SUDAN

In 2018 and 2019, attacks on secondary school and university students increased as police and paramilitary forces arrested or injured hundreds of students in response to anti-government protests. However, attacks on schools decreased as active armed conflict reduced in Blue Nile and South Kordofan states, as well as in the Darfur region.

Context

During the reporting period, conflict continued in South Kordofan and Blue Nile states, as well as the Darfur region, between government armed forces, pro-state militias, and armed opposition groups, including factions of the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement-North (SPLM-N). These hostilities occurred alongside other communal conflicts. In addition, political violence increased during this period. In April 2019, former president Omar al-Bashir was deposed by a four-month protest movement and replaced by a Transitional Military Council, after which protests continued.

In December 2018, the country’s economic decline and the rising price of food staples led to nationwide protests helmed by secondary school and university students and staff. Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, and local media documented excessive use of force by National Intelligence and Security agents, police, and paramilitary groups, against protesters, leading to the death and detention of hundreds of individuals, some of whom, according to the UN, were children. The Transitional Military Council, which took power after al-Bashir, continued the violent repression of demonstrators, in particular on June 3, 2019, when the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) used lethal force to disperse protesters, including raping some individuals, killing over 100, and wounding approximately 700.

In January 2019, the government extended an open-ended unilateral ceasefire in the conflict-affected areas of South Kordofan and Blue Nile states, as well as the Darfur region. However, Human Rights Watch reported that, despite the ceasefire, state forces, including paramilitaries such as the RSF, attacked at least 12 villages in Jebel Mara, Darfur, between March and May 2018. Similarly, Human Rights Watch reported attacks by pro-government militias in Blue Nile state, in April 2018. Armed groups in South Kordofan also continued to block humanitarian aid from entering the state, denying vital assistance to thousands, and worsening the impact of the conflict on civilians. In 2018, the UN reported that an estimated 5.5 million people in Sudan required humanitarian assistance, including an estimated two million internally displaced persons (IDPs) and 1.2 million refugees, many of whom were from South Sudan.

Sudan’s conflicts impinged upon the right to education during the reporting period. In 2017, an Education Sector needs assessment found that 56 percent of school-age children in 30 IDP camps in Darfur had no access to education. According to the UN, enrollment rates in the eight conflict-affected states were far lower than the rest of the country, with primary school enrollment near 47 percent in 2017. Unrest caused schools to close in 11 out of 18 states, from one to three weeks, between the end of December 2018 and January 20, 2019. On July 31, 2019, the government also forced the closure of schools nationwide after four students were killed and dozens were injured during a protest in El-Obeid, North Kordofan state, according to media, UN, and NGO sources.

Local media reported that the government also shut down 38 public universities and around 100 private institutes in early 2019. In July 2019, university students across the country organized demonstrations, demanding the government improve security conditions before the reopening of tertiary education institutions in the country.

Attacks on schools

For the 2017-2019 reporting period, GCPEA collected at least 20 reports of attacks on schools. Attacks decreased during the 2017-2019 reporting period as compared to the 2013-2017 period, most likely due to the de-escalation of conflict in South Kordofan and Blue Nile states and the Darfur region, following ceasefire agreements.

In 2017, the UN verified four attacks on schools in Darfur. GCPEA identified open source information on only one incident of an attack on a school that same year, on January 14, in Saraf el Sa, Central Darfur, in which armed individuals reportedly fired on a Quranic school to steal foodstuffs from its stores. The reported incident may have been included in the UN Country Task Force monitoring and reporting data; it was identified after the publication of Education under Attack 2018.
Attacks on schools in 2018 continued at an increased rate compared to the previous year. The UN verified 14 attacks on schools in 2018, perpetrated by Government Security Forces and paramilitary groups, as well as unidentified armed actors. In addition, GCPEA found one media report of an attack on a school, which took place in Golol, Nierteti locality, Central Darfur state, on July 5, 2018. According to local media sources, the paramilitary group RSF and Sudan Liberation Movement/A-Nur (SLM/A-Nur) clashed that day; after the fighting ended, one of the groups reportedly burned a Quranic school and attacked civilians. The African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur confirmed the presence of both RSF and SLM/A-Nur forces around Golol in late June and July, though they reported that verification patrols in Golol were repeatedly denied by the government in July.

In 2019, the UN reported that armed pastoralists burned farmland in Guldo locality, Jebel Marra district, West Darfur state, on November 25, 2019. Although the school was not targeted, it was damaged in the attack, and 250 male and female students fled the area with their families.

Attacks on school students, teachers, and other education personnel

For the 2017-2019 reporting period, GCPEA collected approximately ten reports of attacks on school students, teachers, and other education personnel. GCPEA documented three reports of attacks on students and teachers in 2017, which injured or killed at least five individuals, in West Darfur and South Kordofan states.

In 2018 and 2019, GCPEA recorded attacks on students and teachers, including the use of excessive force, arrest, and detention, in the context of wider protests over the government’s austerity measures, announced in December 2018. In January 2019, the UN demanded an end to the killing, injury, and detention of children related to the suppression of demonstrations.

GCPEA identified three reported attacks on students and education personnel in 2018, including one related to the government’s suppression of student protests:

- According to international media, on January 9, 2018, police arrested and held 34 high school students, all under the age of 16, from Kosti Technical School, in Kosti town, White Nile state. The students were reportedly protesting against increases in the price of breakfasts near their school, in the context of demonstrations over high bread prices in several parts of the country. The students were reportedly released later that evening.

- Media outlet Radio Dabanga reported allegations that a partially blind Quranic school teacher was detained and held in a National Security prison in Zalingei, Darfur state, on April 1, 2018. The teacher was accused of espionage.

- On or around August 29, 2018, RSF paramilitaries allegedly detained secondary school students in Mellit, North Darfur state, and proceeded to shave their heads, as reported by Radio Dabanga.

In 2019, attacks on school students continued to occur as part of a response by the state to broader anti-government protests, leading to the injury or death of at least 30 students. GCPEA collected six reports of attack, including the following:

- Media outlet Radio Dabanga reported that on January 13, 2019, police fired teargas into a girls’ school in Khartoum, injuring an unspecified number of students, while attempting to halt protests across the city.

- According to Radio Dabanga, on January 16, 2019, police dispersed a student protest inside Deim Baker secondary school in El Gedaref, Gedaref state, and allegedly physically assaulted students. The students were holding a sit-in to demand the release of a teacher arrested in the school the week before.

- The UN, Amnesty International, and international media reported that on July 29, 2019, the paramilitary group RSF, used lethal force to disperse a peaceful protest led by secondary school students about the late start of the school year, along with other grievances related to insecurity in El-Obeid, North Kordofan. At least four children between the ages of 15 and 17 were killed and dozens were wounded. One student was shot in the head with a live bullet and others reportedly sustained gunshot wounds to the head, abdomen and legs. Many of the students were wearing school uniforms and backpacks at the time of the attack. All schools nationwide were suspended after the shooting.
Military use of schools and universities

Reports of military use of schools continued during the 2017-2019 reporting period. Military use appeared to remain approximately steady, in comparison to the last reporting period, which covered 2013-2017 and during which eight incidents of military use were reported by the UN.1919

In 2017, the UN verified the military use of four schools by RSF and the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) in Darfur, as well as the use of another three schools for military purposes by SAF that were formerly held by SPLM-N in Kurmuk, Blue Nile state.1920

In 2018, the UN verified that SAF used one school in West Darfur which was later vacated. In addition, one school used by SAF, in Laiba, East Jebel Marra, which had previously been recorded by the UN, remained in use.1921 However, the government also vacated three schools that had been used for military purposes since 2011 in Blue Nile state, according to the UN.1922

GCPEA received four reports of military use of schools in 2019.1923 For instance:

- A UN interagency humanitarian assessment mission to Abu Khasholar locality, South Kordofan state, was informed in June 2019 that the Khorieloaleed Basic School for Boys had been used for military purposes by SAF since 2011, affecting 550 male students and six teachers. After prolonged negotiations with local community leaders, SAF partially vacated the school and learning resumed. However, the government forces continued to use three rooms in the school, which were meant to be two classrooms and an office. Due to the continued military use of a portion of the school, grade seven and eight pupils were relocated to the girls’ school. In addition, seven nearby schools were vandalized by unknown individuals; of the seven, two schools had what appeared to be bullet holes in the walls.1924

- In West Darfur state, in mid-2019, the UN Country Task Force on Monitoring and Reporting (CTFMR) documented the continued military use of Dar Masalit School for girls. The school had been in use by National Intelligence Security Service (NISS) since 2004, despite advocacy by UN CTFMR for the school to be vacated, advocacy which continued through late 2019.1925

- In May 2019, a UN mission to Gidad village, South Darfur state, reported that a secondary school was in use by Sudan Police Forces. The Education Department reported that the police had entered and used a part of the secondary school because they had no police station in the area. It was unclear how long the school had been in use for non-educational purposes.1926

Sexual violence at, or on the way to or from, school or university

During the 2017-2019 reporting period, GCPEA collected two reported incidents of education-related sexual violence,1927 one of which occurred in the context of the 2019 protests near and at the University of Khartoum. In early June 2019, Physicians for Human Rights received a report that six RSF soldiers raped two women outside a University of Khartoum office building.1928

Attacks on higher education

For the 2017-2019 reporting period, GCPEA identified at least 40 reports of attacks on higher education. Reports of attacks on higher education increased during this reporting period. In the previous period, which covered 2013-2017, GCPEA collected approximately 30 reports of attacks on higher education students and personnel, with attacks peaking in 2015.1929

In 2017, GCPEA documented at least 17 attacks on higher education staff and students, reportedly impacting at least 200 students and personnel.1930 Several of these incidents were identified after the publication of Education under Attack 2018. For instance, on March 21, 2017, Darfuri students at the University of the Holy Quran, in Wad Medani, El Gezira state, reportedly staged a protest to demand university administration keep its agreement to exempt Darfuri students from tuition fees. Security forces allegedly used teargas to disperse the students and, after making arrests that day and the next, later sentenced 16 students to 40 lashes and issued them with a fine for public disturbance.1931
In 2018, GCPEA collected 11 reports of attacks on higher education, leading to the injury or death of at least 35, and the arrest and detention of at least 350, students and education staff. Repression of higher education students and personnel escalated across the country, including in South Kordofan, West Darfur, and Khartoum states from January, when the country erupted in protest over subsidy cuts and price increases to basic goods such as bread. Darfuri students were also targeted and arrested at universities during this reporting period.

GCPEA registered reported incidents of NISS and police officers using force to suppress student and staff protests or detaining university students and staff throughout 2018. In many cases, NISS agents and police used force to intervene in conflicts between pro-government National Congress Party (NCP) and non-NCP students. Examples included:

- On January 9, 2018, student protesters reportedly clashed with police at the University of Khartoum after days of protests against government price increases to basic goods. Police reportedly used teargas repeatedly to disperse crowds, arresting three protesters. In response, students allegedly attacked police with stones, according to Scholars at Risk.

- On January 12, 2018, students at Aldalang University in South Kordofan state reportedly protested against the killing of two classmates the day before by a soldier. Police, military, and NISS officers reportedly responded to demonstrations with excessive force and by arresting students, according to Scholars at Risk. Authorities allegedly arrested and detained 117 students and charged another 24 with offenses such as criminal mischief, disturbance of public peace, public nuisance, and publication of false news, amongst other charges.

- A student at the University of Khartoum gave a speech decrying interference in student union elections on February 11, 2018, after which he was attacked by other students, sparking conflict and protest between rival student groups. Police reportedly intervened with tear gas and live bullets, injuring at least four students and arresting two, as reported by media outlet Radio Dabanga and Scholars at Risk.

- On September 17, 2018 students gathered at El Geneina University, in El Geneina, West Darfur state, to rally against deteriorating conditions at the university and to protest the stabbing of a female student in a dormitory by an unknown person. NISS agents entered the university and deployed teargas, used batons, and fired bullets at students. Dozens of students were reportedly injured, at least four seriously, and five students were detained.

- On November 22, 2018, NISS agents allegedly beat two students outside the University of Dongola, in Northern state, after the students wrote a letter to the dean listing demands to improve the university.

In 2019, attacks on higher education students and personnel continued during the student-led protests at universities demanding President Omar al-Bashir’s resignation. GCPEA collected 15 reports of incidents, which led to the injury or killing of at least ten, and the detention of over 90, university students and staff. After al-Bashir was deposed, on April 11, 2019, students and faculty protested against the Transitional Military Council and its directive for universities to reopen. The Sudanese Students Association issued a statement rejecting this call and demanding administrative changes, including the dismissal of staff associated with the al-Bashir regime, the removal of military forces from campuses, and the dissolution of pro-regime student groups. The University of Khartoum Teaching Staff Initiative and the Association of Sudanese Professors at Universities, Faculties, and Higher Institutes both called for a civil disobedience campaign and refused to resume teaching. Examples of attacks on higher education students and staff in 2019 included:

- On January 6, 2019, Scholars at Risk reported that security forces attempted to block University of Khartoum professors from attending a protest held off campus. The security forces reportedly arrested at least eight professors and held another 100 in a campus building for approximately three hours. On the same day, local news also reported that 20 professors from the University of Khartoum had been arrested, though it is not confirmed if this occurred at the same time.

- On February 12, 2019, security forces arrested 16 University of Khartoum professors, who were preparing a sit-in at the university in protest of the government’s failure to solve the country’s economic problems, according to the Association of Sudan University Teachers, as reported by Bloomberg. The Association reportedly belongs to the Sudanese Professionals Association, an umbrella organization of anti-government groups.
Amnesty International reported that on February 25, 2019, security officers raided the Ahfad University for Women in Omdurman, Khartoum state, beating students and dispersing them with teargas.1944

On June 9, 2019, RSF paramilitaries reportedly raided the University of Khartoum, killing four protesters, then caused damage to the campus, looted professors’ offices, and burned the university hospital, according to Scholars at Risk. Two days earlier, the University of Khartoum Teaching Staff Initiative had called for civil disobedience in opposition to the Transitional Military Council and recent attacks on protesters near the campus. The paramilitaries reportedly stationed forces inside the university after the raid.1945

Reuters and The New York Times reported that on December 30, 2019, protesters gathered outside a court in Omdurman, Khartoum state, in solidarity with a teacher who was killed in custody by NISS officers, after his arrest in January 2018, for allegedly having organized protests against former president al-Bashir. Police dispersed the protesters, including teachers, using teargas, reportedly causing the death of one woman with asthma. The court sentenced 29 NISS officers to death for the torture and killing of the teacher, according to media reports.1946

During the reporting period, NISS agents and police also allegedly detained and physically harmed Darfuri university students, in repeated incidents, generally accusing the students of being involved in separatist activities. For instance:

- Radio Dabanga reported that on July 11, 2018, NISS agents allegedly detained and beat a Darfuri student at the University of Khartoum.1947

- On July 12, 2018, NISS reportedly detained and severely beat a second Darfuri student at the University of Khartoum who was later released, according to Radio Dabanga.1948

- On December 23, 2018, NISS allegedly detained 32 Darfuri students from the University of Sennar, Sennar state, under accusations that they formed a “sabotage cell” of the Abdelwahid faction of the Sudan Liberation Movement, according to international media.1949


Sudan Tribune; Radio Dabanga, as cited in ACLED, Event ID SUD1847; “Sudan uprising week four: Demos in eight cities,” Radio Dabanga, January 17, 2019.


Information shared by a UN respondent, November 2019.

Information shared by a UN respondent, November 2019.

Information shared by a UN respondent, November 2019.


Scholars at Risk Network, Academic Freedom Monitor, University of Khartoum, January 9, 2018.


Scholars at Risk Network, Academic Freedom Monitor, Khartoum University, January 6, 2019; “Sudan arrests Khartoum University lecturers amid fresh protests,” Al Jazeera, January 6, 2019; Sudan Tribune; Radio Dabanga, as cited in ACLED, Event ID SUD1796.


