

## SYRIA

***Schools and universities were attacked by multiple parties to the conflict in Syria. Several hundred educational institutions were damaged or destroyed during air strikes that killed more than 1,000 students and education personnel. The use of schools by state and non-state armed groups as detention centers, military bases, and sniper posts also impeded education. In areas controlled by armed groups, boys faced the threat of being recruited at or along the route to or from school, and some armed groups altered the curriculum to fit their ideology.***

### Context

Armed hostilities broke out in Syria between forces loyal to President Bashar al-Assad and those who opposed his rule, following the government's repressive response to anti-government protests in the southern city of Dara'a in early 2011. After government security forces arrested and tortured thousands of people, including children, protests rapidly expanded to other parts of the country.<sup>2118</sup>

By 2017, the internal crisis had evolved into multisided hostilities involving the Syrian military and intelligence branches; allied domestic and foreign militias and states, including Russia and Iran; a range of moderate and extremist armed opposition groups, some of which were supported by foreign powers, such as Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Turkey, and the United States;<sup>2119</sup> allied opposition forces, including Kurdish, Arab, Turkmen, and Christian units (collectively known as the Syrian Democratic Forces); and an international coalition of states fighting 'IS'.<sup>2120</sup> The conflict had also become marked by aerial operations by Syrian government forces, Russian forces supporting the Syrian government, members of the international counter-'IS' coalition, Turkey, and Israel.<sup>2121</sup>

The Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR) reported that as of March 2017, the six-year anniversary of the Syrian crisis, 207,000 civilians had been killed, including 24,000 children and 23,000 women. According to the rights group, more than 90 percent of them had allegedly been killed by government military action.<sup>2122</sup> According to UNHCR, by November 2017, more than 5.3 million people were registered as refugees in countries neighboring Syria, approximately 48 percent of them under the age of 18.<sup>2123</sup> Inside Syria, 6.5 million people were displaced as of November 2017, including 2.8 million children.<sup>2124</sup> There also were 4.5 million people living in besieged and hard-to-reach areas of Syria.<sup>2125</sup>

The armed hostilities largely destroyed Syria's previously strong education system.<sup>2126</sup> In February 2015, the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic reported that more than three million children had stopped attending school on a regular basis.<sup>2127</sup> The Assistance Coordination Unit (ACU), a Syrian relief organization, found in November 2016 that 1,378 out of 3,373 public schools surveyed were not functioning. The majority of these schools were located in 'IS'-controlled Raqqa district (40 percent), where the extremist group had closed many educational institutions, and in Kurdish areas (31 percent), where some Arab parents reportedly had stopped sending their children to school after the schools had begun teaching in the Kurdish language.<sup>2128</sup> The UN noted that 'IS' shut schools to alter the curriculum and indoctrinate children. For example, in late 2014 'IS' closed all schools in Aleppo, Deir al-Zour, and Raqqa, pending implementation of a "modified" curriculum.<sup>2129</sup>

Early marriage further limited female access to education. Some families forced their daughters to marry with the intention of "protecting" them, or to reduce the family's financial burden.<sup>2130</sup> The UN reported that women and girls in 'IS'-controlled areas were forcibly married to fighters, and 'IS' trafficked Yezidi women and girls they had abducted in Iraq as sex slaves into Syria.<sup>2131</sup>

The multi-sided, shifting, and complex nature of the conflict in Syria made it difficult to verify with certainty when damage to schools and universities from ordnances was the result of targeted attacks, rather than incidental damage resulting from the conduct of hostilities. Nevertheless, all forms of reported attacks on education were significantly more widespread during the current reporting period than in the period covered by *Education under Attack 2014*, which likely coincided with the escalation of the armed hostilities in 2014.

### Attacks on schools

Attacks on schools, whether targeted or incidental, in Syria were frequent. The UN and human rights monitoring groups documented attacks on schools by Syrian government forces, pro-government militias, armed opposition groups, and

violent extremist groups.<sup>2132</sup> The international coalition against ‘IS’ and Russia began carrying out aerial bombardments in September 2014 and September 2015, respectively.<sup>2133</sup> These assaults were particularly destructive of civilian life and infrastructure, including damage or destruction of schools. Reports of attacks on schools did not often state whether there were military targets nearby.

Save the Children reported that between 2011 and 2015 more than half of all attacks on schools worldwide occurred in Syria.<sup>2134</sup> A World Bank report published in July 2017 found that 53 percent of education facilities were partially damaged and 10 percent were wholly destroyed.<sup>2135</sup> The education facilities most commonly damaged or destroyed were vocational institutes, secondary schools, and education offices. The highest number of education facilities affected was in Aleppo, where 73 percent had suffered some damage.<sup>2136</sup> Throughout the country, the many individual attacks on schools had dozens of victims.<sup>2137</sup>

Syrian government forces, pro-government militias, armed opposition groups, and violent extremist groups attacked dozens of schools during 2013, in both indiscriminate and targeted attacks.<sup>2138</sup> For example:

- The UN stated that there were reports that mortar rounds launched by armed opposition groups hit schools in the al-Dweila, Bab Sharqi, and al-Qassa areas of Damascus on November 3 and November 11, 2013, killing children and school personnel and causing the government to suspend classes in those areas for three days.<sup>2139</sup>
- Human Rights Watch reported that armed opposition groups were responsible for at least four attacks in Homs (March 19, May 27 or 28, July 8, and October 17), six in Jaramana, Rif Dimashq governorate (October 22, October 31, and four other unspecified days), one in Eastern Ghouta (November 4), and one in Damascus (November 11) during 2013.<sup>2140</sup> According to information collected by Human Rights Watch, the six attacks in Jaramana killed and injured dozens, and the attack in Homs on March 19 killed four boys between the ages of 10 and 16 and severely injured a fifth boy.<sup>2141</sup>

Multiple attacks that affected schools in 2013 used weapons that caused significant damage and bodily harm. The deadliest attacks included the following:

- On February 21, 2013, the *Telegraph* reported that a car bomb exploded near Ibn Al-Atheer School in Damascus, which was close to the Russian embassy, while students were leaving school, killing 50 people, including children.<sup>2142</sup>
- On August 21, 2013, government rockets struck a school in Eastern Ghouta. According to Human Rights Watch, the effects were consistent with a chemical attack, and only the government—not armed opposition groups—was known to possess the type of weaponry used in the attack.<sup>2143</sup> The UN later confirmed the use of chemical weapons in the attack.<sup>2144</sup>
- Just a few days later, on August 26, 2013, international media reported that victims had burns and were covered in a “napalm-like” coating after an aerial bomb struck a schoolyard in opposition-held Aleppo. Human Rights Watch reported that the attack killed 37 people, most of them students, and injured 44 civilians.<sup>2145</sup>
- On September 29, 2013, a government air strike on a school in Raqqa killed 15 civilians, including 14 students and a school janitor.<sup>2146</sup> Human Rights Watch reported that the attack used a fuel-air bomb, a weapon designed to cause extensive harm.<sup>2147</sup>
- According to media reports, in December 2013 a suicide bomber exploded a device near a primary school in the government-held town of Umm al-‘Amed, Homs governorate, killing at least twelve people, including at least six students.<sup>2148</sup>
- The Syrian Human Rights Committee (SHRC) reported that an air strike on a school in Mare’, Aleppo, injured at least 40 students on December 22, 2013.<sup>2149</sup>

In 2014, the UN verified 60 attacks on educational facilities by government forces and armed groups and noted that the Ministry of Education had reported 889 schools partially or fully damaged by year’s end.<sup>2150</sup> Information GCPEA compiled from media and NGO sources indicated that there were at least 86 attacks on schools.<sup>2151</sup> Media sources reported that, according to UNICEF, attacks on schools killed at least 160 children and wounded 343 across Syria in 2014.<sup>2152</sup> Of the at-

tacks it verified in 2014, the UN reported that government forces perpetrated 39, 'IS' perpetrated 9, the Free Syrian Army perpetrated 1, and unidentified fighters perpetrated 11.<sup>2153</sup>

Air strikes and mortar rounds appeared to be used in the majority of attacks in 2014, according to information compiled by GCPEA, but vehicle and suicide attacks also directly targeted schools in government-held areas of Homs in 2014. Reported attacks included the following:

- According to SHRC, a barrel bomb dropped near Tar'aan school in al-Mizerib, Dara'a, injured approximately 40 students on February 9, 2014.<sup>2154</sup>
- Human Rights Watch reported that on April 29, 2014, two mortar shells hit the Badr el-Din Hussaini educational complex in government-held Damascus. The attack killed 17 children and at least 2 parents, and injured approximately 50 people. According to Human Rights Watch, the mortar rounds came from the direction of Yarmouk camp, an opposition-held area.<sup>2155</sup>
- Media sources reported that government aircraft bombarded Ein Jalout Primary School on April 30, 2014, as members of the school community were preparing for the opening of an art exhibit. The attack reportedly killed at least 20 people, including between 17 and 33 students and 2 teachers, and wounded many more, including the school's principal.<sup>2156</sup> The UN verified that the attack occurred and stated that it killed 33 children and injured 40.<sup>2157</sup>
- On June 19, 2014, a vehicle exploded near Maysaloun School in Homs, according to the UN.<sup>2158</sup>
- In Homs, a suicide attacker carried out a double bombing at al-Makhzomi elementary school on October 1, 2014.<sup>2159</sup> The attack killed more than 50 people, including at least 29 children, according to reports received by the UN.<sup>2160</sup>
- In Homs, another vehicle-borne IED detonated near several schools on October 29, 2014.<sup>2161</sup>
- The UN also reported that on November 13, 2014, the government dropped barrel bombs on Tal Laylan Primary School in al-Hasakah, killing more than 7 children and injuring 13 more.<sup>2162</sup>

During 2015, the UN again verified 60 attacks on education facilities, as well as 9 attacks on education personnel. GCPEA compiled verified and unverified reports from both media and NGO sources of at least 168 attacks on schools, reportedly harming more than 300 students and education personnel.<sup>2163</sup> The 69 attacks verified by the UN killed or injured a total of 174 children. They were attributed to government forces and pro-government groups (48); 'IS' (11); other armed groups (10); and unknown parties (1).<sup>2164</sup>

Attacks on schools in 2015 were similar to those that occurred during the previous year, including mortar rounds and air strikes. According to information from the monitoring group Airwars, of 19 air strikes documented, the international coalition against 'IS' was likely responsible for 1 and the Syrian-Russian joint air campaign was likely responsible for 18.<sup>2165</sup> Approximately 30 percent of the attacks identified by GCPEA occurred in Idlib governorate, but Aleppo and Rif Dimashq governorates were also heavily affected.

Based on the data collected by GCPEA, the attacks that caused the most harm included the following:

- Two missiles struck a primary school in Northern Syria during the exam period in March 2015. One missile fell outside the gate of the school, while the other struck the teachers' room. Five children and three teachers were killed, and fifty children and six teachers were injured, according to a Save the Children report.<sup>2166</sup>
- Media reports indicated that just a few days later, on May 3, 2015, a government barrel bomb hit the Center for Children's Training and Rehabilitation in the Seif al-Dawla neighborhood of Aleppo and killed at least seven people, including four children and a school teacher.<sup>2167</sup> The attack prompted school closures and the cancellation of exams by local opposition authorities in order to protect teachers and students.<sup>2168</sup>
- Mortar shells killed one female teacher and injured twenty students when they hit the al-Thaqafi Primary School in Damascus' al-Maleki neighborhood on May 19, 2015, according to reports shared with the UN.<sup>2169</sup>
- The UN also received information that, in early December, 3 students and 4 education personnel were killed and 17 students injured when air strikes hit the Sabie al-Jamia Primary School in Deir al-Zour.<sup>2170</sup>

- On December 22, 2015, 'IS' fired mortars, striking a school in the Hrabish area of Deir al-Zour city, according to information received by the UN. The attack reportedly killed nine students and injured twenty others.<sup>2171</sup>

In some instances in 2015, aerial bombardments affected multiple schools in nearby locations on the same or consecutive days. For example:

- Between May 31 and June 7, 2015, eight Syrian government air strikes struck in Idlib city and the surrounding countryside, according to SHRC.<sup>2172</sup> In the strike on May 31, a barrel bomb damaged a school in Kafr Aweed village. The attack took place in the evening during summer vacation, so no one was harmed.<sup>2173</sup>
- SHRC reported that on November 24, 2015, there were air strikes on three schools in Deir al-Asafir town, in the outskirts of Damascus: a primary school, a secondary school for girls, and a mixed-gender high school. SHRC attributed the strikes to Syrian government forces.<sup>2174</sup>
- The Independent International Commission of Inquiry and the UN found that on December 13, 2015, air strikes hit up to four schools in Douma. One girls' school in Douma was hit twice in succession, with the second attack occurring while students and teachers were evacuating and those wounded in the first strike were being treated. The Commission of Inquiry reported that the school director and 15 students were among those killed at the girls' school.<sup>2175</sup>

The UN verified 76 attacks on schools in Syria in 2016, which caused 255 child casualties. Government and pro-government forces were reportedly responsible for the majority of these attacks, particularly through air strikes. 'IS,' People's Protection Units, and unidentified armed groups were all responsible for some attacks on schools as well.<sup>2176</sup> Information GCPEA compiled from media and NGO sources indicated that there were at least 205 attacks on schools, but this information was not verified. As previously, more than half of these attacks occurred in Aleppo and Idlib governorates.<sup>2177</sup>

This increased number of attacks on schools at least partially reflected the increased international involvement in the conflict in 2016. Notably, Russia had deployed military forces on September 30, 2015, further complicating the political landscape by lending its air power to the Syrian government.<sup>2178</sup> Periods of intense fighting, often in urban settings, also badly affected schools, with both pro- and anti-government forces responsible.

According to the information compiled by GCPEA, air strikes at or near schools comprised a significant majority of the reported attacks on schools in 2016. Indeed, there were several periods of intense aerial bombardment during 2016 that reportedly damaged dozens of schools and harmed many students and education personnel. For example:

- Between July 31 and August 15, 2016, UNICEF and OCHA each reported that the fighting damaged 12 schools in Aleppo and Idlib governorates.<sup>2179</sup>
- Save the Children reported on August 11, 2016, that six schools run by their local NGO partners in Aleppo were affected by numerous air strikes during a one-week period in August. The bombings damaged four school buildings and killed children and education personnel in three of the incidents in different parts of Aleppo that were unidentified in the report.<sup>2180</sup>
- According to OCHA, by September 2016, 7 out of the 15 schools in Ariha town, Idlib governorate, had been destroyed during the previous year.<sup>2181</sup>

Data collected by GCPEA also indicated that there were almost daily air strikes from late October through December 2016, and that shelling affected more than 60 schools.<sup>2182</sup> Many of these air strikes were deadly. For example:

- On October 26, 2016, Syrian-Russian coalition military planes reportedly struck the Kamal Qal'aji school complex in Hass village, Idlib governorate, between seven and nine times. The complex included a kindergarten, an elementary school, two middle schools, and a secondary school, according to information collected by Human Rights Watch.<sup>2183</sup> According to information verified by the UN, the attack killed twenty children and three female teachers. Five female teachers and many other children were also injured.<sup>2184</sup>
- The following day, on October 27, 2016, shelling by armed opposition groups reportedly struck the National School, a private school in a government-controlled area of western Aleppo, killing between 3 and 6 school children, and injuring between 14 and 23 others.<sup>2185</sup>

- On November 6, 2016, an air strike hit the Rawdat Ajyal al-Mustaqbal Nursery School in Harasta, Rif Dimashq.<sup>2186</sup> According to information verified by the UN, the strike killed eight children and injured twenty more.<sup>2187</sup>
- According to information collected by *Syria Direct*, there were four other aerial attacks on schools on November 20, 2016, alone, again in Hass, Idlib, and the Eastern Ghouta suburb of Damascus.<sup>2188</sup> Several media sources reported, for example, that anti-government groups struck a school in western government-held Aleppo, killing eight children.<sup>2189</sup>

Information GCPEA compiled from media and NGO sources showed that attacks on schools continued to be an almost daily occurrence in 2017, with at least 150 incidents that year.<sup>2190</sup> Raqqa governorate, where the Syrian Democratic Forces and Free Syrian Army militias, backed by the US, sought to retake Raqqa from 'IS,' was most affected by these attacks.<sup>2191</sup> However, Idlib and Aleppo governorates continued to be heavily affected as well. As in 2016, the majority of these attacks were believed to be air strikes, although there were also some ground-based strikes. For example:

- On March 9, 2017, an air strike reportedly hit the Abu Bakr Seddeeq School in Darat Izza, Aleppo governorate, killing seven children and injuring ten others on the school playground, according to credible information received by the UN.<sup>2192</sup> SNHR suspected that Russian warplanes were responsible for the attack.<sup>2193</sup>
- On March 20, an air strike by international coalition forces almost completely destroyed the three-story Badia Boarding School in Mansoura, Raqqa, killing at least 40 displaced civilians who were sheltering there, including 16 children and probably more, according to research by Human Rights Watch. Local residents reported that 'IS' maintained a presence at the school but also said that the school hosted a large number of displaced civilians.<sup>2194</sup>
- On May 18, 2017, a ground-based strike hit a school in Dara'a city, Dara'a governorate, according to information received by the UN. The strike allegedly killed seven children, including four girls, and injured twenty-five other civilians, including five children.<sup>2195</sup>
- On June 14, 2017, an air strike hit the courtyard of Martyr Kiwan Middle School in the opposition-controlled town of Tafas, Dara'a governorate, killing eight people, including a child, Human Rights Watch reported. Most of the casualties were members of a family who were taking shelter at the school after they had been displaced from another town. Artillery attacks near the school roughly an hour earlier killed two other civilians, including one child, and injured five.<sup>2196</sup>
- The UN received information that a vehicle-borne explosive device killed three male teachers and four boys on July 4, 2017, when it exploded next to a secondary school in Quneitra, Idlib governorate.<sup>2197</sup>
- According to Human Rights Watch, at least six Syrian children died on October 31, 2017, when shells fired by government forces landed at the gate of their school in Jisreen town in Eastern Ghouta, Damascus.<sup>2198</sup> NGOs reported that the shelling also damaged the school building and furniture.<sup>2199</sup> Half an hour later, two mortar rounds fell just outside another school in Mesraba, Eastern Ghouta, killing two children, according to Human Rights Watch.<sup>2200</sup>
- SNHR alleged that barrel bombs dropped by Syrian regime helicopters struck a school complex near Babolin village, Idlib governorate, on December 28, 2017. The complex included a high school and a secondary school, and the bombs partially destroyed the school buildings and damaged furniture.<sup>2201</sup>

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

Attacks on students, teachers, and other education personnel reflected levels similar to those reported in *Education under Attack 2014*. The majority of individuals who were killed or injured in reported attacks on education between 2013 and 2017 were harmed in attacks on schools, like those described above. These attacks affected hundreds of students and teachers. However, students and educators were also killed on their way to or from school, as well as in other forms of attack that targeted them more directly.

According to Save the Children, one in five teachers had been displaced or killed by 2015.<sup>2202</sup> UNICEF reported that more than 52,000 teachers and 523 school counselors, nearly a quarter of Syria's teaching personnel, had left their posts by 2015, due to the conflict. Some fled and became refugees in other countries.<sup>2203</sup> GCPEA identified anecdotal cases of



students and educators who were individually targeted. Attacks on education personnel appeared to become more common toward the end of the reporting period, in 2016.

In 2013 and 2014, shelling killed or injured students in at least four reported incidents. The later three incidents were all reported by SHRC:

- Human Rights Watch reported that on May 19, 2013, a 6th-grade student died after shelling by armed opposition groups hit him while he was going home from school in Homs.<sup>2204</sup>
- On April 10, 2014, shelling killed four children as they were leaving school in al-Rastan town, Homs.<sup>2205</sup>
- On September 24, 2014, barrel bombs injured several children, again in al-Rastan, Homs as the children were leaving school.<sup>2206</sup>
- On December 22, 2014, a rocket struck a school bus carrying students from Hafsa Primary School in Saraqib, Idlib. The attack killed four children and injured nine other people.<sup>2207</sup>

Teachers and education personnel also were killed, arrested, detained, or abducted in at least five incidents in 2013 and 2014. For example:

- Lebanon's *Daily Star* reported that in June 2013, a missile hit a government helicopter carrying seven Ministry of Education employees who were transporting exam papers to secondary school students in northern Aleppo. All seven employees and the plane's crew died. The Syrian government accused opposition groups of targeting the plane.<sup>2208</sup>
- Between January 1, 2013, and March 31, 2014, the UN reported three cases of teachers being arrested and detained. The report attributed responsibility for two of these cases to the government and for one to 'IS'.<sup>2209</sup>
- The UN also noted that it had received reports that on October 5, 2014, 'IS' detained a married couple for allegedly teaching mixed-gender classes.<sup>2210</sup>

During 2014 and 2015, exam periods exposed students to particular risks, as thousands of students from besieged areas had to make dangerous journeys across checkpoints to take exams in government schools to ensure that their scores would be recognized by the Syrian government, according to UNICEF and Save the Children.<sup>2211</sup> UNICEF verified that more than 150 of the 400 children killed in 2015 were at school or on their way to or from school when the deadly incident occurred.<sup>2212</sup> Attacks included the following:

- Local sources reported to Human Rights Watch, the UN, and the media that on May 29, 2014, 'IS' abducted 153 Kurdish students who were returning from their end-of-year exams in Aleppo.<sup>2213</sup> The group separated male from female students and kidnapped only the boys.<sup>2214</sup> Four boys escaped after a few days, slipping out a door while their classmates distracted their captors.<sup>2215</sup> 'IS' released many of the remaining boys over the course of the next five months.<sup>2216</sup> According to Human Rights Watch interviews with some of the released children, 'IS' beat the boys and forced them to attend religious lessons and watch videos of 'IS' beheadings and attacks.<sup>2217</sup>
- In December 2015, according to Save the Children, students were stopped at checkpoints while on their way to take exams at government schools in some besieged areas of Damascus. Individuals interviewed by Save the Children reported that the people manning the checkpoints confiscated students' food and medicine. Save the Children did not report why the children were stopped or who controlled the checkpoints.<sup>2218</sup>

Reported attacks on educators appeared to escalate in 2016, when the UN verified 11 incidents of attacks on education personnel, which harmed 28 educators. The UN noted that these numbers represented a 40 percent increase over 2015.<sup>2219</sup> Government forces and other groups continued to intimidate and abduct students and teachers at school and at home in 2016. OCHA reported allegations in January 2016 that 1,500 school students and 400 university students were unable to take their exams or look for jobs because of a siege by opposition groups in the villages of al-Fu'ah and Kafriya in Idlib governorate.<sup>2220</sup> Other incidents included the following:

- The UN received reports that a Kurdish school teacher was abducted from his home in Qamishli city, al-Hasakah governorate, which is on the border with Turkey, on January 9, 2016, and taken to an unknown location. The Kurdish National Council accused the Democratic Union Party/People's Protection Unit (YPG) of kidnapping him.<sup>2221</sup>

- UNICEF noted in February 2016 that girls attending the UNICEF-supported 1070 School in western Aleppo had reported that a sniper repeatedly threatened them by aiming his gun in their direction.<sup>2222</sup>
- OHCHR received reports that a 15-year-old schoolboy died in detention on May 7, 2016, after approximately two years in prison. He had been arrested for unclear or unknown reasons at a government checkpoint in Deir al-Zour city while on his way to take his exams.<sup>2223</sup>

At the time of writing there were no reports of targeted attacks on students or education personnel in 2017.

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

In *Education under Attack 2014*, Syria had the highest rate of reported military use of education facilities of any profiled country. As of the beginning of 2013, as many as 1,000 schools were reported to have been used as barracks, firing positions, or detention and torture centers by different parties to the conflict.<sup>2224</sup> It was not clear when this use occurred. Reports of military use of schools and universities did not reach these levels between 2013 and 2017, but military use did occur consistently throughout the reporting period.

According to Human Rights Watch, armed opposition groups continued to use schools as barracks, detention centers, military bases, and sniper posts in 2013 and 2014.<sup>2225</sup> Between January 1, 2013, and March 31, 2014, the UN documented 16 instances of schools being used as military bases, barracks, or weapons depositories by government forces (4), by the Free Syrian Army (7), by Jabhat al-Nusra (2), and by the YPG (3).<sup>2226</sup>

The UN verified fewer cases of military use of schools in 2014, including nine by 'IS' and other non-state armed groups.<sup>2227</sup> SHRC recorded 37 schools used as military bases across Syria in 2014. This included 27 cases of use by government forces, 8 by 'IS,' and 2 by armed opposition groups, some of which apparently led to attacks on schools.<sup>2228</sup> For example, SHRC reported that on September 8, 2014, Syrian government forces shelled an agricultural high school that 'IS' was using as a military base in Hjen town, Deir al-Zour. The attack seriously damaged the school.<sup>2229</sup>

Information GCPEA collated from UN, NGO, and media sources indicated that, in addition to being used as bases, schools were also reportedly used as prisons in 2014. Examples included the following:

- An August 2014 report by the UN noted that OHCHR had received reports of prisoners being transferred out of a prison in Al-Andalus School in the Old City of Homs.<sup>2230</sup>
- Two UN reports documented additional information indicating that prisoners were transferred to Al-Wahda School in Aleppo in May and July 2014.<sup>2231</sup>

Military use of schools continued in 2015, with at least nine cases reported, at least eight of which were verified by the UN.<sup>2232</sup> These included the following:

- The UN verified that government forces were using eight schools in Idlib for military purposes in March 2015. Reportedly, armed opposition groups subsequently attacked four of the schools using unreported means.<sup>2233</sup>
- According to information verified by UNICEF, government troops used six schools for military purposes in the Ariha subdistrict of Idlib governorate in April 2015. It was not clear whether any or all of these cases overlapped with those documented the previous month.<sup>2234</sup>
- Education Cluster partners reported that on June 25, 2015, 'IS' used a school in Kobane, Aleppo governorate, as a firing location for attacking civilians.<sup>2235</sup>

The UN reported approximately the same number of cases of military use in 2016 as it had verified the previous year: nine instances of military use, including five by the Free Syrian Army, three by 'IS,' and one by government forces. The UN noted that opposing forces reportedly subsequently attacked two of the schools, a trend that was reported by other agencies as well.<sup>2236</sup> For example:

- According to the UN, in June 2016, 'IS' allegedly used two schools in Raqqa city for military purposes, evicting IDPs who had been living there.<sup>2237</sup>
- According to information that Airwars assessed as "fair," 'IS' used two schools in or near Manbij, Aleppo governorate, in June and July 2016. Reported coalition air strikes hit the first, an agricultural secondary school that 'IS'

was reportedly using as a detention center, on June 13, 2016, and the second, a primary school that 'IS' was reportedly occupying for unknown purposes, on July 28, 2016.<sup>2238</sup>

- In late September 2016, the UN reported that 'IS' had forcibly taken over UNRWA's Al Jarmaq School in the Yarmouk refugee camp near Damascus. The group was reportedly using the school to deliver educational services.<sup>2239</sup>
- Information provided to OHCHR by the Syrian government indicated that Muhaddathah School in the Sukkari area of Aleppo had been used for military purposes. Fourteen bodies found in the school on December 23, 2016, were members of the Syrian armed forces and six were members of government-allied forces.<sup>2240</sup>

Al Ameen for Humanitarian support, a Syrian nonprofit, reported in October 2017 that 'IS' had used 54 schools in Deir al-Zour governorate as headquarters for the General Islamic Services Authority and the Islamic police.<sup>2241</sup> It was not clear when this use occurred. GCPEA separately identified reports that at least three schools and one university were used for military purposes during 2017, including the following:

- OCHA reported allegations that snipers took up positions on the roof of the education faculty of al-Furat University in Deir al-Zour governorate during fighting between 'IS' and the government in the beginning of January 2017. Their presence exposed students to shelling and gunfire as they took their exams.<sup>2242</sup>
- Airwars reported that on April 18, 2017, Mohammed Al-Faris School in al-Tabaqa, Raqqa governorate, was targeted by warplanes. The basement of the school was reportedly being used to hold prisoners.<sup>2243</sup>
- The UN also received reports that 'IS' fighters used Aqarib Primary School northeast of Salamiyah city, Hama governorate, on May 18, 2017, during a battle with government forces.<sup>2244</sup>
- According to the UN, 'IS' was reported to have used a school in Albu Kamal city, Deir al-Zour governorate. The school was subsequently targeted by rockets on June 15, 2017.<sup>2245</sup>

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

From 2013 to 2017 there was little documentation of how many children had been recruited from schools specifically to fight for government, pro-government, or anti-government forces in Syria. Nevertheless, some anecdotal information indicated that schools might have been used for recruitment purposes, unlike the period covered by *Education under Attack 2014*, during which no cases were reported. For example:

- On June 8, 2016, government security forces and pro-government armed groups arrested 150 students who were taking exams at Thib Antar School in the Jurah neighborhood of Deir al-Zour, according to reports received by the UN. The UN noted that it was believed the students had been detained in order to recruit them into armed groups.<sup>2246</sup>
- Also in 2016, the ACU found that there were twice as many girl students as boy students enrolled in school. Key informants interviewed by the ACU in Raqqa reported that parents were keeping their boys home from school for fear they would be recruited and that children did often disappear, presumably taken to provide services to fighters.<sup>2247</sup>

There was also some indication that education-related activities played a role in child recruitment. Based on interviews conducted with children formerly associated with armed forces or armed groups, Human Rights Watch reported that armed opposition groups encouraged boys as young as 15 years old to fight, and that groups including Jabhat al-Nusra and 'IS' at times recruiting them by offering free lectures and schooling.<sup>2248</sup>

### ***Attacks on higher education***

While the majority of reported attacks on educational institutions affected primary or secondary schools, attacks by 'IS' and unidentified parties also affected higher education institutions, as mortars, rockets, IEDs, and air strikes struck university buildings. There were also reports that different parties sporadically targeted higher education students and personnel. The number of such attacks was similar to that reported during the 2009-2013 period covered in *Education under Attack 2014*.



Media reports indicated that multiple explosions hit two of the country's most prestigious universities in 2013:

- Two explosions at Aleppo University killed at least 80 people and wounded 150 on the first day of midterm examinations in January 2013.<sup>2249</sup> Many students and university personnel were believed to be among those killed.<sup>2250</sup> The government and opposition groups blamed one another for the attack.<sup>2251</sup>
- Two months later, in March 2013, a mortar fired by armed opposition groups hit a cafe on the Damascus University campus, killing at least 10 students and wounding approximately 29.<sup>2252</sup>

In 2014, mortars and rockets reportedly hit at least three university and college campuses multiple times. For example:

- The UN received information that on March 24, 2014, a mortar shell damaged the faculty of mechanical engineering in Ladhqiyyah.<sup>2253</sup>
- The UN also noted reports that two days later, on March 26, 2014, there was an explosion at Damascus University's Faculty of Medicine in Damascus.<sup>2254</sup> A suicide bomber detonated explosives at the same college on November 2, 2014, killing two students and injuring five, according to information provided to the UN by the Syrian government.<sup>2255</sup>
- On May 3, 2014, three mortar shells reportedly landed on the Faculty of Economy and Trading at the University of Aleppo, killing 12 students and injuring 16, according to reports received by the UN.<sup>2256</sup>

Also in 2014, Syrian government forces killed at least one professor and 'IS' prevented female university students from studying. For example:

- According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, government security forces tortured and killed a professor at al-Furat University in Deir al-Zour in 2014 for his alleged involvement in Jabhat al-Nusra.<sup>2257</sup>
- The US Department of State cited reports that armed groups such as 'IS' prevented female students in Raqqa from traveling to complete their university exams, also during 2014.<sup>2258</sup>

Rockets and mortars struck universities at least six times in 2015. For example:

- On June 4, 2015, rockets hit Baath University in Homs, according to reports received by the UN.<sup>2259</sup>
- Based on interviews, the Commission of Inquiry documented the killing of one student on November 10, 2015, when rockets fired by unidentified fighters struck Tishreen University in government-controlled Latakia city.<sup>2260</sup>
- According to SHRC, a missile that landed on Damascus University's School of Mechanical and Electrical Engineering on September 2, 2015, reportedly killed 1 student and injured 15 others.<sup>2261</sup>
- On November 19, 2015, media sources reported that the Faculty of Mechanical Engineering building at Damascus University was hit by mortar rounds, killing at least two students and injuring three. No group claimed responsibility for the attack.<sup>2262</sup>
- According to reports received by the UN, on December 2, 2015, mortar rounds impacted the al-Sham Higher Institute in Damascus' Rukn al-Deen neighborhood, injuring 14 students and others.<sup>2263</sup>
- Also on December 2, 2015, a mortar shell struck the Civil Engineering College, injuring two students and a professor.<sup>2264</sup>

In 2016 there were at least 11 incidents in which air strikes, rockets, or mortar rounds hit university buildings, campuses, or buses, according to information compiled by GCPEA.<sup>2265</sup> All attacks were reported to have taken place during the second half of the year. For example:

- Based on information shared with Human Rights Watch, during an incendiary bomb attack on August 7, 2016, Syrian or Russian forces hit near the Faculty of Humanities of the university in al-Dabbit, Idlib.<sup>2266</sup>
- On August 10, 2016, projectiles launched by an unidentified armed group hit a bus of students on their way to Aleppo University, killing 13 of the 24 passengers and wounding 35 others, including civilians on the street, according to reports provided to the Commission of Inquiry.<sup>2267</sup>

- Sources in Aleppo reported to OCHA that a rocket launched by armed opposition groups hit the University of Aleppo in al-Furqan neighborhood on October 4, 2016, killing at least two students and several other people.<sup>2268</sup>
- OCHA noted that, according to media sources, mortars struck an agricultural and medical institute in the same neighborhood, also on October 4, 2016, wounding a teacher and three students.<sup>2269</sup>
- Unidentified armed groups hit Aleppo University a second time on November 2, 2016, killing at least two female students at its Faculty of Humanities, according to reports provided to the Commission of Inquiry.<sup>2270</sup>
- OCHA reported a fourth alleged attack on Aleppo University on November 9, 2016, when shelling killed six people and injured twenty. It was not clear how many of them were students, faculty, or other personnel.<sup>2271</sup>

GCEPA identified reports that air strikes or ground strikes struck university campuses six times from January 1 through November 30, 2017:

- The UN received reports that a veterinary school in Idlib city, Idlib governorate, was struck during air strikes on January 30, 2017.<sup>2272</sup>
- According to SNHR, a missile damaged an industrial school near Kafr Nabl city, Idlib governorate, on March 22, 2017, damaging it and making it unusable. SNHR believed that Russian planes were responsible for the strike.<sup>2273</sup>
- The UN identified reports that air strikes on the Faculty of Education at Idlib University injured a female student on March 25, 2017.<sup>2274</sup> SNHR suspected that Russian planes were responsible for the strike.<sup>2275</sup>
- OCHA reported that the faculty of science and an industrial school in Raqqa city, Raqqa governorate, were both severely damaged during air strikes on May 29, 2017.<sup>2276</sup>
- According to SNHR, shells partially damaged Aleppo University's Faculty of Law building, located in the al-Jame'a neighborhood, on August 16, 2017.<sup>2277</sup>

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<sup>2172</sup> Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR), *The 6th Anniversary of the Breakout of the Popular Uprising towards Freedom, and the Killing of the First Civilians* (UK: SNHR, March 18, 2017).

<sup>2173</sup> UNHCR, "Syria Regional Refugee Response: Inter-agency Information Sharing Portal," November 16, 2017.

<sup>2174</sup> "Syria: Creating a safe space for internally displaced families," OCHA, November 13, 2017.

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<sup>2182</sup> UN General Assembly and Security Council, "Report of the Secretary-General," A/70/836-S/2016/360, para. 157. "Russia/Syria: Satellite, Video Imagery Confirm School Attack," Human Rights Watch news release, November 16, 2016. The monitoring group Airwars has documented airstrikes on civilian targets, including educational institutions, by Coalition and Russian forces: "Civilian and 'Friendly Fire' Casualties," Airwars, <https://airwars.org/civilian-casualty-claims/>.

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