CAMEROON

While reports of attacks on schools, students, and school personnel, by Boko Haram in the Far North decreased in 2018 and 2019, an upsurge in reported attacks on school and university students, personnel, and educational infrastructure in North-West and South-West regions was recorded during the 2017-2019 reporting period, leading to the injury, death, or detention of at least 560 school and university students and teachers across the country.

Context

Attacks on education in Cameroon during the 2017-2019 reporting period occurred in relation to two ongoing crises. The first was the insurgency by Boko Haram, an armed group of Nigerian origin, which became active in late 2014 in Cameroon's Far North region. The second involved armed violence between the state and secessionist groups in the North-West and South-West regions, which erupted in late 2016.

In the Far North region, Boko Haram continued to carry out attacks on schools and civilians, similar to its actions across the Lake Chad Basin.[431] The UN reported a sharp increase in the number of suicide attacks in November and December 2018.[432] This trend continued in 2019, when the Institute for Security Studies reported that attacks in Far North region occurred on a nearly daily basis.[433] IOM reported 270,870 internally displaced persons (IDPs), 110,574 returnees, and 46,845 out-of-camp refugees in Far North region in August 2019.[434]

In the North-West and South-West regions, insecurity worsened during the 2017-2019 reporting period, due to the intensification of violence by several separatist armed groups, which began to emerge in 2017. At the end of 2019, the UN reported that Cameroon was faced parallel humanitarian crises and estimated that 3.9 million people, many of whom were in the North-West and South-West regions, were in need of vital assistance.[435] OCHA also reported that, at the end of 2019, UNHCR estimated that over 679,000 people were internally displaced as a result of the crisis and over 50,000 had fled to Nigeria by late December 2019.[436] Over 1,800 people were killed between 2017 and early 2019 in the two regions.[437]

Both Boko Haram and Anglophone separatist armed groups explicitly targeted education, impeding the right to education in Cameroon. In 2018, OCHA estimated that 398 schools were closed, 68 in Far North region, 144 in North-West region, and 186 in South-West region.[438] In the North-West and South-West regions, separatists enforced boycotts of schools, a practice which entered its fourth academic year in September 2019.[439] In September 2019, regional basic education delegates reported an attendance rate of four percent in primary schools, meaning that only 12,200 children out of 321,900 enrolled children were actually in school. As of November 2019, OCHA reported that 90 percent of public primary schools and 77 percent of secondary schools in the North-West and South-West regions were closed or non-operational, and that 91 percent of school-aged children remained out of school.[440] Anecdotal evidence also suggested that school closures led to overcrowded classrooms in non-conflict zones due to displacement.[441]

However, in the Far North region, increased security for students and educational personnel allowed for the re-opening of 23 schools in the 2018-2019 school year, and four schools in the 2019-2020 school year, which increased attendance by both Cameroonian and Nigerian refugee children in the region.[442] However, in the Far North region, attacks by Boko Haram caused population displacements and school closures, according to multisectoral evaluations conducted in mid-2019.[443]

In September 2018, Cameroon became the 81st country to sign the Safe Schools Declaration.

Attacks on schools

For the period of 2017-2019, GCPEA collected reports from different sources indicating almost 60 attacks on schools in Cameroon.

Attacks decreased in the Far North and escalated in the North-West and South-West regions, in comparison to the 2013-2017 reporting period. Boko Haram, reportedly responsible for the damage or destruction of hundreds of schools and classrooms in the 2013-2017 reporting period,[444] had only sporadically attacked schools at the time of writing. In 2017,

there were four reports of least four schools affected by arson or bombing in the Far North region, according to media sources identified by GCPEA.[445] In 2018, GCPEA documented only one media report of arson at a school in Virkaza, Far North region, on February 23, 2018.[446]

The majority of attacks on schools between 2017 and 2019 occurred in the North-West and South-West regions, where armed separatist groups perpetrated attacks on education as part of a broader campaign to obtain greater political recognition. Attacks in these regions increased in comparison to the 2013-2017 reporting period. In 2018, the UN reported that 54 schools had been attacked and 4,437 closed in the North-West and South-West regions as a result of conflict.[447] Similarly, Amnesty International reported that, from 2016 to mid-2018, armed separatists burned 42 schools and targeted teachers who did not participate in a boycott against the government, which included schools.[448]

In 2018, GCPEA compiled reports from media and NGO sources of 11 attacks on schools in the South-West and North-West regions, which primarily involved arson and gunfire.[449] Separatists, though often suspected, rarely claimed responsibility for these events; in addition, some attacks on schools were allegedly attributed to state armed forces. Examples include the following:

- Human Rights Watch reported that armed separatists attacked a high school dormitory in Widikum, North-West region on March 26, 2018, shooting one student. The separatists had previously instructed the school to close.[450]

- In Kumbo, North-West region, approximately a dozen individuals reportedly raided the Melim High School and vandalized offices, according to *All Africa*, causing teachers and students to flee on September 4, 2018.[451]

- On December 3, 2018, Human Rights Watch reported that state security forces set fire to a vocational training center and the house of a teacher, along with other homes, after fighting with armed separatists in Kumbo, North-West region.[452]

In addition, armed separatists carried out at least one other attack in bordering Littoral region. On October 29, 2018, suspected Ambazonian separatists allegedly burned student uniforms, bags and other school items at a government bilingual school in the Littoral region, according to *Journal du Cameroun*.[453]

In 2019, there were three reports of attacks on schools compiled by GCPEA at the time of writing. One of these attacks occurred in the neighboring West region. These attacks all involved arson.

- *Journal du Cameroun* reported that on January 19, 2019, unknown armed actors suspected of being members of an armed group set fire to the administrative block of the Government Technical High School, in Mbengwi, Momo Division, North-West region. The school had reportedly closed several months earlier due to clashes between armed separatists and state security forces.[454]

- *Agence de Presse Africaine* and *Journal du Cameroun* reported that on February 5, 2019, in Babadjou, West region, separatists set fire to Savion Bilingual High School, as well as the principal's car, and then looted school facilities.[455]

- A school in Muyaka, Fako district, South-West region, was reportedly burned to the ground by unknown actors on an unspecified date in April 2019, according to a local media source.[456]

Attacks on school students, teachers, and other education personnel

Between 2017 and 2019, GCPEA collected reports from different sources indicating at least 115 attacks on school students, teachers, and other education personnel.

Attacks on school students, teachers, and educational personnel constituted the most common form of attack on education in Cameroon during this reporting period. UN media website *The New Humanitarian* reported that while statistical information was not available, at least 100 incidents of school abductions by presumed separatist groups allegedly occurred between late 2017 and December 2018 in the South-West and North-West regions, and particularly in the regional capitals of Buea and Bamenda.[457]

In 2017, GCPEA identified four media and NGO reports of attacks on students and teachers, though none of these consisted of abductions.[458] In contrast, through media and NGO and UN sources, GCPEA documented approximately 35

cases of attacks on students, teachers, and other education personnel, which affected at least 535 people between January 2018 and December 2019, 20 of which occurred in 2019.[459] An Education Cluster Needs assessment carried out between March and June 2019 also found that attacks on students, teachers, and education personnel frequently occurred during this period.[460]

Two of the most notable cases of abductions in this reporting period were mass abductions. The most prominent occurred on February 16, 2019, when an unidentified armed party abducted 170 students, one teacher and two students from a Catholic school in Kumbo town, North-West region. To negotiate the hostages' release, church officials closed the school.[461] In another notable case, suspected armed separatists abducted at least 78 students and three school staff, including the principal, from a secondary school in Bamenda, on November 5, 2018. All the students were released the following day and the perpetrators also released a video of the abducted students, as a warning against attending schools, in which the perpetrators self-identified as "Amba boys" (Ambazonian separatists). [462]

Other reported abductions in 2018 and 2019 include the following:

- On May 25, 2018, Human Rights Watch reported that two female principals were abducted in different locations in South-West region, on the eve of national examinations and were severely warned to cancel exams. The abductions were linked to armed separatist groups. Both principals were eventually released.[463]

- According to *Voice of America* (*VOA*), suspected separatists allegedly kidnapped six students in Bamenda on September 3, 2018, the first day of the school year.[464]

- International media, the UN, Human Rights Watch, and ICG reported that in Kumba, South-West region, armed gunmen reportedly abducted at least nine students and one teacher on November 20, 2018. Military forces fought the gunmen, who were suspected Ambazonian separatists, in order to secure the victims' release. The teacher was wounded during this process.[465]

- *Xinhua* reported that on January 24, 2019, armed men kidnapped five students on their way to school in Buea, the capital of the South-West region.[466]

- In mid-June 2019, suspected separatists abducted the proprietor of a high school in Limbe, South-West region, according to the UN.[467]

- In mid-September 2019, three female students were reportedly abducted by unknown armed assailants while on the way to a Catholic school in Ngomgham in Bamenda district, North-West region, as reported by the UN.[468]

Reports of at least three cases of killings of teachers and principals were documented in 2018 and 2019, all in the Anglophone regions. These examples are as follows:

- The head teacher of a government primary school in the town of Etam, South-West region, was decapitated on February 20, 2018, as reported by *Journal du Cameroun*. Local sources claimed that separatist fighters targeted him after he gave a "defiant radio interview."[469]

- *Journal du Cameroun* reported that on November 21, 2018, members of a separatist armed group reportedly killed the vice principal of a government bilingual high school in Belo town and Subdivision, Boyo division, North-West region.[470]

- On December 10, 2018, a staff member of the Government Technical High School in Njinikejem, Belo subdivision, North-West region, was killed by armed assailants, according to *Journal du Cameroun*.[471]

In addition, one account of state suppression of a teachers' protest occurred. On March 1, 2018, over 200 teachers were detained in Cameroon's capital city of Yaoundé, Center Region, where teachers had planned a protest to demand better working conditions and months of backpay.[472]

In addition to staff and students, high-ranking civil servants working in the education sector have also been explicitly targeted. In 2018 and 2019, two such cases were documented in South-West region:

- *VOA* reported that on March 17, 2018, the newly appointed chair of Cameroon's Anglophone educational board was abducted and released a few days later.[473]

– The car of the Regional Delegate for Secondary Education for South-West region was set on fire by suspected Ambazonian separatists on February 4, 2019 in the town of Buea, according to *Journal du Cameroun*.[474]

Military use of schools and universities

For the period of 2017-2019, GCPEA collected reports from different sources indicating as many as 40 incidents of military use of schools.

In 2017, national forces reportedly occupied at least 15 schools in Far North region, denying some 8,000 children access to education.[475] In 2018, GCPEA identified one reported incident of military use that led to an attack on a school in South-West region. On September 16, 2018, media sources and Amnesty International reported that armed men attacked St. Joseph's College, a high school in Sasse, Buea, in South-West region, wounding more than 20 people with machetes and guns.[476] Amnesty International reported that separatists had attacked soldiers stationed near the school.[477] Following the incident, at least six schools in and around Buea asked parents to keep their children at home.[478]

In 2019, according to Regional Education authorities, state military forces used a total of 18 schools in Logone and Chari (9), Mayo-Sava (8) and Mayo-Tsanaga (1) divisions. Of these, 16 remained functional and two were closed. In eight schools, military both resided and taught, in two schools military personnel taught but did not inhabit the building, and in another seven cases the state used the school as lodging but did not teach. According to UN sources, the military presence was partly due to a lack of teachers in insecure areas. Reports also suggested that military continued to wear uniforms and carry weapons while on school premises, although the Ministry of Education and non-governmental organizations had advocated for adherence to the Safe School Declaration principles.[479]

In 2019 in North-West region, GCPEA also identified two reported incidents of military use:

– On January 3, 2019, state armed forces burned a school that was allegedly being used by armed separatists in Eka village, Widikum division, North-West region, according to sources on Twitter. Researchers at the Human Rights Center of the University of California, Berkeley, verified the burning of the school by the Cameroonian military but did not verify the use of the school by an armed group.[480]

– In May 2019, Human Rights Watch and a local media source also reported that armed separatists used an abandoned school in Bali, Mezam division, North-West region to torture a civilian, using fire, machetes, and sticks. The incident, recorded on film, was verified by at least 12 sources, five of whom recognized the school.[481]

Attacks on higher education

As in the previous reporting period, attacks on higher education students and staff occurred sporadically between 2017 and 2019, in North-West and South-West regions, with at least 13 reported attacks perpetrated by both state security forces and non-state armed groups. In 2017, GCPEA documented three attacks on higher education in the two regions, which included detention and raids.[482] Two of these attacks occurred in response to anti-government protests and strikes beginning in late 2016, and the third related to repression of secessionist students.

Tensions in Cameroonian universities continued in 2018, due to ongoing conflict related to separatist groups in South-West and North-West regions. In 2018, GPCEA identified four attacks on higher education students and staff. As with other attacks on education, armed separatists targeted universities because they viewed them as an apparatus of the central government.[483] Examples included the following:

– A professor and a staff member were abducted on November 10, 2018, from the University of Buea, South-West region, which is an important center for English language education in the country, according to *Agence France Presse*.[484]

– Unidentified armed men abducted at least 12 students from the University of Bamenda, North-West region on December 8, 2018, releasing them two days later. The abductors later released a video of the students and discouraged others from attending school.[485]

Also in 2018, university students and faculty who voiced support for pro-Anglophone, secessionist causes were targeted by state forces. Human Rights Watch documented the case of an attack targeting a third-year university student who

was suspected of supporting secessionist causes. The victim, a 22-year old, was beaten to death by security forces while on a trip home to visit his family.[486]

In 2019, at least five attacks on higher education students and one attack on a higher education facility were reported by media, the UN, and NGOs.[487] As in 2018, when attacks occurred at a similar rate, the majority of incidents were attributed to armed separatist groups, though one incident also involved state armed forces. Students were often targeted at university residences on or near campus. Examples included:

–   On February 9, 2019, *VOA* reported that the Cameroonian military forcibly removed hundreds of students from their dormitories at the University of Buea, South-West region. The state security forces reportedly detained the students for several hours before releasing them and urging them to continue their academic activities. A student reported to *VOA* that students had stopped attending classes because of threats made by separatists.[488]

–   On March 20, 2019, OCHA and media outlets reported that 20 students were abducted from the University of Buea, South-West region. The students, all members of the football team who were training when the event occurred, were released after three days and were reportedly tortured by the abductors, according to *CNN* and *VOA*.[489]

–   On June 13, 2019, OCHA and *Xinhua* reported that unknown armed assailants abducted three students from a hostel at a Teachers Training College in Bambilim, Bamenda division, North-West region.[490]

–   According to local media, on November 10, 2019, alleged armed separatists reportedly kidnapped eight students and killed one student who resisted being removed from a hostel at the University of Bamenda, North-West region.[491]

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