SOUTH SUDAN

Attacks on education occurred in South Sudan throughout the reporting period, damaging schools and killing and injuring students and teachers. More than 150 schools were used for military purposes and hundreds of children were abducted from their classrooms. Conflict-related violence destroyed at least 800 schools.

Context

Following a protracted civil war, South Sudan declared independence from Sudan in July 2011.[1935] At the end of 2013, a new civil war erupted in South Sudan over a power struggle between President Salva Kiir, a member of the majority Dinka ethnic group, and his former vice president, Riek Machar, a member of the Nuer ethnic group, who was dismissed by Kiir.[1936]

Warring parties included the national armed forces, known as the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA); the Sudan People's Liberation Army in Opposition (SPLA-IO), which fought against the SPLA; Sudanese rebels who fought at various times alongside the SPLA; and various opposition groups that formed since the war started.[1937] A peace agreement, signed in August 2015, did not prevent renewed conflict, and a follow-up ceasefire in December 2017 did not stop fighting or abuses.[1938]

Violence intensified during the second half of 2016, with the UN warning that the conflict risked becoming a genocide.[1939] In its first three years, the armed conflict was most intensely concentrated in the northeastern states of Upper Nile, Jonglei, and Unity—three of the ten states that form the Greater Upper Nile region.[1940] However, in late 2015 the violence spread to the Greater Equatoria region in the south of the country and to Bahr el Ghazal region, in the west.[1941]

At the time of writing, tens of thousands of people were killed in the fighting and millions fled their homes between the beginning of the conflict in late 2013 and May 2016.[1942] The violence had a particularly damaging impact on children. UNICEF reported that 2.4 million South Sudanese children had been forced to flee their homes as of December 2017.[1943] Over 2,300 children had been killed or maimed, and approximately 19,000 had been recruited into armed groups.[1944] Sexual and gender-based violence also occurred, and government forces and militias used rape as a weapon of war and ethnic cleansing, primarily against women and girls.[1945] Between December 2013 and October 2017, UNICEF reported that more than 1,200 children experienced sexual violence. Ninety-nine percent of those affected were girls.[1946]

In December 2017, UNICEF reported that around 2 million children in South Sudan were out of school, representing 72 percent of the country's school-age population.[1947] This was the largest percentage of any nation's children out of school at the time.[1948] Schools across the country were frequently closed due to fighting and the threat of violence, and hundreds of schools and other civilian assets were looted and destroyed.[1949] Between the beginning of the conflict in December 2013 and October 2017, 293 incidents of attacks on schools or protected persons or of military use of schools were reported to the South Sudan CTFMR. These incidents cumulatively affected more than 90,000 children.[1950] Plan International reported that parents kept their girls home from school to do housework, with conflict and famine adding fuel to their decisions.[1951] GCPEA found instances of rape occurring in the educational context, as described in the section on sexual violence below.

South Sudan signed the Safe Schools Declaration in June 2015.

Attacks on schools

According to UNICEF, between the beginning of the conflict in late 2013 and January 2016, violence destroyed more than 800 schools.[1952] In 2017, the Education Cluster reported that 31 percent of all schools in South Sudan had suffered some form of attack by armed forces or non-state armed groups between December 2013 and the end of 2016, including military use and threats targeting students and teachers. The Greater Upper Nile region, where 63 percent of schools experienced attacks during that period, was most heavily affected.[1953]

These reported numbers represented a dramatic increase over the 100 attacks on schools found during the 2009-2013 reporting period. This increase could be due to more systematic data collection after 2013, the intensification of the conflict in late 2013, or some combination of the two.

Despite the large cumulative number of attacks on schools, annual reports remained anecdotal for much of the reporting period. In 2013, there were reports that at least six schools were looted or destroyed. In some cases, classes were suspended as a result. The six cases were:

· Witnesses reported to Human Rights Watch that soldiers and unknown assailants looted three schools in Pibor town between April and May 2013, destroying books and cupboards and stealing tables and chairs.[1954]

· UNICEF reported that land mines found behind Darussalam school in Maban refugee camp in Upper Nile state forced the suspension of alternative learning activities in its Child Friendly Spaces program in March 2013.[1955]

· According to Human Rights Watch, soldiers destroyed a school near Labrab village in April 2013.[1956]

· Human Rights Watch also reported that, during the capture of Boma town by the SSDM in May 2013, unknown assailants looted and destroyed a school and part of a teacher-training center, both supported by a local NGO.[1957]

In 2014, during the first full year of the conflict, the UN reported but was unable to verify seven attacks on schools.[1958] Amnesty International reported that witnesses described an incident in March 2014 in which the White Army, a Nuer non-state armed group, looted school materials during an attack in Duk county. [1959]

In 2015, attacks on education appeared to particularly affect Unity state because of fighting between the SPLA and allied forces and the SPLA-IO in April and May. A UN report documented nine attacks on schools, including looting, in May 2015 in Unity state alone.[1960] According to Human Rights Watch, two containers of school textbooks were opened, and their contents ruined during the fighting in Unity state.[1961] There were also sporadic reports of attacks on schools elsewhere in South Sudan. For example:

· Local media reported that on April 8, 2015, warplanes coming from the direction of Sudan dropped bombs in Northern Bahr el Ghazal state, some of which landed on one school.[1962]

· The Education Cluster documented the looting and damage of at least two primary schools in two areas of Western Equatoria state, causing them to be abandoned in May 2015.[1963]

· OHCHR reported that witnesses in Mondikolo village described the looting of a primary school in September 2015 by unidentified assailants and said the same school was vandalized the following November.[1964]

· According to local media, the SPLA looted a school in Juba in June 2015.[1965]

Reports of attacks on schools became more common in 2016 as the conflict intensified. The South Sudan Education Cluster found that 72 schools had been damaged or burned by parties to the conflict, although it was not clear whether all of these attacks happened in 2016. Of those 72 schools, 30 were in Jonglei state, 17 were in Unity state, 15 were in Upper Nile state, 7 were in Central Equatoria state, 1 was in North Bahr el Ghazal state, 1 was in Lakes state, and 1 was in Warrap state.[1966] Attacks reported by the Education Cluster and other sources included the following:

· The Education Cluster found that a primary school in Rubkona county, Unity state, was damaged by bullets on January 6, 2016.[1967]

· The UN reported the destruction of three schools on February 18, 2016, when armed fighters, allegedly wearing the uniforms of the SPLA, attacked Shilluk and Nuer IDPs in the Greater Upper Nile region.[1968]

· The Education Cluster found that a primary school in Pajok, Eastern Equatoria, was looted by armed actors on April 7, 2016.[1969]

· Human Rights Watch reported that in the days after an attack in Kansuk, Central Equatoria, on June 15, 2016, government forces looted the boarding house of Kabi Senior Secondary School, stealing mattresses, books, and other items.[1970]

· According to information collected by the Education Cluster, as well as *Radio Tamazuj*, a school in Juba was looted on July 15, 2016. SPLA soldiers later prevented the school from being repaired, for unknown reasons.[1971]

· Government bombs struck another school in Yei River state on December 6, 2016, according to *Radio Tamazuj*.[1972]

Attacks on schools continued in 2017, as the UN recorded 23 incidents of attacks on and military use of schools between March 2 and June 1 alone. Most of these were in Eastern Equatoria.[1973] Attacks on schools across the country, reported by the Education Cluster, included the following:

- On March 1, 2017, fighting at night destroyed a school in Mayendit county, Unity state.[1974]
- Nine schools in Pajok, Eastern Equatoria state, were looted on April 4, 2017.[1975]
- A school in Tonga, Upper Nile state, was looted on April 15, 2017.[1976]
- Two schools in Pajok, Eastern Equatoria state, were looted on April 16 and April 17, respectively.[1977]

Attacks on school students, teachers, and other education personnel

Attacks directly targeted students and teachers in isolated instances between 2013 and 2017, although they were reported more frequently in 2016, after the conflict spread to the south of the country. These attacks occurred more commonly than was reported in *Education under Attack 2014,* when fewer than 10 students and teachers were reported to have been targeted over the course of the reporting period. The Education Cluster reported in early 2017 that there had been 35 attacks and threats targeting students, teachers, and other education personnel in the Greater Equatoria (15), Greater Upper Nile (13), and Greater Bahr el Ghazal (7) regions since the beginning of the conflict.[1978]

There were few reports of individual attacks on students and educators between 2013 and 2015. However, one reported attack occurred on June 8, 2015, when witnesses reported to the UN Mission in the Republic of South Sudan (UNMISS) that ethnic Dinka pastoralists, including students armed with guns and machetes, killed classmates, the headmaster of a local school, and other civilians in the town of Maridi, in Maridi state.[1979]

In 2016, the Education Cluster reported 30 attacks on students, teachers, and education personnel: thirteen in Central Equatoria state, six in Warrap state, four in Unity state, three in Eastern Equatoria state, one in Upper Nile state, one in Lakes state, one in Jonglei state, and one in an unknown location.[1980] It was not clear whether all of these attacks occurred in 2016. The UN, the Education Cluster, and media sources reported the following attacks on students and educators:

- On March 15, 2016, gunmen kidnapped five high school students, according to a media report. Two of the students remained missing at the end of April, more than one month later.[1981]
- An unidentified person or persons killed a teacher at a primary school in Eastern Equatoria state on August 15, 2016.[1982]
- On an unknown date shortly before November 17, 2016, SPLA soldiers killed the head teacher of Nyei Primary School in Yei River state. There were other attacks targeting civilians.[1983]
- In a large abduction of students in 2016, assailants attacked two schools in Amadi, Western Equatoria state, and kidnapped 30 students, according to news sources. The attacks were attributed to the SPLA.[1984]
- The UN reported that witnesses had stated that the head teacher of a primary school in Siliri village, Yei River state, was killed by government forces as he walked home on November 9, 2016.[1985]
- In late November, media sources reported that government security forces arrested more than 30 teachers from Bor town, Jonglei state, who were striking to protest the lack of salary payments and job promotions.[1986]
- Media reports also indicated that five schools in Amadi state had reportedly closed as of November 2016, due to attacks on students and teachers.[1987]

Information on attacks on students and school personnel was more sparsely reported in 2017. The Education Cluster reported three attacks on teachers between April and May 2017, all in Unity state:

- In the first incident, a community teacher in Rubkona county was shot and killed in his house. The assailants were unidentified.[1988]
- In the other two incidents, armed actors recruited five teachers in Guit county and detained them for an unknown period of time.[1989]

Military use of schools and universities

Armed forces and non-state armed groups occupied more than 100 schools and universities during the reporting period, forcing closures and creating extended gaps in schooling for thousands of children. The number of schools being used for military purposes fluctuated from 2013 to 2017, as security forces and non-state armed groups moved in and out of different schools. However, OCHA reported that, between December 2013 and the end of November 2015, armed forces and non-state armed groups occupied a total of 113 schools for varying periods of time.[1990] An Education Cluster survey conducted at the end of 2016 found that 161 schools had been used for military purposes during an unspecified time period, including 92 schools in Greater Upper Nile region, 46 schools in Greater Equatoria region, and 23 schools in Greater Bahr el Ghazal region.[1991]

Military use of education facilities was reported more frequently at the beginning of 2013, even before the outbreak of conflict in South Sudan, than during the period from 2009 to 2012. The UN documented the use of 26 schools by government security forces and non-state armed groups during 2013, resulting in the loss of access to schooling for approximately 13,000 children. The groups responsible included the SPLA (19 schools), South Sudan national police services (6 schools), and non-state armed groups (1 school).[1992] During the first quarter of the year alone, the Education Cluster reported that 21 schools were used for military purposes in Jonglei, Western Bahr el Ghazal, and Lakes states, with the SPLA occupying the vast majority.[1993] The US State Department noted that UNMISS had found SPLA forces occupying a university and a primary school in Unity state in 2013 and multiple schools in Western Bahr el Ghazal state in July of that year.[1994]

Military use of schools and universities was recorded at higher rates in 2014. The UN reported 60 incidents of military use of schools by numerous armed actors throughout the year.[1995] The US Department of State reported that in May of that year the SPLA occupied a growing number of schools.[1996] As of December 2014, the UN found that various armed actors continued to use 33 schools, which affected access to schooling for approximately 11,000 children.[1997] For example:

- UNMISS observed the occupation of at least one university and one primary school in Unity state during December 2014, according to the US Department of State.[1998]
- According to Human Rights Watch, SPLA soldiers continued living in two primary schools in Pibor town, Jonglei state, even after the May 2014 peace agreement to end the conflict. Their presence prevented children from studying at the schools. The soldiers later vacated the schools but retained barracks adjacent to them, frequently walking through school property and sleeping in classrooms when it rained. Students from the schools reported that they were fearful of the soldiers, who were regularly inebriated.[1999]

Schools continued to be used for military purposes in 2015. The Education Cluster collected information on approximately 24 cases of military use of schools that year. Of these, 15 were in Unity state (at least five by the SPLA), four were in Warrap state (at least three by the SPLA), three were in Central Equatoria (at least two by the SPLA), one was in Eastern Equatoria, and one was in Western Equatoria.[2000] UNMISS reported that 29 schools were being used by armed forces and non-state armed groups as of early December 2015.[2001]

At the same time, advocacy resulted in some schools being vacated. The UN reported that 36 schools being used for military purposes were vacated in 2015, mainly due to UN advocacy and agreements with the SPLA.[2002] It was not clear whether the schools the UN reported as vacated overlapped with any of those identified by Human Rights Watch, UNMISS, or the Education Cluster as being used by armed forces and non-state armed groups.

Reported military use of schools showed a slight uptick in 2016 as the conflict intensified. The Education Cluster collected information on approximately 50 schools by armed actors across the country that year.[2003] At the end of the year, the UN verified military use of 55 schools across the country.[2004] This total included 21 new cases of military use of schools, of which 10 were attributed to the SPLA and 7 to the SPLA-IO.[2005] There may have been overlap between the Education Cluster and UN totals. The individual incidents of military use that were reported by a variety of sources included the following:

- Human Rights Watch reported that in the city of Yambio, Western Equatoria state, the SPLA temporarily occupied at least four schools during the first four months of the year, displacing students.[2006]

- SPLA forces occupied Pajok Primary School in Pajok Payam, Eastern Equatoria state, as of September 2016, according to the UN.[2007]

- In November 2016, the Education Cluster collected verified information indicating that armed actors used a primary school in Yambio, Western Equatoria state.[2008]

- At least one case of military use during 2016 also targeted students. Human Rights Watch indicated that SPLA-IO fighters held more than 300 students hostage at their school in Yei River state from late September until at least the end of November.[2009]

Military use of schools was also documented at varying levels in 2017. Between March 2 and June 1, 2017, the UN continued to verify reports of ongoing military use of 55 schools across the country.[2010] However, these numbers appeared to have dropped by the end of the year. The UN reported that, between September 2 and November 14, 2017, 16 schools remained occupied by armed forces or armed groups.[2011] It was not clear exactly how many previously occupied schools were vacated or how many schools were newly occupied at the end of the year, but the Education Cluster found seven new incidents of military use of schools between March 2 and June 1, 2017. Of these, two were in Jonglei state (one by the SPLA, the other seemingly by multiple parties at various times), two were in Unity state (both by the SPLA), and three in Greater Equatoria (all by the SPLA).[2012]

Reports in 2017 indicated that this use negatively impacted the learning environment. For example:

- Of the 12 looted schools that the Education Cluster found in Pajok and Tonga, Upper Nile state, in April 2017 (mentioned in the section on attacks on schools), eight were being used for military purposes.[2013]

- In April 2017, media sources described an internal UN report indicating that UN officials had visited a school in Jonglei state that was being used by a local militia. Children were still attending classes at the school in classrooms where rifles and grenade launchers were propped against the walls.[2014]

Child recruitment at, or en route to or from, school

Several hundred children were reportedly recruited from schools in South Sudan during the reporting period. The Education Cluster found at least six cases of child recruitment that occurred in schools between December 2013 and the end of 2016, including five cases in Greater Upper Nile and one in Greater Equatoria.[2015] Child recruitment was not reported at schools during the period covered in *Education under Attack 2014*.

Incidents of child recruitment reported to have occurred at schools included the following:

- According to NGO and UN sources, in December 2013, just three days after the war broke out in Juba, non-state armed groups began forcibly recruiting students from schools in the Unity state towns of Bentiu and Rubkona.[2016] In Rubkona, the SPLA-IO forcibly recruited 413 school children from their schools. The children were later used in combat in Bentiu during April and May 2014.[2017]

- In May 2014, the *BBC* reported that non-state armed groups recruited more than 100 students from a primary school in Bentiu town, Unity state.[2018]

- UNMISS found that the following year, on February 16, 2015, members of a Shilluk militia commanded by General Olony reportedly forcibly recruited at least 36 students from secondary school classrooms in the village of Wau Shilluk, Upper Nile state. Most of the students were under the age of 18. The militia released the children following an intervention by child protection actors.[2019]

- The Education Cluster collected information in November 2016 indicating that an unknown group recruited children from a school in Juba. This occurred at an unknown time after the beginning of the conflict in December 2013.[2020]

Sexual violence by armed parties at, or en route to or from, school or university

Sexual violence by parties to the conflict affected education in anecdotal incidents reported between 2013 and 2017. Sexual violence affecting education was not reported between 2009 and mid-2013. Incidents of sexual violence may

have occurred in the education context during that time but would not have been carried out by parties to the conflict, which started in December 2013.

There were at least four incidents of sexual violence in the education context during the 2013-2017 reporting period:

· The UN reported that in May 2014, approximately 30 SPLA soldiers captured three women scavenging for food and cooking supplies in abandoned homes and gang raped them in a primary school.[2021]

· The US Department of State found that on October 29, 2014, the SPLA-IO abducted and raped women in Bentiu, including from Lich University.[2022] It was unclear whether the women abducted from the university were professors or students.

· In September 2015, the UN Secretary-General reported that SPLA soldiers raped several girls who were going home from school in Central Equatoria state.[2023]

· Witnesses reported to Human Rights Watch that on an unspecified date between June 2016 and May 2017, three suspected members of a non-state armed group raped three school girls on their way home from boarding school in Kajo Keji county, Central Equatoria state.[2024]

Attacks on higher education

Attacks on higher education included sporadic instances of assault, abductions, arrests, and threats targeting students and professors. Three attacks were reported between 2013 and 2017, as compared to one from 2009 to 2013.

There was one reported attack on higher education in 2013. After 2013, no further incidents of attacks on higher education were reported until the end of 2015, which included the following:

· On February 1, 2013, two Nuer students at the University of Juba disappeared in a suspected kidnapping by unknown assailants, according to the US State Department.[2025]

· On December 7, 2015, the National Security Service arrested a professor while he was driving home from Juba University. It was not clear why he was arrested; however, he remained in detention as of the end of March 2016.[2026]

· On December 28, 2015, five armed men attacked and threatened nuns who worked at the college at the Solidarity Teacher Training College in Yambio, Western Equatoria state. The men, who attempted to rob the women, were believed to belong to the SPLA-IO.[2027]

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