CAMEROON

Violence perpetrated by the Nigeria-based extremist group Boko Haram spilled over into the Far North region of Cameroon, resulting in several attacks on schools, students, and teachers, as well as military use of schools. Hundreds of schools closed due to a lack of security. During protests in Cameroon's Anglophone regions, government security forces reportedly detained or injured several teachers and students.

Context

Two factors caused the violence that affected education in Cameroon. First, the armed group Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati wal-Jihad, commonly known as Boko Haram, whose moniker translates to "Western education is forbidden" in the Hausa language, accelerated attacks in the country in 2014. The group, which was founded in neighboring northeastern Nigeria, established a presence in Cameroon's Far North region in 2009.[460]

Between March 2014 and March 2016, Boko Haram carried out more than 400 attacks on civilian infrastructure in the Far North region of Cameroon, including 50 suicide bombings by both adults and children.[461] Notably, Boko Haram suicide bombers in Cameroon were girls who had been recruited and forced to carry out the attacks.[462] The group also raided villages where it engaged in child recruitment, abductions, beheadings, arson attacks, and raids that affected people and property, including students, teachers, and schools.[463] The violence exacerbated ethnic tensions in the Far North, where the Kanuri ethnic group was stigmatized and associated with Boko Haram, even though no linkages between them were found.[464] The fear and insecurity caused by Boko Haram's activity in the region forced more than 240,000 people from their homes between 2014 and 2017.[465]

The second cause of the violence that affected education in Cameroon stemmed from internal tensions between Cameroon's French-speaking majority and its English-speaking minority. In October 2016, lawyers from the English-speaking northwest and southwest regions went on strike in response to the perceived marginalization of the Anglophone minority, including the lack of English-language legal resources.[466] Journalists, students, teachers, and others in the Anglophone areas expanded the scope of the protests to include the imposition of French-language education. National security forces responded violently, killing at least four people during a crackdown in December 2016.[467] This violence led to more than a year of general strikes and school closures by Anglophone school authorities, as well as boycotts of schools still operating in other regions.[468]

The violence escalated on October 1, 2017—a date usually marked by celebration of the reunification of Cameroon. Instead of celebrating, tens of thousands of people protested government repression in the Anglophone region, and secessionist groups declared the symbolic independence of "Ambazonia." Security forces responded with excessive force, including live ammunition and teargas. This resulted in at least 40 deaths and more than 100 injured protesters, and more than 500 protesters were detained.[469]

Cameroon did not meet the criteria necessary for inclusion in *Education under Attack 2014*. Therefore, no comparisons with the previous reporting period can be made. During the current reporting period, attacks on education became more frequent after Boko Haram expanded its operations in the Far North in 2014. Attacks in the Anglophone areas of the country started after anti-government protests there began in October 2016, increasing in frequency through the end of 2017.

Attacks on schools

Arson attacks, bombings, and raids reportedly damaged schools, especially after Boko Haram increased its activity in the Far North region in 2014. The US Department of State reported that the group had damaged or destroyed hundreds of classrooms in 2016.[470] In addition, there were several dozen arson attacks on schools in Anglophone areas in 2017, after the outbreak of protest-related violence.

According to UNICEF, 120 schools in the Far North were forced to close as a result of attacks on infrastructure and personnel throughout the 2014-2015 academic year.[471] By December 2014, 69 schools remained affected by closure, damage, or intermittent operations, according to *IRIN*.[472] UNICEF stated that 33,163 children were out of school or had to

seek education outside their own communities as a result of school closures between 2014 and 2015.[473] In this context, attacks on schools included the following:

- Amnesty International attributed an arson attack to Boko Haram, which reportedly burned down a primary school in Greya, Far North region, on August 18, 2014.[474]

- According to witness testimony reported to Amnesty International, Boko Haram destroyed a school in Amchide, Far North region, on October 15, 2014.[475]

- Boko Haram set fire to a school in Tourou, Far North region on an unknown day in 2014, killing or wounding several children and causing the school to close for approximately two years, according to international media.[476]

Attacks on schools by Boko Haram continued into 2016 and may have accelerated. The US Department of State reported that the group damaged and destroyed hundreds of classrooms and that the government shut down hundreds of schools due to security concerns in the Far North region.[477] Other agencies and media sources also reported attacks on schools, including the following:

- The UN reported that members of Boko Haram detonated explosive devices at Bodo primary school on January 25, 2016. Ten children were killed and 20 others were injured in this attack and a simultaneous explosion in a market.[478]

- On January 28, 2016, two suicide bombers entered a school in Kerawa village in the Far North region and detonated their devices, killing four people. According to media reports, the school was hosting Nigerian refugees at the time of the incident.[479]

- Media sources indicated that on February 19, 2016, two suicide bombers detonated their devices near a school in Tokombre town, Far North region. The sources attributed the attack to Boko Haram.[480]

In September 2017, the government delegate in charge of elementary education in the Far North region reported to *Voice of America* that dozens of schools in the area remained closed due to a lack of security. [481] Media sources reported that Boko Haram was responsible for two attacks on schools in 2017:

- Boko Haram detonated suicide bombs behind a high school full of students on April 3, 2017, in Mora, Far North region, according to international media. There were no reported casualties in the blast.[482]

- Boko Haram set fire to a school in Vouzi town, Far North province, on November 13, 2017.[483]

In addition, 2017 saw arson and IED attacks on schools linked to the protests and boycotts spreading through the Anglophone areas in reaction to the government's perceived discrimination against the English-speaking population. The International Crisis Group (ICG) reported in December 2017 that armed "self-defense" groups had begun carrying out arson attacks on schools, as well as shops and markets.[484] Amnesty International reported that at least 30 schools in the region were severely damaged through arson between January and September 2017.[485] These attacks reportedly contributed to school closures. For example, schools in Buea, the capital of the Anglophone southwest, remained closed at the beginning of the September 2017 academic year, after having been shuttered the entire previous year due to protest-related violence and boycotts.[486]

Attacks on schools in the Anglophone region, some of which were likely included in the totals above, include the following:

- An arson attack targeted the Baptist Comprehensive High School in Bamenda, the capital of the Anglophone northwest, on August 13, 2017. Following the attack, parents reported to *Voice of America* that educating their children was no longer safe.[487]

- According to news sources, after security forces shot and killed a 17-year-old boy in Kifem, northwest Cameroon, in early September 2017, protesters burned a school and government building.[488]

- The *BBC* reported that an IED was found outside a secondary school in Bamenda on October 20, 2017, and was safely detonated by security forces.[489]

- According to news sources, unknown perpetrators burned down four schools in Jakiri in the northwest. These included Jakiri Bilingual High School in Jakiri town, which armed men set on fire after threatening two guards at the school on November 4, 2017.[490] These attacks occurred amid calls for the schools to remain closed until the situation in the Anglophone region was resolved.[491]

Attacks on school students, teachers, and other education personnel

Teachers reportedly fled their communities to escape raids and targeted attacks by Boko Haram, and students were killed in at least one attack by the same group between 2013 and 2017.[492] Child Soldiers International reported that national security forces detained children, especially those studying in Quranic schools, supposedly to prevent them from becoming involved in or being recruited by Boko Haram, despite a lack of evidence suggesting that they were at increased risk of recruitment.[493] In addition, government forces repressed protests against the imposition of French-language classes and curriculum in Anglophone areas from October 2016 onward. This included violence against student and teacher protesters.[494] GCPEA collected information on one or two attacks on students and personnel per year, beginning when the confrontation between Boko Haram and government forces intensified in 2014 and continuing when protests broke out in the Anglophone region in 2016.

In 2014, there were at least two incidents of national security forces detaining students for supposed involvement with Boko Haram:

- According to Amnesty International and international media, three students were arrested for sharing via text message a joke about how Boko Haram would not recruit students with low exam results. The security forces reportedly transferred the students to prison on January 14, 2015, and held them in ankle chains for four months. They were charged under the Cameroonian Penal Code and Cameroonian Military Code on March 3, 2015, and found guilty of "non-denunciation of terrorism related information" on November 2, 2016. They were sentenced to 10 years in prison, according to the same sources.[495]
- Amnesty International reported that security forces raided Quranic schools in Guirvidig, Far North region, and arrested 84 children on December 20, 2014. The government claimed that the schools were being used as Boko Haram training camps and reportedly held the children for more than six months without allowing them access to their families. The children were released in June 2015.[496]

Attacks by Boko Haram affected students in at least one case in 2015. According to a Christian news source and local media, nine students were burned to death in an attack on the village of Kamouna, Far North region, by 80 members of Boko Haram on July 19, 2015.[497]

Teachers reportedly fled or decided that the schools were too dangerous for them to work in as the violence progressed. According to *Voice of America*, the Cameroonian government stated that at least 500 teachers in the Far North did not report for duty at the beginning of the 2016-2017 school year.[498]

Meanwhile, in the Anglophone southwest and northwest, negotiations between the government and the teachers' union progressed in 2017.[499] Nevertheless, there were two attacks on students or teachers:

- Unidentified assailants reportedly attacked one student in Limbe in the southwest in January 2017, allegedly because he was French speaking and did not want to participate in the boycott of French-language education in English schools.[500]
- An IED exploded on the grounds of a teachers' training school in Limbe, southwest region, on September 22, 2017. The school's security guard was injured in the blast, according to news sources.[501]

Military use of schools

Armed groups reportedly used more than a dozen schools in the Far North region as bases and torture centers from the beginning of the increased violence between Boko Haram and government forces in 2014, continuing through the end of the reporting period in 2017.

UNICEF stated that eight percent of 110 schools surveyed during a needs assessment in the Far North in 2015 reported being occupied by armed groups since the onset of the confrontation between national security forces and Boko Haram in 2014.[502] The UN also reported in May 2017 that national armed forces used 15 schools in the Far North for an unknown period of time. In April 2017, seven of these schools had been vacated and the other eight were still in use. The occupation of the schools denied approximately 8,000 children access to education.[503]

For example, according to information provided to Amnesty International, which included a video that Amnesty authenticated, Public School Number 2 in Fotokol, Far North region, was used by Cameroonian national forces from May 2014 until at least June 2017. The information indicated that the school was used as a site to detain and torture suspected members of Boko Haram between May 2014 and October 2016. The school reopened in November 2016, but information obtained by Amnesty International showed that national security forces still used the school in June 2017 and that soldiers shared the space with school children. Local sources informed Amnesty International that nine detainees were still held at the school as of June 1, 2017.[504]

Police officers also were present around schools in the Anglophone region in September 2017, although it was unclear whether the officers were stationed on the school grounds. *African News* reported that, when some schools in the Anglophone regions opened at the beginning of the 2017-2018 academic year in September 2017, there was a heavy police presence around the schools, supposedly to prevent protests from interrupting classes.[505] It was unclear whether the police were on school grounds.

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

In Cameroon, the ICG found that Boko Haram recruited young men with promises of money and marriage, and that abducted girls became the wives of Boko Haram fighters, similar to the group's practices in Nigeria.[506] GCPEA did not find reports of sexual violence by Boko Haram in the context of education, but this could be the result of underreporting of such violations.

There was at least one report of sexual violence in the context of the protests in Anglophone areas. Local media indicated that security forces raped and detained students at the University of Buea and the University of Bamenda in conjunction with their supposed involvement with the protests in December 2016, as discussed below.[507]

Attacks on higher education

Attacks on higher education occurred in the context of the anti-government protests in Anglophone regions that started in October 2016. Government efforts to repress this opposition resulted in at least three reported incidents of violence committed against university students in late 2016, and one arrest of a university professor in early 2017. These incidents included the following:

· Scholars at Risk and international media indicated in late November 2016 that state security forces reportedly attacked students participating in a peaceful protest at the University of Buea in Southwest region. An unknown number of students were detained.[508]

· Local media reported that students at the University of Buea and the University of Bamenda were raped, tortured, and pulled from their dormitories before being arraigned in court for supposedly protesting on an unspecified date in December 2016.[509]

· On January 17, 2017, security forces arrested Dr. Fontem A. Neba, a professor at the University of Buea, in connection with a strike that began the day before. Dr. Neba was placed in a detention cell and was reportedly subject to inhumane treatment while in detention, which lasted until at least February 2017.[510]

· In the early morning of October 1, 2017, government security forces raided the hostels at the University of Bamenda in Northwest region, reportedly harming students, lecturers, and their families, according to *University World News*.[511]

GCPEA did not find reports of Boko Haram attacks on universities and their students and personnel in the Far North during the reporting period.

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