ETHIOPIA

Attacks on education continued during the 2017-2019 reporting period. At least ten schools were reportedly damaged or closed due to conflict in Oromia region. In addition, attacks on higher education increased, primarily due to reported arrests and violent repression of students by police and military forces on university campuses.

Context

In April 2018, Abiy Ahmed Ali was elected prime minister of Ethiopia. Prime Minister Abiy's government sought to reduce hostilities by releasing thousands of political prisoners, allowing exiled political dissidents to return, enacting legislative reforms, removing a ban on three opposition groups, and signing a long-anticipated peace agreement with Eritrea.[790]

The ICG reported that two main armed opposition groups, the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) and the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF), signed agreements with the government and took concrete steps to disarmament and reintegration, which led to reduced fighting in Oromia and Somali regions.[791]

Despite political reforms, a sharp increase in ethnic and communal violence occurred in 2018.[792] In June 2018, more than 800,000 people were displaced due to violence that erupted in the Gedeo zone, Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples' (SNNP) region and West Guji zone, Oromia region, during ethnic and land conflicts.[793] Following the return of formerly exiled OLF leaders in September 2018, demonstrations took place in Addis Ababa over dissatisfaction with the government's responses to ethnic violence and forced displacement, during which police shot and killed five people and arrested over 1,000 others.[794]

Violence also increased in Somali region in 2018, particularly near the border of Oromia.[795] In August 2018, riots and inter-communal violence broke out in Jijiga, Somali region, reportedly leaving at least 15 dead and hundreds of people displaced.[796] In December 2018, renewed conflict at the border of the Oromia and Somali regions killed 21 people and injured at least 61 others, according to *Al Jazeera*.[797]

In February 2019, OCHA reported 3.19 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) and IDP returnees in Ethiopia; 82 percent of whose displacement was related to conflict.[798] Moreover, Ethiopia hosted the second largest refugee population in Africa in 2019, with more than seven hundred thousand refugees registered in December 2019.[799] Schools inside refugee camps were damaged during this reporting period in the context of protests and violence between groups of refugees. For instance, in Tongo refugee camp, in the Benishangul-Gumuz region, humanitarian actors reported that on December 13, 2018, four pre-school centers were vandalized and looted, with three of them completely destroyed, during a violent protest by camp refugees.[800]

Conflict and insecurity affected access to education, at all levels, during this reporting period. A UN assessment in November and December 2018 found that 414 schools were closed, more than half of which were located in Somali region, and that 260 of those schools were destroyed due to conflict, floods, drought and other emergencies.[801] The UN also found that 2.7 million children had their education impacted by protracted displacement and damaged schools resulting from conflict and natural disasters, as of December 2019.[802] Ethnic and communal violence was present on 22 of the country's 45 public university campuses in late 2019, leading thousands of students to leave campus; in response, federal police were deployed to all 45 universities in December of that year.[803]

The government also declared a state of emergency from February to June 2018, which curtailed constitutional rights such as assembly and communication. In addition, the declaration allowed security forces to detain individuals indefinitely and without a warrant, and to enter schools and university campuses to "arrest and stop mobs."[804]

Attacks on schools

During the 2017-2019 reporting period, GCPEA collected at least 15 reports of attacks on schools. In 2017, GCPEA identified one report, in which a grenade was thrown into a school, injuring four students on September 6, in Harar, eastern Ethiopia.[805]

In 2018, the UN reported that 16 schools were partially or completely damaged as a result of conflict in Oromia region.[806]

In addition, 27 schools were damaged in West Guji and Gedeo zones in the context of conflict, as reported by the UN in August 2018;[807] however, whether damage occurred due to armed conflict, other violence, or presence of IDPs in schools was not clear. A report in October 2018 noted that ten schools were still occupied by IDPs, 12 schools remained partially damaged, and five schools required total rehabilitation, in West Guji and Gedeo zones.[808] Occupation of schools by IDPs occurred frequently during this reporting period, according to news, NGO, and UN reports.[809]

In 2019, 16 primary schools were closed in Metekel zone, Benishangul-Gumuz region, due to conflict and displacement, which impacted access to education for nearly 1,000 schoolchildren, as the UN reported in November of that year.[810]

Military use of schools and universities

Military use of schools and universities occurred sporadically between 2017 and 2019, as in the previous reporting period. In 2017, four instances of military presence at universities were reported in Oromia and Gambella regions,[811] one of which was covered in *Education under Attack 2018*.[812] In December 2017, the government announced it would deploy federal security forces to universities around the country.[813]

On April 26, 2018, local media outlet *ESAT News* reported that students at Ambo University, in Ambo, Oromia region, protested the presence of security forces on the campus.[814]

In early November 2019, the *Associated Press* reported that security forces entered campuses in the Amhara and Oromia regions after the death of three university students during inter-communal conflicts.[815] For instance, on November 12, 2019, fighting broke out between students at Bule Hora university, in West Guji zone, Oromia region, injuring at least ten students. In response, federal army troops were deployed inside the campus, according to *Addis Standard*.[816]

Attacks on higher education

Attacks on higher education continued during the 2017-2019 reporting period, increasing in 2018 and 2019, primarily in relation to protest repression on university campuses. In 2017, GCPEA collected three cases of attacks on students at Ethiopian universities, involving the injury, killing, or detention, of at least 50 university students in Oromia and Amhara regions.[817] These reported incidents were identified after the publication of *Education under Attack 2018* and include, for instance:

- On November 15, 2017, the military reportedly entered Haramaya University, in Haramaya, Oromia region, and beat students, according to *ESAT News*. Students at the university had been protesting government intervention in academic life, including alleged spying on students on campus.[818]

- *ESAT News* reported that, on an unspecified date in December 2017, security forces and inter-communal conflict killed four students at Wollega University, in Nekemte, Oromia region, and Debre Tabor University, in Debre Tabor, Amhara region.[819]

In 2018, GCPEA recorded at least four incidents of attacks on higher education, including the injury and arrest of university students and the arrest of a professor.[820] For instance:

- On January 2, 2018, 18 students were arrested from Adama University, in Adama, Oromia region.[821]

- At Ambo University, in Ambo, Oromia region, students reportedly protested for the release of detained classmates and for the military to vacate campuses, on April 26, 2018. *Addis Standard* reported that police used teargas to disperse the student protestors.[822]

- On June 9, 2018, an unidentified perpetrator threw a bomb into a library in Dilla University in SNNP state, injuring at least nine students, according to Scholars at Risk and media sources.[823] The sources noted that Dilla University was a politically tense campus.[824] In 2015, GCPEA recorded a similar event at Dilla University involving a hand grenade which killed two students and injured six others.[825]

GCPEA identified at least six reports of attacks on higher education in 2019, primarily involving the use of excessive force against university students during education-related protests or protests on campus. The arrest of a university lecturer and the abduction of university students were also identified.[826] For instance:

- On April 1, 2019, media sources reported that ethnic Oromo students at Haramaya University, in Haramaya,

Oromia region, led a protest on campus in support of the ethnic and regional status of Addis Ababa as part of Oromia. In clashes with the police, more than ten students were reportedly injured and hospitalized. Classes were suspended after the event due to security concerns.[827]

- On April 17, 2019, medical students and interns at Arsi University, in Assela, Oromia region, held a protest over their learning and internship conditions, according to *Addis Standard*. Police reportedly responded with excessive force, injuring both male and female students, some of whom were admitted for medical treatment for bone fractures.[828]

- A lecturer at Rift Valley University, in Jimma, Oromia region, was arrested and charged under the Anti-Terrorism Proclamation on August 17, 2019, according to Amnesty International and other rights organizations. The lecturer was accused of writing a book critical of the government, and was released three months later.[829]

- On December 4, 2019, at least 12 students were abducted outside Gambella city while returning home from Dembi Dolo University, in Oromia region.[830] While the exact number of persons is uncertain, local and international media report that 13 or 14 female and four male students were abducted.[831] The students were returning home after violent clashes between Amhara and Oromo students on campus the day before, when their bus was stopped by an unidentified group of individuals. No group had claimed responsibility for the abduction at the time of writing, although regional officials alleged that the non-state armed group Oromo Liberation Army perpetrated the attack. The armed group, in turn, claimed that the government was responsible for the abduction. At the time of writing, the students had reportedly not been released.[832]

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