

## Group 62 - Information Centre Asylum and Migration

# Briefing Notes

22 July 2019

### Afghanistan

#### Hospitals in Wardak province (centre) resume operations

After Afghan security forces had raided a hospital operated by the Swedish Afghanistan Committee (SCA) in Wardak province in the night of 08 to 09 July 2019 (see BN of 15 July 2019) the Taliban forced SCA to close 42 of 77 medical facilities in six of the nine districts in Wardak province. SCA says that almost 4,000 patients were affected. After talks with the Taliban the hospitals have slowly been resuming operations since 19 July 2019.

WHO reports that there were 58 attacks on medical facilities in the first six months of this year. 100 had to close down and only 27 could be reopened. 13 staff members and patients were killed, 25 wounded.

#### Internal refugees, returnees

According to WHO the conflict drove 27,971 people from their homes in June. This brings the number of internal refugees this year up to 178,498. At the same time 235,170 people returned from Pakistan, Iran and Turkey since January. Many of them depend on international aid. Added thereto must be the 410 Pakistani families who fled from the conflict in Pakistani North Waziristan to Bermal district in the Afghan province of Khost in June. They were housed in five refugee camps.

#### High number of assaults and attacks continues

The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED)'s evaluation of the conflicts in week 28 resulted in a relatively high number of incidents for the last four weeks. However, the number of civilian victims dropped by about one third in week 28, because there were less clashes between the Taliban and the Afghan security forces. The Taliban reported territorial gains in five provinces, though; including the northern provinces Baghlan, Balkh, Jowzjan and Kunduz.

Last week assaults and fighting were again reported almost daily. On 18 July 2019 two civilians were killed when a car bomb exploded in the northern province of Balkh. A colonel of the Afghan army was shot by a defector in a so-called insider attack. Eleven people died in a Taliban attack on a police headquarter at the provincial capital Kandahar. On 19 July 2019 at least eight people died in a suicide bombing near Kabul university.

The continued intensity of the fighting is illustrated by a statement of the Afghan defence ministry of 17 July 2019 which says that the security forces were engaged in 13 joint and 97 special operations against insurgents in a period of 48 hours. In 29 cases the Afghan air force had given support. At least 110 government opponents are said to have been killed and 59 injured in these actions. The fighting took place in the provinces of Faryab, Badghis, Kandahar, Ghazni, Helmand, Zabul, Wardak, Paktika, Nangarhar, Balkh, Sar-e-Pul, Kunduz and Takhar.

### Algeria

#### More demonstrations

On Friday tens of thousands of Algerians took to the streets of the capital again to demand the withdrawal of the old elites, right now especially represented by interim President Abdelkader Bensalah and Prime Minister

Noureddine Bedouia. However, the demonstrations were dwarfed by the celebrations of the Algerian national football team's victory - it won the African championship for the first time after 29 years.

## **China**

### **Mass protests in Hong Kong**

Police and protesters clashed again in renewed mass protests in Hong Kong on 21 July 2019, allegedly 28 people were injured. The organizers say that about 430,000 people attended the protest march, the police estimate that there were 138,000. Again, the protesters demanded a formal withdrawal of the controversial extradition law and an independent commission to investigate police violence during clashes at earlier protests. After the end of the protest march hundreds moved on to the liaison office of the Chinese leadership. For the first time the protests were not only targeting the Hong Kong government, but also directly aimed at the Chinese representation.

Anti-government demonstrators were attacked by persons wearing white T-shirts at the Hong Kong train station Yuen Long in the evening of 21 July 2019. On 22 July 2019 the official Chinese news agency Xinhua threatened that provocations of the central government in Beijing would not be tolerated any longer, the Hong Kong government criticised the attack as a violation of law and order.

## **Democratic Republic of Congo**

### **WHO declares Ebola outbreak a Public Health Emergency**

On 17 July 2019 WHO declared a Public Health Emergency because of the Ebola outbreak in the Democratic Republic of the Congo following the recommendation of its consultant expert's committee. Committee Chairman Robert Steffen, however, said that there was merely a regional, not an international threat. By declaring the emergency WHO intends to intensify the fight against the disease in Congo and its neighbouring countries and hopes to win more funds for eliminating Ebola. It is a major concern that the most recent Ebola epidemic that started in August 2018 in eastern Congo is not yet under control. It remains confined to the two provinces North Kivu and Ituri in eastern Congo. Only once in June 2019 three members of a family infected with Ebola had travelled to Uganda where two of them died. The continuing violence in North Kivu and Ituri makes it very difficult to contain the disease. Since January 2019 there were 198 attacks against health care staff or Ebola treatment centres in which three people died and 58 were wounded.

A total of 2,532 people (as on 17 July 2019) have been infected since the recent Ebola outbreak (2,438 cases are confirmed and 94 are suspected). 1,705 people died of Ebola (of these 1,611 confirmed and 94 suspected).

## **Egypt**

### **State of emergency extended once again**

On 22 July 2019 President Al-Sisi issued a decree to extend the state of emergency for another three months after 27 July 2019, this is the ninth consecutive extension. Prime Minister Mostafa Madbouly extended the night curfew on the northern Sinai Peninsula for another three months as well. In this region Egyptian security forces have been fighting Islamist rebels who officially allied themselves with IS, for several years.

## **Ethiopia**

### **Ethiopia accepts referendum on the independence of the Sidamo**

On 16 July 2019 the Ethiopian elections authority accepted the application of the Sidamo living in southern central Ethiopia to hold a referendum on Sidama independence. A timeline of five months was defined. The decision comes as a surprise. Although the federal constitution expressly grants the right to autonomy, it was generally assumed that the government would reject the application, fearing that it would create a precedence which others might then take as a model in this country of more than 80 ethnic groups. Indeed, some other ethnic groups have already applied for a referendum. Ethiopia consists of nine regional states (and two

independent cities). Their boundaries run along the lines of ethnicity, language and settlement patterns. Observers assume that the central government wanted to pre-empt any acts of violence in the Sidamo region. Activists had announced to declare autonomy unilaterally, if their application was rejected.

Leading Sidamo representatives agreed to the five months deadline. But still there were protests in Wotera Rassa on 19 July 2019, including clashes with the Ethiopian security forces, in which reportedly at least 13 people were killed. It is said that four people succumbed to their gunshot wounds in Hawassa. This has not yet been officially confirmed, though.

### **Background**

The Sidamo account for about five percent of Ethiopia's total population (about 105m), but they are the largest group in the multi-ethnic Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples' Region (SNNPR) and have been demanding independence for years. They applied for a referendum on 18 July 2019; according to the Ethiopian constitution a decision on such an application must be taken within one year. The Sidamo are living in an area extending over 10,000 square kilometres, comparable in size to Kosovo or Lebanon.

The Sidamo's announcement to make Hawassa, the SNNP region's capital, their own region's capital might also create ethnic tensions. Already in June 2018 there was bloodshed when Sidamo and Wolayta clashed in Hawassa. The posts on social networks give rise to fears that the conflicts between the region's ethnic groups will exacerbate. 56 different ethnic groups are living in the SNNPR and all of them could demand independence separately.

Ultimately, the Sidamo conflict is a consequence of the reform policies of Prime Minister Abiy (in office since April 2018) which the international community of states has generally commended him for. He took office after many years of anti-government protests, released thousands of political prisoners and lifted the ban on several parties that had been classified as terrorist before. However, at the same time ethnic conflicts became more pronounced. In June 2019 there were assassinations in the Amhara region and in Addis Ababa which the government declared to be a coup attempt and during which five representatives of the government and the military who were loyal to Abiy were killed.

## **Ethiopia/Eritrea**

### **Ethiopia and Eritrea vow to strengthen relations**

During talks in Asmara on 18 and 19 July 2019 Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed and Eritrean President Isaias Afwerki agreed to intensify the current peace process and their economic cooperation. Delegations of both countries also visited the road that is under construction between Nefasit and Dekemhare. The meeting took place exactly one year after Ethiopian Airlines took off for its historic flight to Asmara on 18 July 2018, more than two decades after diplomatic relations between Addis Ababa and Asmara had been cut. Shortly thereafter the two countries' embassies were reopened in the respective capitals.

This one year of rapprochement between the two countries also led to the re-establishment of trade relations. But after the unilateral closure of the four border crossings by Eritrea they have recently been cut short again. Generally, disillusionment has meanwhile spread in Eritrea. The euphoria after the unexpected opening of the border, which some observers compared to the fall of the Berlin wall, has evaporated some time ago. Hopes for political change in Eritrea, in particular regarding the national service, have been dashed.

There are still many issues open between Ethiopia and Eritrea. Such as the border delimitation, probably the most formidable controversy, a permanent trade agreement and an agreement on the conditions for leaving and entering the country.

## **India**

### **Assaults against minorities and opposition candidates**

Since the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya-Janata Party (BJP) won this year's parliamentary elections, assaults against minorities, specifically against Muslims and casteless people, have increased according to the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED). The BJP is also accused of having used violence against the candidates of other parties during the local elections in the eastern state of Tripura on 11 July 2019 and of having intimidated them.

## **Iraq/Kurdistan-Iraq region (KR region)**

### **Member of Turkish consular staff shot in Erbil**

The Turkish foreign ministry informed that a staff member of the Turkish consulate was shot in a restaurant in Erbil on 17 July 2019. An Iraqi citizen was killed and another one died of his injuries later. The Kurdish regional government called the incident a planned terror attack on 18 July 2019. On 20 July 2019 a suspect was arrested by Kurdish security forces.

The Al-Jazeera broadcasting station announced that the director of its Erbil office, Ahmad al-Zawiti, was beaten up by security forces while reporting on location. The Iraqi Journalistic Freedoms Observatory stated that this year 139 cases of violation of the freedom of the press have been documented in the Kurdish region of Iraq.

### **18-year-old girl dies in air strike in Erbil province**

Kurdish media reported on 10 July 2019 that a civilian was killed by an air strike of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards. Two of her brothers were wounded in the attack. According to media reports the Iranian Revolutionary Guards are occasionally flying air raids against Kurdish groups, like the Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan (PDKI).

### **Turkish military launches operation**

On 12 July 2019 the Turkish defence minister announced the launching of military operation Claw 2 in the Autonomous Region Kurdistan Iraq. Military operations with ground and air troops against PKK (Kurdistan Workers Party) bases in the Kurdish region of Iraq had started on 27 May 2019. According to the Turkish Defence Ministry at least 71 PKK fighters died between 27 May 2019 and 15 July 2019. The press releases of the Iraqi Defence Ministry and the Kurdish regional government say that the victims also include civilians.

## **Iran**

### **Reason for arrest for a dual citizen unclear**

The French-Iranian anthropologist Fariba Adelkhah who is teaching at the reputed Paris Science Po University, has been arrested in Iran. She worked on several research projects on the situation of women in society in Iran and Afghanistan. This is the first time that a French dual citizen has been arrested. Earlier the British-Iranian dual citizen Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe, a project manager with the Thomson-Reuters Foundation, Canadian-Iranian university professor Homa Hoodfar and the US-American-Iranian economic consultant Siamak Namazi had been detained. Experts disagree whether the prisoners are bargaining chips in the controversy about the Nuclear Agreement and the sanctions or whether this is meant to interfere with President Rohani's foreign policy course.

### **Clothing rules: Only 13% of Iranian women want to wear a chador (hijab)**

According to press reports only 13% of Iranian women still want to wear a hijab. Independent reports say that there are more and more women who are showing their hair and sometimes appear in shopping centres or parks without hijab. Others are also against the hijab, but shy away from conflict with the authorities or the Pasdaran. Their morals police still pursue all violations of the clothing regulations rigorously.

### **Iran bans improperly veiled women from air travel**

Hassan Mehri, commander of the airport police, said that improperly veiled women may not travel by airplane anymore according to governmental instructions. Any violation would lead to legal action, he said. Previously Hossein Rahimi, the head of Tehran's police, had again underlined that women must wear the mandatory veil.

### **Iran censors BBC (BBC-Farsi)**

British broadcaster BBC sent a correspondent and contributor to the HuffPost, Yashar Ali, to Iran. The station is among the TV stations with most viewers in the Farsi-speaking area. It serves 100 million Farsi-speakers in Iran, Afghanistan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. The BBC signed an agreement promising that the Farsi-language station will not transmit any information critical of Iran, neither terrestrial nor online.

## **Kosovo**

### **Prime minister resigns**

On 19 July 2019 Prime Minister Ramush Haradinaj announced his resignation. Following early parliamentary elections Haradinaj had assumed the office of prime minister in September 2017 as the chairman of the Alliance for the Future party. He said that his resignation was triggered by a renewed summons to the UN Special Court in The Hague, where he did not want to appear as the head of Kosovo's government, but as a regular citizen of Kosovo. Already in 2005 and 2011 the former UÇK commander had been a defendant at the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia. Both times he was acquitted of committing serious crimes against Serbian civilians during the Kosovo war (1989-1999) for lack of evidence.

The international Special Kosovo Court was established in 2015 following international pressure and against the protests of Kosovo's population. Formally, the Court is governed by the law of Kosovo, but it consists of international prosecutors and judges and is sitting in The Hague. It is tasked with investigating the allegations of serious violations of human rights, crimes against humanity and war crimes committed by the Kosovan Liberation Army UÇK during the armed conflict with Serbia in the period 1998 to 1999.

Kosovan media reported that the first indictments will be issued this year. Ramush Haradinaj, President Hashim Thaçi and the speaker of the parliament Kadri Veseli may be among those indicted.

## **Lebanon**

### **Protests by Palestinians in Lebanon**

Local media report that the protests by Palestinians in Lebanon are entering their second week. The protests were triggered by the closure of shops and fines for companies employing foreign nationals without work permits. The Lebanese government took these actions (see BN of 17 June 2019) to implement the labour laws applying to foreign nationals.

## **Libya**

### **Tripoli water supply**

Militia fighters from southern Libya occupied the five major pumping stations for the Tripoli water supply on 12 July 2019. Cutting Tripoli's water supply was an action taken to protest against the poor power supply to wide areas of the south. The operation of one of the pumps was not permitted again until Sunday. As a consequence, there was no water for several days, because each pumping station needs several days to build up the required water pressure in the pipes.

### **Fighting in Tripoli**

WHO published the latest figures about fighting in Tripoli on 16 July 2019. Accordingly, WHO learnt about 1,093 casualties and 5,752 wounded persons since 04 April 2019. The number of internally displaced persons, in some cases displaced for a second time, meanwhile exceeds 100,000.

### **Al-Baghdadi Ali al-Mahmudi released**

On 20 July 2019 the Libyan justice ministry announced the imminent release of al-Baghdadi Ali al-Mahmudi, the last chairman of the Libya's General People's Committee (prime minister) under Gaddafi, for medical reasons. The ministry stressed that this was not a pardon.

### **Member of parliament abducted**

Seham Sergewa, one of the few female members of the Libyan parliament who is considered a reputed activist for women's and human rights, was abducted from her house in Benghazi by armed men on 17 July 2019; they also seriously wounded some of her relatives. Previously she had publicly criticized Khalifa Haftar's offensive against Tripoli in an interview and called for the formation of a government of unity including Islamist groups, because such groups would be fighting on both sides, as she said.

## **Myanmar**

### **Sanctions**

The US imposed more sanctions on Myanmar on 16 July 2019. They concern army chief General Min Aung Hlaing and the number two in the military hierarchy, General Soe Win, as well as members of their families. For the time being they have been barred from entering the US. The sanctions also affect commanders who are held directly responsible for the massacres in the north of the ethnic partial state of Rakhine. Currently it is being clarified whether proceedings will be opened against the leadership of the army of Myanmar at the International Criminal Court in The Hague. According to US sources General Min Aung Hlaing ordered the release of soldiers who had been sentenced for killing members of the Rohingya in the village of Inn Din.

## **Nigeria**

### **37 people killed by bandits in Sokoto state**

In the north-western state of Sokoto in the Goronyo Local Government Area (LGA) armed bandits on motorcycles attacked three villages on 17 July 2019. The LGA chairman said that they shot 37 villagers, stole the cattle and set fire to businesses. Several hundred villagers have already been killed by such armed gangs in Nigeria's north-west this year. At least 20,000 people fled across the border to the Republic of Niger. A spokesman of President Buhari said that troops had been deployed to the affected regions.

### **Assault on aid convoy in the Federal State of Borno**

On 18 July 2019 presumably fighters of the terror organization Boko Haram assaulted a motor convoy of the relief organization *Action Against Hunger* near the city of Damasak. They killed the driver. Two other drivers, three health care workers and a staff member of the NGO were abducted.

## **Pakistan**

### **Journalists protest**

On 16 July 2019 journalists protested peacefully against the restrictions of the freedom of the press in several cities throughout the country. The president of the Pakistani Journalists Association (PFUJ) said that the media are subject to unofficial censorship and journalists are threatened. The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) concludes in its report that the military had quietly but effectively restricted media reporting. Access to information is limited, journalists are coerced to exercise self-censorship by intimidation.

### **LeT founder arrested**

On 17 July 2019 Pakistani authorities arrested Hafiz Saeed, the founder of the terrorist group Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) and leader of Jamaat-ud-Dawa (JuD), the LeT's charity sub-unit, for financing terrorism. Recently LeT mainly assaulted Indian security forces in Kashmir. In 2008 LeT executed its largest attack in Mumbai, India, killing at least 160 people. JuD spokespersons announced legal measures against the arrest. Saeed had been arrested several times before, but was always released again for lack of evidence.

### **Pakistani Taliban assume responsibility for the double attack after the provincial elections**

Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), the Pakistani Taliban, assumed responsibility for two attacks in north-western Dera Ismail Khan in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) province near the Afghan border on 21 July 2019. At first unknown gunmen attacked a police checkpoint killing several policemen. When an ambulance took the victims to a hospital a female suicide bomber blew herself up there. At least 8 people died and dozens were wounded.

On 20 July 2019 representatives to the provincial parliament were elected for the first time in the former tribal areas (Federally Administered Tribal Areas, FATA) in the country's north-west. In 2018 the constitution had been amended to integrate the seven districts along the Afghan border into the neighbouring province of KP where they hold 16 seats in the local government assembly.

## **Russian Federation**

### **Demonstrations against the exclusion of candidates for the Moscow local elections**

On 20 July 2019 thousands took to the streets in Moscow to protest the exclusion of opposition candidates from the upcoming local elections of 08 September 2019. According to the NGO White Counter 22,500 people attended the legal protests in the Russian capital. The Russian authorities estimated that their number was between 10,000 and 12,000. The media reported that the Moscow election committee had excluded between 30 and 57 candidates from the local elections in the capital, among them many politicians of the opposition.

## **Somalia**

### **Attacks**

Alleged al-Shabaab fighters exploded a bomb in a tea shop at Dhusamareb, the capital of Galgududuud region, on 14 July 2019. One soldier was killed and five persons, including a regional parliament deputy, were injured, it is said.

### **Fighting**

On 17 July 2019 al-Shabaab fighters attacked soldiers of the Somali National Army (SNA) near Barire Town in Lower Shabelle region. Five soldiers were killed. On the same day one person died when a car bomb exploded in Mogadishu.

On 16 July 2019 al-Shabaab attacked a military convoy of Ethiopian AMISOM soldiers in the village of Halgan, near the city of Beledweyne, Hiiran region. Several people were killed or wounded.

Reportedly SNA took back several villages in Lower Shabelle region from al-Shabaab on 14 July 2019. The SNA informed that 15 militant fighters lost their lives in this operation.

There are reports that militants of Islamic State in Somalia (ISS) clashed with Puntland security forces in front of the Hotel Safa in Bosaso, Puntland, on 12 July 2019.

## **Sudan**

### **Agreement signed**

On 17 July 2019 the military and the opposition signed an agreement on the formation of an interim government. According to the agreement an eleven-member Sovereign Council will hold power and appoint a government of experts. Elections shall be held in three years' time at the latest. A future constitutional declaration shall lay down the distribution of duties between the Sovereign Council and the government of experts. The agreement had been reached after difficult negotiations that at long last ended in a compromise in early June.

## **Sudan/South Sudan**

### **UN soldier and civilians killed**

Unknown armed men attacked the market of Amiet in Abyei region on the border between Sudan and South Sudan on 16 July 2019. One UN blue helmet from Ethiopia and six civilians were killed in the attack. It is said that several UN blue helmet soldiers were wounded. So far no-one claimed responsibility for the assault.

## **Syria**

### **Fighting in the north-west**

The pro-opposition Syrian Human Rights Observatory reported that on 21 July 2019 at least 18 people were killed by air strikes of the Syrian army. These attacks occurred in the village of Urum al-Jawz in the west and of Kfarouma in the south of Idlib province.

Official Syrian media reported on 21 July 2019 that missiles had been fired on the Syrian government-controlled city of Masyaf in the north-west of Hama province from the rebel areas. The missiles had been successfully destroyed by the anti-missile defence system, though.

At least twelve civilians are reported killed and many others injured by an air strike on a marketplace in Ma'ar Shoreen, Idlib on 16 July 2019.

### **Reports of the involvement of Russian units**

Several rebel leaders from Idlib reported on 17 July 2019 that Russian ground forces had been involved in fighting for the first time since the operations against the last rebel stronghold had started more than two months ago. Allegedly the Russian units participated in the reconquest of the strategic hills of Humayat in northern Hama. It is said that Iran-supported Shiite militias took part in the fighting. The Russian defence minister denied these reports and said that Russia had no ground troops in Syria.

## **Tanzania**

### **Tanzania will maintain capital punishment**

According to a judgement of the Supreme Court of 18 July 2019 capital punishment can be imposed in Tanzania in the future as well. The Court held that the grounds for its abolition were insufficient. Thereby the action of human rights organisations has been denied. They had argued that capital punishment is unconstitutional.

Since 1994 the death penalty has not been executed anymore, but it was imposed about 500 times and in some cases converted to life prison sentences. As recently as March this year a teacher has been sentenced to death, allegedly for beating to death a 14-year-old student.

## **Turkey**

### **Acquittal**

On 17 July 2019 Turkish journalist and representative of the organisation Reporters Without Borders, Erol Önderoğlu, and two of his co-defendants were acquitted by an Istanbul court. Önderoğlu and the two co-defendants, the human rights activist Sebnem Korur Fincani and author Ahmet Nesin, had been standing trial on charges of propaganda for terrorism since November 2016. The charges stemmed from their participation in a solidarity campaign for the pro-Kurdish newspaper Özgür Gündem which was closed down after the July 2016 coup attempt because of propaganda for the PKK. The three defendants had been held in pre-trial detention temporarily but were released after international protests.

### **EU releases further funds for refugee support**

On 19 July 2019 the EU Commission approved a further relief package of €1.4 billion to support Syrian refugees in Turkey. The programmes will focus on the areas of health, protection and socio-economic

support of the people, furthermore municipal infrastructure shall be improved in regions with a particularly large share of refugees.

The €1.4 billion are part of the facility promised to Turkey when the refugee deal was made in 2016. The facility includes a total of € 6 billion of which €2.4 billion have already been disbursed.

## **Ukraine**

### **President Zelensky's party wins parliamentary elections**

President Volodymyr Zelensky's party "Servant of the People" won the parliamentary elections of 21 July 2019. After counting of about one third of the votes, his party emerged as the strongest force in parliament winning 42% of the seats. Next are the pro-Russian opposition platform with almost 13% and the party of former president Petro Poroshenko "European Solidarity" at about 8%. The Fatherland Party of ex-prime minister Yulia Tymoshenko came in fourth with 7.4% of the vote and the party "The Voice" of rock singer Svyatoslav Vakarchuk fifth with 6.5%. The voter turnout was lower than five years ago and did not quite reach 50%. Five of the total of 22 parties managed to pass the five percent entrance barrier. In the evening of the election day Zelensky announced that he will start coalition negotiations with the party "The Voice". The party was established only in May of this year and is radically going after younger political career changers, the fight against corruption and the influence of wealthy oligarchs, just as Zelensky. Among the major priorities of the government's policies are the termination of the armed conflict in Eastern Ukraine and bringing back the prisoners. If Zelenski's party wins the majority of all direct mandates it could still achieve an absolute parliamentary majority, this will be established in the course of the week after the final vote count.

## **Venezuela**

### **Permanent working group**

The talks attempting to find a solution for Venezuela's current situation resulted in the formation of a joint permanent working group by the government and the opposition on 12 July 2019. The working group shall institutionalize the current exchange. However, neither new elections nor any other solution for the permanent crisis are in sight.

### **Forecast of the Organization of American States**

The Organization of American States (OAS) published estimates for mid-term planning for the Venezuelan refugee crisis. According to these estimates the exodus will accelerate again and increase from currently about 4 million Venezuelans in exile to about 5.7 million by the end of the year. For next year an increase to 8.2 million is expected.

## **Yemen**

### **Talks between the government and the Houthi rebels**

On 15 July 2019 the UN hosted a meeting between representatives of the Houthi rebel movement and the Yemeni government on a ship in the Red Sea. The representatives discussed the next steps to implement the Stockholm Agreement. This is the first official encounter since February 2019. The UN announced that the parties agreed on measures to strengthen the ceasefire in Hodeida and the withdrawal of troops from the area.

### **Fighting**

On 20 July 2019 the Saudi-led coalition flew air raids against Houthi rebels in the capital Sanaa. The coalition flew more air strikes against the Houthi rebels in the north of al-Bayda Gouvernment on 15 July 2019.

Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) is said to have attacked and killed five members of the security forces at a checkpoint in Abyan Gouvernment on 19 July 2019. On 14 July 2019 fighting between AQAP and Houthi rebels was reported from the Qayfa area in al-Bayda Gouvernment.

Also, on 14 July 2019 fighting between pro-government forces and Houthi rebels was reported from al-Dhali Gouvernement.

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