GUINEA

Beginning in February 2017, two national teachers’ unions held recurrent strikes in opposition to education sector reforms, which in turn provoked student protests demanding an end to interruptions in teaching. Police reportedly used excessive and sometimes lethal force against both student and teacher protesters at least 20 times between February 2017 and December 2020. Police repression of higher education protests also occurred sporadically during the reporting period.

Context

In Guinea, education sector reforms caused a series of teachers’ strikes, beginning in early 2017. A devastating outbreak of the Ebola virus in 2014 weakened an already fragile economy which slowed real economic growth to zero percent in 2015 according to the Guinean government, and partly led to budget cuts affecting teacher salaries and the size of the teaching force.

According to Human Rights Watch, police frequently deterred or repressed anti-government protests during this period, killing at least 12 people in 2018. In July 2019, the national parliament adopted a law that allowed soldiers to shoot at sight of any obstacle or imminent threat, which the BBC reported could allow security forces to kill opposition members with impunity.

Two national teachers’ unions began striking on February 1, 2017, in opposition to policies that reduced junior teachers’ pay and halted the hiring of contractual teachers. After losing weeks of class, students led protest marches, some of which turned violent, demanding that the government negotiate with teachers and that teachers resume service; police responded to protesters by using excessive force. Though the government closed all public schools and universities to prevent further demonstrations, protests continued. Security forces reportedly killed five people in a protest on February 20, 2017, although their status as student or education personnel was not confirmed.

Throughout 2018 and 2019, a similar pattern of strikes and student protests occurred, with one teachers’ strike lasting over two months, from October to mid-December 2018, in several administrative regions. The Free Union of Teachers and Researchers (SLECG) teachers’ union estimated that 90 percent of teachers respected the strike. The same union also went on strike for a month between February and March, 2018, ending after extensive negotiations to ensure a 40 percent pay increase and immunity for teachers engaging in the protest.

The teachers’ strikes caused months of interruption to student learning in the country during the reporting period, raising concerns about students’ ability to pass the necessary exams to continue their education. A government spokesperson also noted that not all teachers adhered to the strike, causing inequity of provision, as some students continued classes and others could not.

Guinea was not profiled in previous Education under Attack editions, thus no comparisons can be made with the previous reporting period.

Attacks on school students, teachers, and other education personnel

Between 2017 and 2019, GCPEA collated at least 20 reported attacks on school students and teachers in Guinea; over 50 teachers and students were detained and dozens were injured or killed. In the majority of incidents, students protesting for the resumption of classes were met with excessive force in Conakry, the capital city, as well as in other cities across the country. The government had mandated that all primary and secondary schools and universities suspend classes until the completion of negotiations with teachers’ unions in February 2017. While strikes and protests occurred in early 2017 and early 2018, police repression of both groups escalated at the end of 2018.

In 2017, GCPEA collected four reports of attacks on both teachers and students during protests against school closures and education sector reforms, which led to the arrest of at least 35 and the injury or death of at least 30 students. These included:

- On February 13 and 14, 2017, Radio France Internationale (RFI) and local media reported that students protesting the teachers’ strike and the suspension of classes set up barricades along a busy thoroughfare in the capital
city of Conakry, allegedly burning tires and throwing rocks at security forces, who responded with teargas, according to local media reports.848

- On February 20, 2017, local and international media reported that students and security forces clashed across Conakry, with protests extending from the central Hamdallaye-Cosa intersection to five communes of the city. Students erected barricades, burned tires, and threw rocks at police, while police fired teargas at protesters and used force. During the protests, 31 students were reportedly arrested, and five people were killed and 30 injured, though their status as students or teachers was not reported.849

- On November 20, 2017, Garda World and RFI reported that police forces fired live ammunition at school students who were protesting a teachers’ strike in Conakry. Two students were reported killed and others injured.850

Police met student and teacher protests with excessive force in 2018, as negotiations between teachers and the government continued. Reported incidents peaked in October and December, during a two-month strike. GCPEA collected 12 media reports which documented the use of force against, and arrest of, protesters in Conakry, N’zérékoré and Labé cities in 2018,851 which included the following:

- On February 13, 2018, teacher strikes caused students in Conakry to demonstrate. Police and students violently clashed, allegedly leading to the death of two students, according to RFI and Aminata.852

- On Oct 29, 2018, in Kaloum area of Conakry, students protested, calling for an end to the teachers’ strike; police allegedly responded by firing gunshots and teargas into the crowds, as well as engaging in running battles to break up the crowds, as reported in local media.853

- On November 22, 2018, dozens of schoolteachers reportedly held a sit-in at the Ministry of Education in Kaloum area of Conakry, before marching to the office of the Prime Minister. Police reportedly dispersed protesters with teargas, allegedly injuring three teachers, according to Aminata. Guinée News reported that police arrested six teachers who, on November 26, were sentenced with unlawful assembly. 854

- On November 26, 2018, students from Kaloum area of Conakry held protests to demand the reopening of schools, which remained closed since the beginning of October. Police used teargas to break up the protest, according to local media.855

- Local media reported that on November 26, 2018, teachers from the SLECG union held a second day of sit-in protest in front of the Prime Minister’s office in Kaloum area, Conakry. Police allegedly used teargas to disperse protesters, who were demanding renewed negotiations with the government and the payment of their salaries, which had been unpaid since the beginning of the strike in October.856

In 2019, reported attacks on school students and teachers decreased as compared to previous years. GCPEA collected three reported incidents, which included:

- On January 7, 2019, Guinée News reported that police used teargas to disperse a teacher protest led by SLECG in Conakry. Police allegedly arrested five teachers who were on strike.857

- On January 21, 2019, in Mamou city and region, students at Cabral High School protested against the cancellation of classes, and reportedly disrupted other high schools in the area. Africa Guinée reported that police fired teargas, causing minor injuries and unspecified material damage.858

- Local media source Kaba Bachir reported that students in Conakry protested against the teachers’ strike on April 10, 2019, blockading some streets. Police used teargas to disperse the demonstration.859

**Attacks on higher education**

Attacks on higher education students occurred at least three times between 2017 and 2019. In some cases, such as student protests on February 13 and 14, 2017, university students reportedly demonstrated alongside high school students and were met with excessive force.860 In addition, GCPEA found one media report of a 23-year-old medical student of Ivoirian origin, who was shot and killed by police during a student protest in Conakry, on December 5, 2017. Police reportedly fired at a student residence from a vehicle during these protests, according to international media sources.861
On May 30, 2019, Scholars at Risk reported that police used violent and lethal force to disperse a peaceful student protest at the University of Labé, located in Labé city and region. Students were protesting against the campus administration’s decision to require two hospitalized students to sit exams. Police, allegedly called by the administration, clashed with students, killing at least one and injuring others.\footnote{862}

On July 5, 2019, students at the University of Kankan, in Kankan city and region, allegedly demonstrated against the institution’s failure to distribute student loans that had been due three months earlier. According to Guinée Matin and Kaba Bachir, police reportedly used teargas to disperse protesters, and injured one journalist.\footnote{863}
Kaba Bachir, April 10, 2019.

860 RFI, "Teachers’ strike in Guinea: school and university students show their anger (Grève des enseignants en Guinée: élèves et étudiants manifestent leur colère)," RFI, February 14, 2017.

