SOUTH SUDAN

A peace agreement signed between the government and main opposition groups and enacted in September 2018 contributed to a decrease in violence in South Sudan. However, attacks on education continued to occur during this reporting period, including the use of schools by armed forces and groups, attacks on schools, attacks on students and teachers, and sexual violence at schools.

Context

Fighting de-escalated between the pro-Riek Machar Sudan People’s Liberation Army in Opposition (SPLA-IO (RM)) and the government’s South Sudan People’s Defense Forces (SSPDF) preceding and following the signing of the Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (R-ARCSS) in September 2018.1799 According to International Crisis Group (ICG), armed conflict noticeably declined in former areas of hostilities such as Bentiu, Wau, and Yei.1800 However, violence escalated again in late 2018 and early 2019 between signatories and non-signatories to the agreement, including the National Salvation Front (NAS) in Central Equatoria state and the Greater Bahr el Ghazal region, in addition to continued intercommunal violence.1801

Violence during the 2017-2019 reporting period occurred in the context of a civil war that erupted in 2013 when a power struggle between President Salva Kiir, of the majority Dinka ethnic group, and former vice-president Riek Machar, of the Nuer ethnic group, triggered ethnically-charged violence between government armed forces and the SPLA-IO (RM), and other affiliated militias and local self-defense groups.1802

Civilians were impacted by the fighting during the 2017-2019 reporting period. Between April and August 2018, the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) documented unlawful killings, forced displacement, abduction of civilians, and widespread burning and looting of property, by state forces and non-state armed groups, some of which they claimed may have amounted to war crimes.1803 More than 3,100 children were released from armed forces and armed groups between 2014 and 2019, after UN negotiations, with more than 1,000 released between February 2018 and February 2019.1804 According to the UN, 1.47 million people were internally displaced in South Sudan in December 2019.1805

According to UNMISS and OHCHR, the government’s Sudan People’s Liberation Army (SPLA), the former name of the SSPDF,1806 used sexual violence as a weapon of war in Southern Unity state.1807 Another joint report by these agencies documented 175 cases of conflict-related sexual and physical violence against 111 women and 64 girls in Northern Unity state between September and December 2018.1808

During this reporting period, war in South Sudan continued to significantly impact education. In July 2018, the UN reported that 2.2 million school-aged children in South Sudan were out of school, the highest proportion globally, and that 75 percent of girls were out of school.1809 An estimated 2.7 million children aged between three and 18 did not have access to pre-school, primary, and secondary education in 2019, with the most severe needs reported in Central Equatoria, Lakes, and Unity states.1810 The UN reported that one out of three schools has been damaged, destroyed, occupied, or closed since 2013.1811 Over 50 percent of schools that reported interruptions to education cited insecurity as the main cause, according to the UN.1812 However, there were some improvements in access to education during this period: an Education Cluster Assessment published in October 2018 estimated that 80 percent of schools were functioning, an increase of 21 percent from the previous school year.1813

Attacks on schools

During the 2017-2019 reporting period, GCPEA identified at least 50 reports of attacks on schools. Reported attacks on schools occurred at a less frequent rate than during the 2013-2017 period, when violence reportedly destroyed more than 800 schools between late 2013 and early 2016.1814

In 2017, the UN verified attacks on 26 schools perpetrated by government forces, SPLA-IO (RM), the pro-Taban Deng SPLA-Io, and the South Sudan People’s Patriotic Front (SSPPF).1815

In 2018, the UN verified 18 attacks on schools that were attributed to government security forces, including the SSPDF
and the Taban Deng-allied SSPDF, as well as non-state armed groups, including SPLA-IO (RM) and NAS; these attacks predominantly took the form of destruction and looting of educational facilities, and crossfire.\textsuperscript{1816} In addition, GCPEA identified the following media and UN reports of specific attacks on schools in 2018, which may have been included in the above number reported by the UN:

- Media outlet \textit{Radio Tamazuj} reported allegations that on February 26, 2018, government forces from Yuai launched an offensive and burned a school, killing 13 people, including four children. Another four children were reported missing.\textsuperscript{1817}

- The UN Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan reported that on May 14, 2018, SPLA soldiers attacked a Christian college that was offering only primary-level classes due to security concerns, in Goli, Central Equatoria state. In the attack, the soldiers killed five students and three staff, as well as two internally displaced persons (IDPs) seeking refuge at the school. The soldiers were reportedly looking for “rebels.”\textsuperscript{1818}

- In July 2018, UNMISS and OHCHR reported that five primary schools had been ransacked and looted on the road between Tambura and Nagero, Gbudue state.\textsuperscript{1819}

In 2019, the UN verified ten attacks on schools.\textsuperscript{1820} UNMISS also reported that government forces looted four schools in Karpeto, Kergulu, Morsak, and Yappa, in Central Equatoria state, between January and April 2019.\textsuperscript{1821} However, it is unclear whether incidents between the reports overlapped. No media reports were collected at the time of writing.

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

For the 2017-2019 reporting period, GCPEA collected approximately nine reports of attacks on students, teachers, and other personnel. As in the previous reporting period, attacks on students, teachers, and other education personnel occurred sporadically between 2017-2019. Between 2013 and early 2017, approximately 35 attacks and threats against students and educators occurred, including abductions and killings.\textsuperscript{1822}

GCPEA identified five reported attacks on school students and personnel from media sources and the Education Cluster in 2017.\textsuperscript{1823} Two of these reported attacks were identified after the publication of \textit{Education under Attack 2018}. In one such instance, as reported by local media outlet \textit{Gurtong}, an armed actor allegedly killed a teacher in Wau town, Wau state, on April 1, 2017. The armed actor was reportedly arrested and held in a military prison after the attack, according to the same news outlet.\textsuperscript{1824} No reported incidents were collected for 2018.

In 2019, GCPEA collected four reported instances of attacks on school students and teachers in Amadi, Western Lakes, and Jonglei states:

- Media outlet \textit{Catholic Radio Network} reported that on May 6, 2019, students and teachers from Rumbek National Secondary School in Rumbek, Western Lakes state, protested for classes to be resumed, following a disagreement among staff at the school which had halted lessons. The report alleged that police arrested ten students and two teachers.\textsuperscript{1825}

- Media source \textit{Radio Tamazuj} reported that pupils and teachers of Agergum Primary School in Rumbek, Western Lakes state, held a demonstration against the recent transfer of teachers, during which they damaged Ministry of Education property, on June 7, 2019. Police reportedly arrested approximately 20 teachers and students, allegedly beating and torturing some, before releasing them. Classes were reportedly suspended after the events.\textsuperscript{1826}

- Local NGO Screen of Rights reported that on June 12, 2019, students from the Royal High School in Bor, Jonglei state, protested the low quality of classes and lack of school feeding program, setting some school buildings on fire. In response, police reportedly shot and injured two demonstrators.\textsuperscript{1827}

- Sometime around July 2019, armed individuals allegedly abducted six students in Amadi state, as reported by media source \textit{Radio Tamazuj}.\textsuperscript{1828}
Military use of schools and universities

Reports of military use of schools occurred at a similar rate during this period, as compared to the 2013-2017 reporting period, during which state armed forces and non-state armed groups reportedly used over 100 schools and universities. In 2017, the UN verified that 22 schools were used for military purposes. In 2018, the UN reported the military use of 35 schools for sleeping quarters and bases, as of June 30 of that year. The UN also reported that 85 schools had been vacated by that same date. In addition, GCPEA collected seven reported instances of military use of schools, however these may also be included in the summary statistics reported by the UN. For instance:

- The UN Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan reported that, in June 2018, the SPLA began to use a primary school in Wadhalelo, Wau state, as a base and barracks. The SPLA reportedly took over the school from the SPLA-IO, giving as their reason for using the school that it was not in operation when they arrived in the area.

- Human Rights Watch reported in a news release that on June 24, 2018, the army attacked the town of Mboro, Wau state, to regain control of rebel-controlled areas; the government soldiers reportedly took control of the town on June 30, using at least one school and the health clinic as a military base.

- In July 2018, Human Rights Watch also documented the use of a school by government soldiers in Wad Alel, Wau state.

- The UN Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan reported that the SPLA-IO (RM) used a school in Central Equatoria state before September 24, 2018, when the NAS attacked and began to use the school as a barracks.

GCPEA collected at least 20 reported instances of military use of schools in 2019. Separately, the UN verified the use of 18 schools for military purposes in 2019. Between February 27 and May 28, 2019, ten instances of military use of schools affected an estimated 3,210 children, 1,550 of whom were girls, according to the UN. It remains unclear whether the reported incidents collected by GCPEA overlap with those recorded in the UN reports. Examples of reported instances of military use in 2019 collected by GCPEA included:

- Human Rights Watch reported that government forces used a primary school as a barracks in Lorega village, Mukaya county, Yei River state, in early January 2019.

- UNMISS reported the use of two primary schools by government forces around Lobonok area, Central Equatoria state, in early 2019, which interrupted classes in those communities.

- In September 2019, non-state armed groups used four primary schools in Moreno county, Yei River state, for military purposes; all four schools had property looted. The schools had been closed since 2016.

- Armed forces used two primary schools in Tore county, Yei River state, in 2019, including looting school materials. By October 2019, the armed forces were still present, and the schools had not reopened. The schools had been used for military purposes since an unspecified month in 2017.

- Armed forces used six primary and secondary schools in Eastern Equatorial state in 2019, all of which remained closed in October of that year, although some had been vacated.

Child recruitment at, or on the way to or from, school

For the 2017-2019 reporting period, GCPEA identified at least three reported incidents of child recruitment at, or on the way to or from, school. Fewer reports of child recruitment were collected during this reporting period as compared to 2013-2017, when at least six cases, affecting hundreds of children were reported. No reports of school-related child recruitment were documented in 2017. In September 2018, UNMISS reported that NAS abducted seven children from Yondoru Primary School in Mukaya, Equatoria state, and forced them into both military training and labor, including acting as bodyguards to commanders. On June 28, 2019, the SPLA-IO attempted to recruit several hundred children from schools in Pibor, Jonglei state.
**Sexual violence at, or on the way to or from, school or university**

GCPEA collected reports of sexual violence at, or on the way to or from, school, on two occasions, both in 2018. The UN Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan reported that on May 14, 2018, SPLA soldiers attacked a Christian college that was offering only primary-level classes due to security concerns, in Goli, Central Equatoria state. The Commission documented at least three cases of sexual violence in the attack, including at least one against a boy. Other incidents of sexual violence were suspected that day at the school but could not be verified. In addition, a non-state armed group attacked a primary school in Western Equatorial state, during an unspecified month in 2018. School property was looted, and a female teacher was raped during the attack. As a result, the school was closed for two months.

**Attacks on higher education**

For the 2017-2019 reporting period, GCPEA identified at least three reports of attacks on higher education. Attacks on higher education in South Sudan occurred sporadically between 2017-2019, as they did in the previous reporting period, which covered 2013-2017 and included one reported attack in 2013 and two in 2015, involving assault, abduction, arrest, and threats against university teachers and students. For 2017, GCPEA collected one reported attack on higher education, which was identified after the publication of *Education under Attack 2018*. Human Rights Watch and media outlet *South Sudan Liberty News* reported that, in January 2017, National Security Service officers arrested two lecturers from Juba University for organizing faculty protests and salary negotiations.

In 2018, GCPEA identified one report of an attack on a university student. *Eye Radio* and *The Tower Post* reported that on April 16, 2018, armed actors shot and killed a university student, and injured two others, at a checkpoint outside a UN camp in Juba, presumably as the students were on their way home from studies.

In 2019, GCPEA identified one reported attack on higher education, involving the repression of a student protest. Media sources reported that on or around May 8, 2019, students at the St. Mary College for Nursing and Midwifery in Wau state, many of whom were reportedly female, protested against tuition fees and a high cost of living. State security forces reportedly arrested two students and beat others. It was reported that the college would remain closed until the end of May 2019.