

## Group 22 – Information Centre Asylum and Migration

# Briefing Notes

20 June 2016

Short version due to current staffing constraints

### Afghanistan

#### Security situation

On 14 June 2016, Taliban fighters seized Charchino district (central Uzurgan province). The Afghan ministry of defence said that during the following days, special forces have killed at least 47 insurgents and wounded another 41. In Achin district (Nangarhar province), at least 23 ISIS combatants were killed in an air raid followed by a ground offensive.

#### Targeted attacks

On 20 June 2016, a suicide attack on a minibus in Kabul left at least 14 Nepalese and Afghan staff members of a security company dead and 8 more wounded. The Taliban have claimed responsibility for the attack.

### Iraq

#### Most of Fallujah recaptured

On 17 June 2016, Prime Minister al-Abadi said that Iraqi security forces have recaptured most of Fallujah after weeks of heavy fighting (see BN of 6 and 13 June 2016). Now, attention will turn to the ISIS stronghold of Mosul, he added. Notwithstanding this, fights are continuing in Fallujah. In the last three days alone, some 30,000 people have been displaced from the city, with a humanitarian crisis unfolding in the surrounding area, the Norwegian Refugee Council reports. The Iraqi government in Baghdad has announced steps to rapidly build 10 new camps for the displaced, but so far little has happened.

UNHCR says that up to 84,000 people have been forced to flee their homes since the end of May.

#### Several hundred ISIS suspects captured

Iraqi forces say that during the last two weeks, more than 500 suspected ISIS combatants were detained when trying to sneak out of Fallujah, blending in with fleeing civilians. Apparently, many of them were using fake identity documents.

### Syria

#### Russian airstrike on US allies?

On 16 June 2016, Russia apparently launched an airstrike on US-backed Syrian rebel fighters near al-Tanf, close to the Syrian-Iraqi border. It was reported that the rebels, members of the 'New Syrian Army' (troops who were trained by the US and their allies in Jordan), had met with Iraqi units in order to co-ordinate joint measures against the ISIS insurgents. Russia, in turn, stated that it was difficult to distinguish between moderate rebels and Jabhat al-Nusra (JN) fighters.

#### Russia and US agree to improve military co-ordination in Syria

On 19 June 2016, the Russian defence ministry said after a video conference with US experts that both countries have agreed on the need to improve military co-ordination in Syria to avoid incidents and misunderstanding in the Syrian airspace.

### **Syrian refugees killed at Syrian-Turkish border?**

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights says that in the night to 19 June 2016, Turkish border guards killed at least 8 Syrian refugees, including two women and four children. Other sources put the number of victims at 11. The incident occurred near the northwestern Syrian town of Jisr al-Shugour. The Turkish army spoke of an attempt to cross the border illegally; after warning shots at the group, some people had run towards the woods. Ankara had de facto closed the border in August 2015. Since the beginning of the civil war, Turkey has been host to at least 2.7 million refugees. Human Rights Watch says that 60 Syrians have been killed by gunfire of Turkish border guards since the beginning of 2016.

## **Yemen**

### **United Arab Emirates announces end of military operations**

On 16 June 2016, the UAE announced the end of its military operations in Yemen. The UEA has been the most active member of the Arab coalition which intervened to assist forces loyal to Yemen's President Hadi in March 2015. Presently, their troops are active in eastern Yemeni Hadramawt province and in the port city of Aden.

## **Iran**

### **British citizen accused of espionage**

On 19 June 2016, Iran's judiciary spokesman Hossein Mohseni Ejeji confirmed the arrest of Nazani Zaghari-Ratcliffe for espionage and seeking to overthrow the government. Ms Zaghari-Ratcliffe, who holds both British and Iranian citizenship, was arrested after visiting relatives in Kerman. She is working as a project coordinator at the Thomson Reuters Foundation which runs training courses for journalists around the world. Allegedly, the project aims at overthrowing the Iranian regime. If convicted for espionage, she could face either death penalty or long-term imprisonment.

## **Turkey**

### **LGBT rally dispersed**

On 19 June 2016, security forces violently dispersed a rally of some dozens of LGBT activists in Istanbul. The rally, which was to kick off the LGBT week in Turkey, had been prohibited beforehand. For this week, a whole series of other events is planned. Istanbul authorities have banned all rallies planned during the LGBT week citing security concerns. The ban mainly aims at the final parade of the 'Pride Week Istanbul' next Sunday. The parade has taken place for more than ten years and was banned and broken up by police for the first time in 2015 because it overlapped with the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan.

## **Eritrea**

### **UN commission of inquiry condemns human rights violations**

A UN inquiry reveals that over the last 25 years, systematic human rights violations have been committed in Eritrea. Independent UN commissioners have documented numerous cases of arbitrary detention, torture, enslavement and killing, the report says, concluding that "without substantial institutional and legal reform, there is no genuine prospect of the domestic judicial system holding perpetrators to account." The commission recommends that the case be referred to the International Criminal Court's chief prosecutor by the UN Security Council.

Also, the commission calls upon the African Union (AU) to conduct investigations in order to bring to justice the leading figures around President Isaias Afwerki.

Already in June 2015, the commission had published an extensive report (see BN of 15 June 2015), accusing the government of systematic human rights violations. Eritrea, in turn, had accused the commission of being

biased because its findings had exclusively been based on the testimony of hundreds of asylum seekers living abroad. As was the case in the context of the first report, the Eritrean authorities refused entry to the commission also this year.

The release of the new report comes at a point in time when the EU is holding talks with Eritrea over cooperation with a view to reduce illegal migration. Around 5,000 Eritreans are estimated to leave the country every month. The UN says that a total of 47,025 Eritreans applied for asylum in the EU last year.

## **Ethiopia**

### **Hundreds of protesters killed since November 2015**

In its report released on 15 June 2016, Human Rights Watch says that state security forces have killed more than 400 protesters when dissolving the 500 protests that reportedly have occurred since November 2015. Apparently, tens of thousands people have been arrested. The protests were triggered by government plans to expand the municipal boundary of the capital of Addis Ababa, the report says. Protesters feared that the plan would displace Oromo farmers in the surroundings of Addis Ababa, depriving them of their livelihood. In January 2016, the government announced the cancellation of the plan. Since then, protests have declined sharply, the report went on, but the number of people presently detained was unclear. Only few individuals have been charged so far with any offenses; dozens of journalists and opposition party members have been charged under the anti-terrorism law. Former detainees said that they were tortured, mistreated or raped in detention, the report says.

## **Kenya**

### **Court rules that medical examinations of suspected homosexuals are legal**

On 16 June 2016, a court in Mombasa rejected a petition calling for the abolition of the use of forced anal examinations of suspected homosexual men. The petition was created by two men who had been arrested on charges of homosexual acts and had undergone the examination in 2015. They said they had been forced to agree to the examination. Criminal proceedings against the two individuals have not yet been concluded. In Kenya, homosexuality can be punished with up to 14 years of imprisonment. As far as known, only few charges have been brought to court.

## **DR Congo**

### **Several people killed in fights in demobilization transit centre**

On 15 June 2016, between 10 and 20 people were killed in clashes between the army and former rebels at the southeastern Kamina military base where more than 2,000 former rebels from various armed groups (including M23 rebels and Mai-Mai militia members) are stationed as part of a government disarmament programme. According to government spokesman Lambert Mende, the military police prevented former fighters from trying to leave the base and return home.

## **Republic of Congo**

On 14 June 2016, Congo's security forces detained former army chief General Jean-Marie Michel Mokoko in the capital Brazzaville. Mr. Mokoko had run unsuccessfully against President Denis Sassou Nguesso in a disputed election held on 20 March 2016, gaining 14 percent of all votes cast and ending in the third place. He was charged with violation of state security and illegal possession of war arms and ammunition. In a video of 2007, he had apparently talked about the removal of former and current President Denis Sassou Nguesso with a man who presented himself as an agent of a French intelligence service.

## **Niger**

### **Attack by Boko Haram militants**

Seven policemen have been killed by members of the Islamist militia Boko Haram. Interior minister Mohamed Bazoum said on 17 June 2016 that the terrorists attacked the village of N'Gagam near the Nigerian border. Employees of a local security company report that the attackers arrived in vehicles and opened fire on the policemen. Only few hours before, the minister had visited the village with a delegation.

## **Somalia**

### **Al Shabaab fighters sentenced to death in Puntland**

A military court in Garowe (Puntland) has condemned 43 al-Shabaab members to death. The prosecuting attorney said that 97 fighters of the extremist organization had been arrested during the fighting in Nugaal and Mudug regions in March and April. They had been involved in attacks in Puntland and had pleaded guilty, the attorney said. The other 54 prisoners were minors, it was stated.

### **Up to 5,000 child soldiers**

UNICEF says that there are up to 5,000 child soldiers in Somalia. In 2015 alone, 900 children were recruited; about 60 percent of them by al Shabaab. However, also the Somali army has drafted more than 200 children. According to UNICEF, over 750 children have been killed or mutilated in fights during the last year.

## **Nigeria**

### **Biko Haram attacks on villages claim many lives**

On 16 June 2016 at about 10pm, fighters of the Islamist terror organisation Boko Haram riding motorbikes attacked the village of Kuda-Kaya (Madagali Local Government Area, LGA) situated near Sambisa forest (the group's last major retreat in Nigeria), killing 24 persons who were attending a funeral service. In the early morning of 14 June, the militants attacked the village of Kautuva (Damboa LGA, Borno State), killing four villagers and abducting three women.

## **Kosovo**

### **EU Mission EULEX extended by parliament**

On 17 June 2016, 84 of 120 members of parliament voted in favour of an extension of the EU rule of law mission in Kosovo until 14 June 2018. Two days before, the government and the EU had come to an agreement on the issue. The EU mission's far-reaching independent powers had been the subject of disputes. So far, the mission's tasks have included investigation and prosecution of war crimes, terrorist acts, organized crime, inter-ethnic assaults, economic crimes and other serious crimes. Under the new agreement, the mission will focus more on monitoring and advising. From now on, EULEX will take on new cases only if Kosovo's legal authorities agree.

## **Russian Federation /Northern Caucasus**

### **Anti-terror operation claims several lives in Dagestan**

On 17 June 2016, at least 10 people were killed in an anti-terror operation in the Russian Republic of Dagestan (North Caucasus). Also, four members of the Russian security forces lost their lives. Citing security circles, Interfax news agency said that members of Russia's Federal Security Service FSB and special interior ministry units had conducted a joint operation against suspected Islamists in three locations

simultaneously in Southern Dagestan, killing at least 6 members of two Islamist groups; other sources put the number of killed extremists at 9.  
The Republic of Dagestan continues to be the epicentre of assaults and fighting in the North Caucasus region.