BURKINA FASO

The frequency of attacks on education in Burkina Faso increased during the reporting period, with a sharp rise in attacks on schools and teachers in 2019. Over 140 incidents of attack – including threats, military use of schools, and physical attacks on schools and teachers – took place within a broader climate of insecurity, leading to the closure of over 2,000 educational facilities.

Context

The violence that broke out in northern Burkina Faso in 2015, and which spread southward in subsequent years,[331] escalated during the 2017-2019 reporting period.[332]

Ansarul Islam, an armed group that also operated in Mali, perpetrated an increasing number of attacks in Soum province, in the Sahel region, throughout 2016 and 2017.[333] Other armed groups, including Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and its affiliate, Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims (JNIM), as well as the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS), also committed attacks against government buildings, and civilian structures such as restaurants, schools, and churches, targeting military posts.[334] Since the spring of 2017, the government of Burkina Faso has undertaken military action against armed groups in the north, including joint operations with Malian and French forces.[335]

Data from the UN Department for Safety and Security (UNDSS) demonstrated increasing insecurity in Burkina Faso during the reporting period. Between January and September 2019, 478 security incidents reportedly occurred, more than during the entire period between 2015 and 2018 (404).[336] These incidents have extensively affected civilians. The Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED) estimated that between November 2018 and March 2019, reported 499 civilian fatalities from direct, targeted attacks, an increase of over 7,000 percent from the same period in the previous year.[337] As of December 2020, an estimated 560,000 Burkinabé were internally displaced.[338]

Reported attacks on schools and teachers escalated in January 2017, when teachers began receiving threats that they and their schools would be targeted if they did not teach the Quran and replace French language instruction with Arabic.[339] As a result, school closures increased during the reporting period. While over 2,000 schools were closed in conflict-affected areas in June 2019,[340] by the beginning of the school year in October 2019, the Education Ministry reported that 1,455 schools were closed, affecting some 200,000 students.[341] Compared to only one administrative region affected by school closures in 2017, seven regions were affected in 2019. By December 19, 2019, the Education Ministry reported that the number of schools closed had risen to 2,087, affecting over 300,000 students.[342] The Sahel region experienced the most closures, followed by the Nord, Est, Centre-Nord, Boucle du Mouhoun, Centre-Est, and Centre-Sud regions.[343]

Conflict-related displacement has also negatively impacted access to education. According to the National Council of Emergency Relief and Rehabilitation (CONASUR), of the 56,101 displaced children, the vast majority (46,587) were not in school, with only 9,514 enrolled as primary, post-primary, and secondary students. In addition, 96 schools were used as shelters for internally displaced persons, as of August 31, 2019.[344]

Burkina Faso was the 69th country to endorse the Safe Schools Declaration in 2017 and took action to protect students and teachers from attacks during the reporting period. For example, in 2018, in partnership with the UN and NGOs, the government supported 1,400 schools in implementing Safe School Strategies to analyze risks and develop response and mitigation plans.[345]

Attacks on schools

During the 2017-2019 reporting period, GCPEA collected reports of at least 120 attacks on schools in Burkina Faso. Reporting indicates that attacks on schools by armed groups through means of arson and gunfire escalated during the 2017-2019 reporting period, primarily in the Sahel, Nord, Centre-Nord, Boucle du Mouhoun, and Est regions.

Through UN, NGO and media sources, GCPEA counted nine reported incidents of attacks on schools in the Sahel region of Burkina Faso in 2017.[346] According to the UN, between January 2017 and May 2017, 517 schools had been affected by general insecurity caused by non-state armed groups.[347]

Reports indicated that attacks on schools escalated in the second half of 2018, spreading from the Sahel region to Nord and Est regions, with a few attacks also recorded in Boucle du Mouhoun and Centre-Nord.[348] In 2018, non-state armed groups opened fire on, burned, or looted schools in at least 30 reported incidents compiled by GCPEA.[349] These attacks had a chilling effect on education in the North and Sahel regions, where, by May 2018, 473 out of 644 primary schools were closed, according to the UN.[350]

Examples of reports of attacks on schools identified by GCPEA in 2018 included the following:

– Human Rights Watch and a local media source reported that on January 21, 2018, unknown perpetrators set fire to and significantly damaged the school in Kacham-Ouest village in the Oudalan province near the border with Mali. The attackers allegedly opened fire on the village prior to attacking the school and abducted one person.[351]

– On April 5, 2018, armed actors reportedly opened fire on the Collège d'Enseignement Général, a secondary school in Béléhedé village in Soum, Sahel province, and proceeded to set fire to classrooms and a motorbike, according to local and regional media sources.[352]

– ICG and a local media source reported that on September 8 or 9, 2018, armed actors set fire to and destroyed three primary schools and teacher housing in Tankwarou village, Est region.[353]

– On November 22, 2018, armed actors reportedly burned the school in Sampieri, Est region, and issued threatening orders to instructors that they must teach in Arabic, according to local media sources.[354]

– On December 26, 2018, armed attackers burned textbooks, and according to some reports also burned the school, in Loroni village, Boucle de Mouhoun region, according to local and international media sources.[355]

In 2019, the number of reported on schools more than doubled from 2018. Between January and December 2019, GCPEA identified over 80 reported incidents of attacks on schools from media, UN, and NGOs.[356] These attacks, along with increasing insecurity, served as a warning and a threat to teachers in non-affected schools, contributing to further school closures in surrounding areas.[357] By mid-2019, 2,024 schools had been closed due to insecurity, according to the Ministry of Education, more than twice as many as in the previous year.[358]

Reported incidents of attacks on schools collected by GCPEA in 2019 included:

– On the morning of January 4, 2019, a local media outlet reported that armed assailants burned the supply room of the school in Petanaye village in Loroum province, Nord region.[359]

– On January 28, 2019, armed assailants reportedly opened fire on and looted teacher housing in Mougounou-goboko, Yatenga province, Nord region. Pupils and teachers fled the area, according to local media sources.[360]

– On June 12, 2019, armed actors reportedly attacked a school in Bourzanga, in Bam province, Centre-Nord region, with unspecified weapons, according to local media reports. State security forces successfully responded to the attack and no casualties were reported.[361]

– In mid-July 2019, the Kinséré primary school and teachers' homes were subject to arson by armed actors in the Boucle du Mouhoun region, affecting 176 students and five teachers, according to the UN.[362]

– On or about July 8, 2019, the UN and local media reported that in the locality of Mansila, Yagha province, Sahel region, armed actors set fire to five schools and threatened to destroy the remaining ones in the area if they were reopened.[363]

– On December 11, 2019, armed actors allegedly attacked the school in Tangaye, in Yatenga province, Nord region. Local media sources reported that equipment and documents were destroyed.[364]

Attacks on school students, teachers, and other education personnel

GCPEA received reports indicating approximately 20 attacks on students, teachers and education personnel between 2017 and 2019. Media, NGO and UN sources found that non-state armed groups threatened, physically assaulted, killed, and abducted teachers, with the stated aim to stop their teaching, or to force them to only teach the Quran.[365] These types of attacks became more frequent throughout the reporting period and sometimes occurred in conjunction with

attacks on school infrastructure.

In 2017, Human Rights Watch reported three attacks on teachers, which affected two teachers and one principal, and led to school closures.[366] These attacks escalated in 2018, when, through media and NGO reports, GCPEA documented five accounts of attacks on teachers that followed a similar trend of assaults and abductions.[367] The UN also reported that, in May 2018, targeted killings of teachers and general insecurity caused schools to close in the Mentao refugee camp and surrounding areas in the Sahel region, preventing 490 refugee boys and 237 girls from completing the school year.[368] Reported attacks in 2018 included:

- Human Rights Watch reported that on April 12, 2018, approximately five armed individuals entered the school in Nassoubou village in Soum province, Sahel region. They fired gunshots into the air, hitting a sixth-grade student. The assailants then abducted a teacher.[369]

- On May 2, 2018, unknown armed actors attacked and set fire to the school principal's house in Bafina, Centre-Nord region, according to *Le Monde* and Menastream. The assailants blindfolded the school director while committing the arson. The assailants also stole two teachers' motorbikes.[370]

- *BBC* and ICG reported that on November 12, 2018, unidentified assailants reportedly whipped five school employees in Toulfé, Nord region, while students watched. The provincial branch of the teachers' union suspended classes across Loroum province due to the violent attack, according to a local media source.[371]

In 2019, reports collected by GCPEA indicated that attacks on teachers increased from 2018. GCPEA counted at least five reported attacks on teachers and education personnel between January and December 2019.[372] Reported attacks identified by GCPEA included the following:

- The UN, *Voice of America*, and local media reported that two teachers were kidnapped in Soum province, Sahel region, on March 11, 2019 and subsequently killed, with their bodies found on March 18.[373]

- On April 26, 2019, international and local news outlets, the UN, and Plan International reported that armed actors, reported to be JNIM affiliates, shot and killed five teachers at a school in Maytagou village, Koulpélogo Province, Centre-Est Region. An international NGO reported that two of the teachers were part of non-formal program located within the government school where the other three teachers were employed.[374]

In addition to physical attacks, affiliates of different armed groups repeatedly threatened teachers across the country in several incidents between 2017 and 2019. These threats, which generally consisted of orders to stop teaching or to teach Arabic, caused a chilling effect that resulted in high numbers of school closures. GCPEA collected reports of 13 such incidents.[375] Some examples include:

- On February 1, 2018, alleged affiliates of an Islamist group reportedly visited the primary school in the village of Vini in Loroum province, Nord region, and wrote threatening messages on walls and desks demanding that teachers conduct classes in Arabic or suffer consequences.[376]

- According to ICG and local media sources, on November 5, 2018, presumed ISGS militants entered two schools in the villages of Kicki and Kletafades, Sahel region, where they threatened teachers, stole their personal items and money, and forced them to leave, resulting in the closure of the two schools.[377]

- In early December 2018, media sources reported that secondary school teachers in the Kiembara department, Boucle de Mouhoun region, stopped work after approximately 12 unidentified armed men allegedly visited the school and ordered them to leave; the secondary school subsequently closed for one month.[378] A month later, teachers found posters, presumably from the same suspected militants, threatening them that they would be killed if they did not close their schools, according to a local media source.[379]

- In Moaga village, Centre-Est region, two local media sources reported that on February 17, 2019, affiliates of either JNIM or ISGS entered the village waving a black flag, fired gunshots, demanded that people pray, and announced that they were targeting state representatives and teachers. State security forces were deployed to the site.[380]

Military use of schools and universities

During the 2017-2019 reporting period, GCPEA collected several reported incidents of military use of schools.

GCPEA did not identify any reported incidents in 2017. A witness reported to Human Rights Watch that on December 20, 2018, in the town of Tin-Akoff, Oudalan province, in the Sahel region, armed actors executed a local councilor in the local school. The victim was one of four people of Bella ethnicity killed on that day in the same village.[381]

In 2019, in the Centre-Nord region, four schools were reportedly used by state armed forces: two primary schools in Barsalogho, beginning in May 2018, and two secondary schools in Dablo and Pensa, beginning in July 2019, according to the UN.[382] In 2019, Human Rights Watch also documented the military use of ten schools by state armed forces and five schools by non-state armed groups; armed actors attacked at least three schools in Centre-Nord region during or after their occupation by military troops.[383]

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

While no incidents were collected during the 2017-2019 reporting period, GCPEA identified qualitative evidence that suggested that teachers at a Quranic school recruited students to join non-state armed groups. During a conflict and protection analysis conducted by the Danish Refugee Council in July 2019 in Est region, displaced persons and residents reported that Quranic school masters instructed children studying under them to join armed groups.[384]

Attacks on higher education

Two attacks on higher education students reportedly occurred in 2019 at the Polytechnic University of Dori, in the Sahel region. Tensions between students and the administration heightened in late May 2019, when the institution refused to change exam dates that were scheduled during Ramadan. According to local media, on June 6, 2018, during a press conference held by students on the University of Dori campus, police, allegedly permitted on campus by the administration, reportedly used violent force including batons to disperse students, wounding five and arresting 20 others.[385] Following this, the president of the national students' union also reported that on June 11, 2019, two students were arrested and held for 24 hours in connection with their involvement in the press conference.[386]

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