

## LIBYA

***Aerial bombings, car bombs, grenades, and other explosives damaged and destroyed hundreds of schools and universities in Libya. Armed groups used kidnapping to generate income, their victims including teachers, professors, and students at the primary, secondary, and tertiary levels.***

### **Context**

The General National Congress (GNC), established with a temporary mandate in August 2012 after the ouster of Colonel Muammar Gaddafi in 2011, refused to step down when the mandate expired in February 2014. After a conflict erupted in eastern Libya in 2014, two rival governments emerged, one in Tripoli and one in the eastern cities of al-Bayda and Tobruk. Thus, by 2017 three different governments competed for legitimacy and control. The UN-backed Government of National Accord (GNA) headed by the Presidential Council, created after the signing of the UN-brokered Libyan Political Agreement in 2015, and the Government of National Salvation (GNS), which drew authority from the GNC, were both based in Tripoli until clashes resulted in the GNS being exiled to operate mostly out of Turkey. The other rival interim government operated from Tobruk and al-Bayda, supported by the Libyan National Army (LNA) under the command of Khalifa Hiftar. The House of Representatives, Libya's Tobruk-based parliament, also supported the LNA and the interim government.<sup>1304</sup>

Forces aligned with the different governments and armed militias fought for control over various parts of the country.<sup>1305</sup> Between 2015 and 2017, the UN spearheaded multiple attempts to reach a political agreement between the major factions to end hostilities, including most recently an attempt by France's President Emmanuel Macron to get Hiftar and GNA Prime Minister Serraj to agree to a deal that would end the hostilities on July 25, 2017.<sup>1306</sup> However, the situation in Libya remained volatile at the time of writing.<sup>1307</sup>

'IS' gained a foothold in Sirte in 2014, but its remnants retreated to areas south of Sirte after a joint Libyan militia alliance, backed by US air strikes, retook the city in February 2017.<sup>1308</sup> Before January 2017, when 'IS' lost control over territory it had held in the eastern cities of Derna and Benghazi and Sirte, the group instituted gender-segregated classes in some areas, closed educational facilities that they alleged contradicted Islam, enforced dress codes, and restricted the movement of women and girls.<sup>1309</sup>

The conflict displaced hundreds of thousands of people, as the parties to the conflict indiscriminately shelled civilian areas and destroyed civilian property. According to the Ministry of Education in Tripoli and Benghazi, 558 schools had been affected by the crisis as of November 2016, impeding education for 279,000 students.<sup>1310</sup> Access to education was severely interrupted in 2014 and 2015, and the 2016-2017 school year started one month late, due to teachers protesting their low salaries.<sup>1311</sup> Abduction of civilians was a prominent feature of the conflicts in Libya, which reportedly negatively affected school attendance.<sup>1312</sup>

Collection and verification of data on education was a significant problem in Libya throughout the reporting period, due to the rival governments, including rival education ministries, and insecurity.<sup>1313</sup> These challenges resulted in very limited documentation of attacks on education. The following profile therefore has significant information gaps, which made it difficult to compare trends either between the current reporting period and that covered in *Education under Attack 2014*, or over the course of the 2013-2017 reporting period.

### **Attacks on schools**

Targeted and indiscriminate attacks reportedly damaged and destroyed several hundred schools across Libya during the current reporting period. According to OHCHR, conflict-related violence damaged more than 40 percent of Libya's schools between 2011 and 2015.<sup>1314</sup> Reported rates of attacks on schools were lower during the current reporting period than in the previous one. Nearly 2,000 schools were reported destroyed or damaged between 2011 and mid-2013, while the Ministries of Education in Tripoli and Benghazi reported in November 2016 that 30 schools were destroyed and 477 damaged.<sup>1315</sup> It was not clear when these schools were attacked.

In 2013, the US Department of State reported that many schools across Libya remained abandoned, due to a lack of materials, damage to buildings, or security concerns.<sup>1316</sup> There also were anecdotal reports of individual attacks on schools.<sup>1317</sup> These included the following:

- The UN reported two attacks on schools in 2013, both involving the detonation of explosives inside schools in Benghazi by unknown perpetrators.<sup>1318</sup>
- Local media reported that on May 10, 2013, a bomb exploded in front of a police station in Benghazi, shattering the windows of the school opposite. There were no injuries in the blast.<sup>1319</sup>
- Later that year, media sources reported an attack on a girls' school in Derna, eastern Libya, where unidentified assailants detonated an explosive device on November 22, 2013.<sup>1320</sup>

The UN documented the closure of many schools across the country in 2014, particularly in eastern Libya, because of insecurity.<sup>1321</sup> There were sporadic examples of unidentified attackers perpetrating several targeted attacks, including the following:

- The *BBC* reported that on February 5, 2014, unknown perpetrators threw a grenade over a wall into the playground of a private school in Benghazi, injuring 12 children.<sup>1322</sup>
- According to news reports, on April 7, 2014, an explosive device hidden in a bag detonated near a girls' school in Benghazi.<sup>1323</sup>
- In a similar attack on May 31, 2014, a car bomb exploded near a school in Benghazi, also according to media sources.<sup>1324</sup>
- News reports noted that on October 26, 2014, a rocket struck a school in Benghazi.<sup>1325</sup>

Information from the UN and Save the Children indicated that Benghazi was significantly affected by attacks on schools in 2015. According to the UN, 40 schools in Benghazi were damaged or destroyed, including by indiscriminate shelling, along with an unknown number of other schools across the country.<sup>1326</sup> Save the Children reported in June 2015 that 75 percent of school-age children in Benghazi had no access to education, and that 440 schools there could not operate because they were damaged or destroyed by shelling.<sup>1327</sup> Human Rights Watch reported one air strike that destroyed a school in Ganfouda, a district of Benghazi, at the beginning of 2015. Classes were moved to a nearby mosque, until it too was destroyed.<sup>1328</sup>

Media reports also documented occasional attacks on schools inside and outside of Benghazi in 2015. These included the following:

- On January 28, 2015, unknown perpetrators allegedly threw a grenade, which did not explode, at a school in Tripoli.<sup>1329</sup>
- On August 5, 2015, an 'IS' member detonated a suicide bomb next to a school in Derna's Bab Tobruq area, killing himself but not harming others.<sup>1330</sup>
- An explosive planted at a school detonated in Baninah in Benghazi on September 9, 2015, reportedly killing four children and injuring two more.<sup>1331</sup> It was not clear whether this incident was included in the total reported by the UN.

In 2016, UNICEF reported that 64 schools in the cities of Sirte, Bani Walid, and Tarhuna were partially damaged or transformed into IDP shelters, according to education authorities. This represented 17 percent of all schools in the three cities.<sup>1332</sup> There were also media reports of at least three incidents affecting schools in 2016, which included the following:

- On January 7, 2016, an explosion at a school in Derna city, Derna district, damaged the school.<sup>1333</sup>
- The Barqa Province of 'IS' claimed responsibility for firing rockets at al-Nahda School in Derna city on January 23, 2016.<sup>1334</sup>
- On November 21, 2016, a car bomb exploded outside a hospital in Benghazi, reportedly harming children who were leaving a nearby primary school. The number of casualties and injuries reported varied. According to some

reports, three children were killed. Others reported that eight children were injured, along with 22 other civilians.<sup>1335</sup>

In 2017, local media sources reported one attack on a school. On July 10, 2017, a suicide bomb exploded at the Sulaimani Martyrs elementary and middle school in the al-Sabri area of Benghazi. Security forces had pursued the attacker, who was killed, from another area.<sup>1336</sup>

### ***Attacks on school students, teachers, and other education personnel***

There were sporadic cases of students and educators being individually targeted for attacks throughout the reporting period. These types of incidents, which included shootings, harassment, and abduction, were not reported in *Education under Attack 2014*.

Kidnapping increasingly affected the landscape in Libya during the second half of the reporting period, when armed groups engaged in kidnapping for the purpose of extortion.<sup>1337</sup> These abductions harmed civilians, including students and educators, and parents' fears that their children could be abducted reportedly led them to keep them home from school. For example, OHCHR reported that parents in areas of Derna and Benghazi—then controlled by the later dissolved Ansar al-Sharia militant groups—stated in 2015 that they were afraid of sending their daughters to school because of the chance they would be abducted. OHCHR received reports that girls had been attacked and harassed on their way to school in Tripoli but did not indicate the frequency or precise nature of those threats.<sup>1338</sup>

Attacks that individually targeted students and educators included the following:

- On February 20, 2014, gunmen allegedly shot and killed the caretaker of a school in Derna that was to be used as a polling station during the election of a panel to draft a new constitution, according to news sources.<sup>1339</sup>
- OHCHR found that, in April 2014, gunmen in a car shot and killed a school headmaster while he was driving in central Benghazi. The headmaster was a well-known advocate for the non-politicization of education and for the need to keep schools operating under all circumstances.<sup>1340</sup>
- International news media reported that on May 19, 2014, the armed group Jaish al-Islam abducted and held hostage the principal of an international school in Benghazi, releasing him almost five months later.<sup>1341</sup>
- On December 3, 2015, armed men reportedly kidnapped a girl and her two brothers while they were on their way to school with their mother, according to a media report. The article attributed the attack to an armed militia.<sup>1342</sup>
- OHCHR reported that at the end of 2015 an 11-year-old boy was abducted while on his way to school. His kidnapers demanded a ransom, and the boy was found dead on February 24, 2016, after 68 days, bearing marks of torture.<sup>1343</sup>
- Armed men reportedly kidnapped another boy from a bus in front of his school in Zliten, Murqub district, at the end of January 2017, according to a media sources.<sup>1344</sup> It was not clear why the boy was kidnapped.
- Gunmen allegedly opened fire on Othman Abdeljalil, the education minister of the Libyan GNA, on July 3, 2017. The minister, who was monitoring final exams being given in Sabha city, was unharmed in the attack.<sup>1345</sup>
- The UN Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) reported that a 7-year-old boy was killed and an 11-year-old girl injured on November 10, 2017, when they were caught in crossfire as they were leaving school in Salmani, Benghazi.<sup>1346</sup>

### ***Military use of schools and universities***

Government armed forces and non-state armed groups reportedly used schools and at least one university as bases; as centers for detention, interrogation, and torture; and for other purposes between 2014 and 2016. However, there was limited information on the extent of these practices, and it was not clear whether military use occurred more or less frequently than during the 2009-2013 reporting period, during which GCPEA found more than 200 cases of military use.

Sporadic cases of military use of educational institutions were documented throughout the reporting period, including the following:

- OHCHR reported that the 21st Unit of the Army Special Forces (al-Sae'qa) of the LNA detained a man at an unknown location in October 2014 for suspicion of being part of Ansar al-Sharia. They took him to a school and tortured him for a day. The man told OHCHR that he was beaten and tortured for nine hours at the school.<sup>1347</sup>
- In another incident reported by OHCHR, also during October 2014, four men surrendered themselves to Operation Dignity forces, a coalition of armed groups that mounted an offensive against the Benghazi Revolutionaries Shura Council and 'IS' in a military operation known as Operation Dignity. Two of the men were temporarily detained at a school that was being used as a military base.<sup>1348</sup>
- OHCHR reported that the Army Special Forces (al-Sai'qa) used Hassan Ben Haitham School in Benghazi as a detention and torture center at least once between 2013 and 2015 for an unknown period of time.<sup>1349</sup>
- Separate UN documents showed that armed groups were using schools to launch attacks in the Warshafana area and the Nafusa Mountains between March 2014 and January 2015.<sup>1350</sup>
- In 2015, the UN documented one case of military use of a school as a detention facility by the Derna Mujahideen Shura Council, an armed group controlling Derna.<sup>1351</sup> The report did not specify the time or duration of this use.
- During February 2015, international media reported that members of 'IS' took over Sirte University, leading the university to suspend classes and postpone exams.<sup>1352</sup> Human Rights Watch documented information showing that 'IS' restrictions on education had also contributed to the suspension of classes at the university. These restrictions included segregating the 16,000 students by gender, as well as closing the law, language, literature, and art faculties, all of which the group claimed contradicted Islamic teachings.<sup>1353</sup> Another media report indicated that the group used a female dormitory at Sabha University to store artillery and mortars.<sup>1354</sup>
- OHCHR reported that it was investigating an unidentified armed group's use of a primary school in Benghazi as a base and detention facility. Satellite imagery from August 2015 showed several cargo vehicles of the type used for military purposes on the school grounds.<sup>1355</sup>
- A local news source reported that on June 7, 2016, a large bomb exploded at the entrance to the Al Nahda School in the Bab Tobruq area of Derna, which had been taken over for use as a military base by the Derna Mujahideen Shura Council. The explosion did not result in any casualties.<sup>1356</sup>
- On September 8, 2016, local media reported that, according to a military source in Sirte, 'IS' forces had transferred prisoners from a social security building to the 17 February High School for Engineering Science in the Al-jezza Albahria area of Giza.<sup>1357</sup>
- On July 9, 2017, Libyan armed forces found 10 unidentified decomposed bodies in the National School in the Sabri area of Benghazi and 15 unidentified bodies in the Fatima al-Zahra engineering science school for girls, after having retaken the area from armed groups that reportedly used the schools to bury opposing fighters.<sup>1358</sup> A local news source later reported that the Libyan Red Crescent was able to take DNA samples from seven of the bodies taken from the National School. With the cooperation of local municipal authorities and the prosecutor's office, they were able to bury the bodies on August 22, 2017.<sup>1359</sup>

### **Attacks on higher education**

Abductions, explosions, and indiscriminate air strikes reportedly affected higher education. Such cases were documented more commonly in the current reporting period than in *Education under Attack 2014*, but limitations on information gathering inhibited the identification of patterns. Many attacks on higher education involved the targeting of individual academics, possibly representing a general crackdown on opposition and freedom of expression. However, university facilities also were damaged in conflict-related violence.

Media sources reported one attack on higher education in 2013. Khalaf Hassan Al-Sa'idi, an Iraqi professor working at the University of Derna Higher Institute of Work Studies, was abducted on November 23, 2013. The professor was later killed on an unknown date.<sup>1360</sup>

There were at least six attacks on higher education in 2014, according to OCHA and media reports. These included one air strike that hit a university and five individually targeted attacks on university students and personnel:

- OCHA reported that in June 2014, a Libyan warplane targeted a base belonging to an unidentified extremist militia group in Benghazi but instead fired three rockets that hit the engineering faculty of a university, causing significant damage.<sup>1361</sup>
- On March 18, 2014, unidentified gunmen shot Christian Iraqi Professor Adison Karkha on his way to work at the University of Sirte, according to Scholars at Risk and international media.<sup>1362</sup>
- On April 27, 2014, unidentified assailants attempted to kidnap a university student in Benghazi city, according to media sources.<sup>1363</sup>
- According to media reports, an explosive device was detonated in an auditorium at Omar Mukhtar University in Derna on May 8, 2014. It was not clear who was responsible for the attack. There were no casualties in the blast.<sup>1364</sup>
- Media sources also reported two attacks on University of Tripoli professors in November 2014.<sup>1365</sup> In the first, attackers who were suspected to be members of the Libya Dawn militia stormed the house of Professor Fadi Ahmed Azzabi, injuring him, reportedly for refusing to condemn Operation Dignity on television.<sup>1366</sup> In the second, another group of unidentified attackers abducted the dean of the economics department at Tripoli University, whose whereabouts remained unknown as of May 2017.<sup>1367</sup>

According to media sources, there were at least five attacks on higher education in 2015, including the following:

- On January 4, 2015, unknown assailants reportedly abducted an Iraqi professor and his three sons in Sirte. There was no report of them being released.<sup>1368</sup>
- On March 29, 2015, an unknown group allegedly detonated an explosive device near the Higher Careers Institute in Derna, injuring two education personnel and one student.<sup>1369</sup>
- On April 16, 2015, government security forces reportedly discovered and safely defused an explosive device that unidentified attackers had planted at the gate of the High Institute of Economic Science in Sirte.<sup>1370</sup>
- On July 29, 2015, media sources reported that the Tripoli Province of 'IS' abducted four Indian nationals working for Sirte University at a checkpoint in Sirte. Two of the hostages were released two days later, while the other two were held until September 2016.<sup>1371</sup>
- Unidentified assailants reportedly opened fire on Salem Rahil, a local imam and a staff member of the Islamic Studies Department at the University of Benghazi, as he was leaving his home in his car on November 2, 2015. He was not injured.<sup>1372</sup>

Media sources documented two reported attacks on universities in 2016:

- On January 9, 2016, a vehicle filled with explosives was reportedly discovered outside Al-Marqab University in Al-Khums, Murqub district. The explosives were defused. It was not clear who was responsible for the foiled attack.<sup>1373</sup>
- The Barqa Province of 'IS' claimed responsibility for firing rockets at the Medical Technical School in Derna city, Derna district, on January 23, 2016. The group fired rockets at another school that day.<sup>1374</sup>

In 2017, there were at least three reported attacks on higher education:

- Amnesty International reported that Dr. Salem Mohamed Beitelmal, engineering professor at the Department of Maritime Engineering at the University of Tripoli, was abducted by local militias on the outskirts of Tripoli on April 20, 2017. He was released on June 6, 2017.<sup>1375</sup>
- On December 10, 2017, a student at the Faculty of Petroleum Engineering at al-Zawiya University in Zawiya city was injured when he was shot in the leg while on the university campus. UNSMIL reported that the alleged perpetrator was a relative of the commander of an armed group based in al-Zawiya.<sup>1376</sup>
- Four armed men wearing military uniforms raided al-Arab Medical University in Benghazi on December 23, 2017 and fired shots into the air.<sup>1377</sup>

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- <sup>1308</sup> Aiden Lewis, “Islamic State shifts to Libya’s desert valleys after Sirte defeat,” *Reuters*, February 10, 2017.
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- <sup>1311</sup> OHCHR, *Investigation on Libya*, A/HRC/31/CRP.3, para. 281. Mustafa Fetouri, “In Libya, the education system suffers more than most,” *National*, November 15, 2016. Mustafa Fetouri, “Public schools are latest victim of Libyan infighting,” *Al-Monitor*, October 17, 2016.
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- <sup>1314</sup> OHCHR, *Investigation on Libya*, A/HRC/31/CRP.3, para. 201.
- <sup>1315</sup> OCHA, *Humanitarian Needs Overview 2017: Libya*, p. 21.
- <sup>1316</sup> US State Department et al., “Country Reports 2014: Libya,” p. 30.
- <sup>1317</sup> A full list of references can be found on GCPEA’s website, <http://www.protectingeducation.org/education-under-attack-2018-references>.
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