EGYPT

Attacks on education slowed from 2017 to 2019, with around one dozen reported. These included occasional attacks on school and university facilities, as well as incidents targeting higher education students and faculty, in apparent connection to their academic work. In addition, teachers were reportedly targeted in half a dozen incidents that occurred in 2017 in North Sinai governorate.

Context

Security in Egypt remained fragile between 2017 and 2019. In Sinai, an Islamic State (“IS”) affiliated group, the Sinai Province, claimed responsibility for attacks against civilians, including Christians and Muslims who engaged in Sufi practices. During the reporting period, Human Rights Watch also documented that hostilities involving state security forces, pro-government militias, and Sinai Province militants led to the injury, death, or detention of civilians.

In addition, the Egyptian government continued to place restrictions on civil society, including NGO staff, journalists, and human rights defenders. The government consolidated its power through a set of constitutional reforms approved in a referendum in April 2019. Human Rights Watch reported that after anti-government protests on September 20, 2019, Egyptian authorities arrested over 4,400 people. Observers, including the International Crisis Group, reported that the Egyptian government tended to classify opposition groups as ‘terrorists’ and impose severe consequences on critics during this reporting period.

Despite this context, attacks on education declined from 2017 to 2019. This trend continued the pattern reported in Education under Attack 2018, which found that attacks on education peaked from 2013 to 2014, coinciding with widespread student protests that took place after General Abdel Fattah El-Sisi became president. Attacks on education subsided as student protests became less common. During the 2017-2019 reporting period covered in this report, attacks on educational facilities, students, and education personnel occurred sporadically.

Attacks on schools

Between 2017 and 2019, GCPEA collected at least three reported incidents attacks on schools. Attacks on schools were less commonly reported than in Education under Attack 2018, which identified at least 20 attacks on schools from 2013 to 2016. From 2017 to early 2019, GCPEA identified reports of three attacks on schools, two of which occurred in 2017 and one in 2019:

- As reported in Education under Attack 2018, local media reported that Sinai Province fighters remotely detonated explosives at a state-run school in Rafah, North Sinai governorate, on February 3, 2017. According to Daily News Egypt and Anadolu News Agency, the armed group was seeking to prevent Egyptian security forces from using the roof of the school for surveillance.

- On March 25, 2017, unknown armed actors allegedly used improvised explosive devices to target Al-Azhar educational building in Al Arish, North Sinai governorate, according to Daily News Egypt. The report alleged that an armed group attacked the school due to its use by police and the army; however, GCPEA was unable to confirm whether the school was in use at the time of attack.

- On March 3, 2019, local media FJ Portal reported allegations that gunfire from military forces struck a school bus, killing one student and injuring another.

Attacks on students, teachers, and other education personnel

For the 2017-2019 period, GCPEA identified at least ten reports of attacks on students, teachers, and other education personnel. Reports of attacks on teachers spiked in 2017, in comparison to previous years and compared to 2018. In 2017, GCPEA identified media reports of six attacks on teachers, compared with no reports in 2016 and just one reported incident in 2015. Nearly all reported attacks took place in North Sinai governorate, where the Sinai Province of “IS” was active. GCPEA found no reports of attacks on students, teachers, or other education personnel in 2018.

Cases of attacks on teachers in 2017 not reported in Education under Attack 2018 included:
On February 26, 2017, according to a media report identified by the Global Terrorism Database, the Sinai Province of “IS” claimed responsibility for stopping a bus that was transporting female teachers in Rafah, North Sinai governorate, to warn the teachers to wear veils and travel with male guardians in accordance with Islamic law.775

Unidentified individuals reportedly abducted a primary school principal, in Arish, North Sinai governorate, on September 4, 2017, releasing him ten days later, according to media reports.776

Unidentified armed actors reportedly opened fire on a bus that was transporting teachers to their schools in North Sinai governorate on December 17, 2017. According to reports from local media Madamasr, at least one teacher was killed and another injured.777

In May 2019, local and international media outlets reported that police forces harmed or detained secondary school students while they were protesting a new electronic exams system in cities across the country.778 According to media sources, police also peacefully dispersed protesters in several cities.779 These events occurred in response to technical failures in the exam system which occurred during the final exam period.780 Several photos and videos were published on social media that documented the arrest of or use of force against students, many of whom were female, and some as young as 15 years old.781 BBC reported that dozens of students were released from police custody on May 23, 2019, after official orders from the Minister of Education.782 Three incidents of attacks on school students were compiled by GCPEA:

- On May 21, 2019, or an earlier date, local media reported that female secondary students in Kafr az Zayit, Gharbia governorate, protested against the new electronic exams system, the technical problems of which caused disruptions to end-of-year exams. Police forces allegedly interfered and arrested several girls.783

- Local media also reported that, on May 21, 2019, students in Ismailia governorate protested against the new electronic exam system and that police reportedly intervened and arrested several protesters.784

- In an incident unrelated to the exams system, according to an NGO respondent, on July 7, 2019, police detained at least eight staff members from Arabeya Language Institute, an Arabic language school in Mohandiseen, Cairo, following a raid on the school. Security forces interrogated staff and students in the school for several hours, then released the students, but detained the teachers incommunicado for several days. An opposition media outlet later alleged that authorities had charged six of the teachers with joining a “terrorist organization.”785

Attacks on higher education

For the 2017-2019 period, GCPEA identified at least five reported attacks on higher education. Attacks on university students, personnel, and facilities continued to slow during the reporting period. In 2017, one explosive attack by suspected members of the Sinai Province militant group reportedly targeted Al-Azhar University, and Egyptian security forces detained dozens of Chinese Uyghur students, whom China sought to forcibly repatriate, as described in Education under Attack 2018 and in the current chapter on China.786

In 2018, GCPEA found one reported attack on a university student. On May 24, 2018, according to Scholars at Risk, Egyptian authorities detained a University of Washington doctoral student, apparently because of his academic research. The student was reportedly arrested after carrying out an interview with a law professor on judicial independence. Egyptian authorities charged him with spreading false news and with joining a ‘terrorist’ organization and detained him for four days without access to a lawyer. At the time of writing, the student was being prosecuted along with several journalists and activists.787

At the time of writing, GCPEA identified two reports of attacks on university professors in 2019:

- On March 25, 2019, Scholars at Risk reported that a professor of Islamic law was arrested for making posts about an alleged rape and death of a student on the Al-Azhar University Campus in Cairo. Student protests about the university’s response to the rape and murder occurred on March 24, 2019, during which police intervened and blocked students from leaving campus, however the report did not indicate any use of force.788
Scholars at Risk reported that on September 24, 2019, authorities detained a professor of economics, for giving interviews on political affairs to journalists, as well as posting a critical commentary on social media. Egypt’s Supreme Court charged him with a range of offenses including participating in a ‘terrorist’ group. After an initial sentence of 15 days, the professor’s detention was extended with the addition of other charges related to terrorism.\textsuperscript{789}