Afwerki does not include the freedom of opinion. At present several reporters are detained in prison under degrading conditions, some of them have been detained for more than twelve years.

In September 2001 the government banned the private press. Since then, there have always again been arrests of journalists, something which is against the rule of law.

Somalia

Terror attack on airport

A suicide attack on the airport of Mogadishu killed at least seven on 13 February 2014, among them also security forces. Some other people were also wounded. The attacker reportedly drove with his car to the airport gate and then triggered off the car bomb so that it exploded. The al-Shabaab has taken responsibility for the attack.

Misappropriation of weapon supplies by government members

A confidential report of a UN group of experts which regularly controls the embargo on weapons from 1992 on Somalia which was loosened in 2013 with the support of the USA, said that the government of President Hassan Sheikh Mohonud systematically violates the embargo. In addition, they undergo the controls. The reports says that a high ranking advisor of the president belonging to the president's Hawiye-Abgal clan is involved in the planning of arms deliveries to a leader of the al-Shabaab who also belongs to the Abgal clan. In addition, a minister of the government belonging to the Hawiye clan Habr Gedir has reportedly played a

certain role in an arms deal with an unnamed golf state which had not been disclosed. The material was reportedly transported by airplane to Mogadishu and then taken to a private property. The whereabouts of large shipments from Djibouti and Uganda also remains unclear.

The experts request either to re-establish the embargo in full or to increase the requirements for publication and reporting.

Central African Republic

Ethnic cleansing

According to Amnesty international Muslims are the aim of ethnic cleansing. The international forces in the country can reportedly not prevent the spreading of violence against Muslims.

The Islamic parts of the capital of Bangui are almost unpopulated. Most of the Muslims have fled and their shops and houses were plundered. Amnesty documented the killing of at least 200 Muslims by Christian militia. Hundreds of Muslim civilians who could not flee were killed. In the town of Yaloké in the north west of Bangui almost the complete Muslim population (30,000 people) had to flee.

A mass grave was found in a camp which was used by Muslim rebels. The Red Cross said that the victims could not be identified.

UN Secretary-General Mr Ban Ki-Moon warned against a tribal genocide. He requested that the French increase their troops and that an earlier deployment of the planned EU troops should be made.

The World Food Programme of the UN WFP started an air lift from Douala in the neighbouring country Cameroon to Bangui. For one month 150,000 refugees shall be cared for, most of them in the capital of Bangui.

The President of the Central African Republic Ms Samba-Panza intends to take intensive action against militant Christians who kill Muslims.

Russian Federation

Security situation in North Caucasus

Clashes in the North Caucasus region claimed 14 lives in total in the first two weeks of February 2014. In Dagestan nine extremist were killed and in Kabardino-Balkaria one underground fighter, three civilians died in Chechnya and one in Karachay-Cherkessia. Dagestan is still the focus of fighting in North Caucasus. This is the place where in the past five years around 70% of all attacks and crimes have been committed. There have been far less terrorist acts of violence in Ingushetia, Chechnya, Kabardino-Balkaria and North Ossetia than in Dagestan. Hardly any acts of violence or attacks occur in the two other North Caucasus republics of Adygia and Karachay-Cherkessia.

Ukraine

Situation slightly better – Protesters leave Kiev city hall

After weeks of occupation the Ukrainian opposition has begun to leave Kiev city hall on 16 February 2014 and has thus fulfilled the main request of the controversial President Mr Viktor Yanukovich. The government opponents will however, stay in front of the city hall for the time being and continue to protest against Mr Yanukovich. On 1 December 2013 demonstrators had seized Kiev city hall after security forces had violently dispersed a student protest. Since then, the city hall has been regarded as the “Revolution’s headquarters” in Ukraine. Last weekend, the government opponents withdrew also in other regions in the west of Ukraine. Mr Yanukovich had set a deadline for the opposition in order to leave the occupied public buildings and squares by 17 February 2014. The release of the occupied buildings is the condition in order to enact the act of grace adopted two weeks ago in favour of the protesters who were arrested during the protests. On 14 February 2014 the authorities had released all arrested protesters who had criticised the government. Whether or not the prosecution will be stopped is dependent on the fact however, that the conditions will be fulfilled in time.

China

Outbreak of violence in Xinjiang

Official sources say that eleven assumed Uigurs died on 14 February 2014 in an attack onto a police patrol in Wushi in the district of Aksu (Uigur Autonomous Region Xinjiang). According to this, eight attackers have reportedly been shot dead by the police; the news agency Xinhua calls them terrorists. Three other died when an explosive device fixed to their car, exploded. Radio Free Asia reported under reference to local sources about a curfew in this territory.

Nepal

New head of government

Three months after the parliamentary elections a new Prime Minister was elected in Nepal. On 10 February 2014 Mr Sushil Koirala (75) of the Nepali Congress Party received 405 out of 553 votes. Prior to this, there had been long and difficult negotiations before the Congress Party – although strongest party in the election however without absolute majority – could secure the support of the second strongest party, namely the liberal Unified Marxist-Leninist Party.

Its main task will be the drafting of a constitution where the final form of government, the governmental system and the electoral system as well as the future federal structure shall be determined. The new constitution was planned for 2010 however, fighting between the parties for power have rendered this task impossible for the time being. A new constitution is required because a “civil war” lasting for ten years has led to the fall of the monarchy in 2008. Urgent economic reforms have also not been implemented for the time being. Owing to poverty and high unemployment approximately 1,600 mostly young people leave the country every day.

North Korea

Crimes against humanity

A UN committee accuses North Korea of having committed crimes against humanity. Evidence for such crimes has reportedly been collected in the course of one year. In addition, people in South Korea and Japan have reportedly been kidnapped. The committee has publicly questioned more than 80 people in Seoul, Tokyo, London and Washington.