

## LIBYA

***Dozens of attacks on education were reported in Libya from 2017 to 2019. These included targeted and indiscriminate attacks on schools and universities, some occurring in the context of battles, mostly between armed groups fighting for control of territory. In addition, students, teachers, and university personnel were reportedly targeted in killings and abductions. Several schools were reportedly used for military purposes.***

### **Context**

Two rival governments continued to compete for control of Libya: the internationally-recognized Government of National Accord (GNA), led by Prime Minister Fayeze al-Serraj and based in Tripoli, and the Interim Government, a second entity seated in the east of the country, recognized by Libya's sole legislative authority, and allied with the armed group known as the Libyan National Army (LNA), also known as the Libyan Arab Armed Forces, under the command of General Khalifa Haftar.<sup>1098</sup> Armed groups affiliated with both entities fought for control over territory, resources, and government institutions.<sup>1099</sup> In July 2017, Prime Minister al-Serraj and General Haftar agreed to a ceasefire and to hold national elections in 2018, but these had not taken place by the end of December 2019, in part due to ongoing hostilities.<sup>1100</sup>

Outbreaks of hostilities took place throughout the reporting period. During 2018, significant fighting took place in Derna, Sebha, and Tripoli.<sup>1101</sup> In early April 2019, the LNA advanced towards Tripoli, quelling hopes for a reconciliation agreement that the UN had been working to move forward.<sup>1102</sup> In July and August 2019, fighting also spread beyond Tripoli to Jufra and Waddan in central Libya,<sup>1103</sup> and to Murzuq, in southern Libya.<sup>1104</sup> In December 2019, the LNA launched a "zero hour" offensive to capture Tripoli and the rest of western Libya, which resulted in increased fighting and indiscriminate attacks on populated areas.<sup>1105</sup>

Fighting caused significant displacement. The International Organization for Migration reported 355,672 IDPs in December 2019,<sup>1106</sup> over 140,000 of whom were displaced due to fighting between April and December in the southern suburbs of Tripoli.<sup>1107</sup> According to Human Rights Watch, thousands of displaced people across Libya were unable to return home because of threats by armed groups. For example, a peace agreement was signed in June by representatives from the cities of Misrata and Tawergha, permitting displaced residents to return to Tawergha; however, destruction, looting, and insecurity prevented many from going back.<sup>1108</sup>

Conflict severely impacted the provision of education. Displacement resulted in overcrowding in schools, as well as the use of schools as shelters.<sup>1109</sup> According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), by the end of 2019, around 37 schools were destroyed, over 180 were partially damaged, and around 20 were being used as shelters for IDPs.<sup>1110</sup> According to the UN, 15 percent of children did not attend school regularly, and security concerns and teacher protests and strikes regularly caused delays to the school year.<sup>1111</sup> In the first weeks of the school year in October and November 2019, a teacher strike caused at least 85 percent of schools to close or be non-operational, affecting an estimated 800,000 students across the country.<sup>1112</sup>

In April 2019, as fighting surrounding Tripoli accelerated, the school year was suspended, affecting 122,088 children living in nine municipalities near Tripoli, according to the UN.<sup>1113</sup>

### **Attacks on schools**

GCPEA identified at least seven reported incidents of attacks on schools in Libya which took place between 2017 and 2019. Ground fighting, airstrikes, and arson and explosive attacks affected schools throughout the reporting period, with sporadic reports of incidents. In February 2019, UN Mine Action Service reported that explosive remnants of war (ERW), particularly in urban areas, continued to threaten schools and universities.<sup>1114</sup>

In 2017, GCPEA identified two incidents of attacks on education.<sup>1115</sup> In one incident, the UN reported crossfire near a school in the al-Hadba neighborhood of Tripoli, which injured a student on January 1, 2017, and the other incident involved a suicide bomber detonating at a school complex in Benghazi, on July 10, 2017, according to local media.

In 2018, the UN verified five attacks on schools, three perpetrated by unknown parties, one attributed to Ahmad al-Dabbashi, and one to the Abu Salim brigade.<sup>1116</sup> GCPEA identified UN and media reports of four attacks on schools,

some of which may have been included in the UN's reporting. These included:

- On October 7, 2018, UNSMIL reported that an unexploded ordnance detonated inside an abandoned school in al-Zariri'ia area, near Benghazi. The blast killed one civilian.<sup>1117</sup>
- On October 30, 2018, a secondary school in Zawiya city and district was reportedly set on fire by unidentified attackers. At the time of publication, there was no information regarding the perpetrators.<sup>1118</sup>
- On November 4, 2018, UNSMIL reported that shelling from nearby clashes between armed groups hit a school in Sebrata, Zawiya district. While no casualties were reported, the school closed for two days following the event.<sup>1119</sup>
- On December 7, 2018, *Libya24* reported that the criminal investigations department found and defused two IEDs at a school in Sabri, Benghazi district. The report alleged that members of an armed group had planted the devices.<sup>1120</sup>

In 2019, GCPEA collated at least 14 reported incidents of attacks on schools from UN, European Union, and media sources.<sup>1121</sup> Fighting around Tripoli in April and May 2019 resulted in considerable damage to schools. In the first weeks of April 2019, REACH reported that several schools had been damaged by shelling and that insecurity along school routes prevented children from going to school.<sup>1122</sup> In early May, OCHA also reported that education was badly impacted by the fighting.<sup>1123</sup> The UN reported that five schools were destroyed and 210 were forced to close, as a result of fighting in Tripoli and western Libya in December 2019, affecting 115,000 children.<sup>1124</sup> Reported attacks on school facilities collated by GCPEA included:

- On April 13, 2019, the LNA reportedly struck the Al Quds school in Ain Zara, Tripoli district. The attack badly damaged the school building.<sup>1125</sup>
- The day after, on April 14, 2019, a Ministry of Education warehouse located in the same area - Ain Zara - was severely damaged. According to the UN and the Ministry of Education, the warehouse stored more than four million copies of textbooks for primary and secondary education, along with school certificates and records.<sup>1126</sup>
- In a May 2019 incident, Human Rights Watch documented a rocket attack that badly damaged a school with 800 students in the southern Tripoli area of Swani, forcing it to close. No students were at the school at the time of the attack.<sup>1127</sup>
- On July 27, 2019, shelling reportedly damaged a school in the Al-Hani area of Tripoli. No casualties were reported, according to the UN and local media.<sup>1128</sup>
- On July 28, 2019, the UN and the European Union condemned the shelling of a school in the Al-Alamain area of Tripoli. The UN expressed concern that damage to three of the 12 classrooms would negatively impact the education of 350 boys and 230 girls enrolled at the school.<sup>1129</sup>
- *The Libya Observer* and *The New Arab* reported that on December 29, 2019, shelling struck near a school in the Abi Al-Shar area of Tajura, Tripoli district. *The New Arab* reported that the attack occurred while students were waiting in the yard to leave school, but that no children were injured.<sup>1130</sup>

### ***Attacks on students, teachers, and other education personnel***

Between 2017 and 2019, GCPEA identified at least eight reported incidents of attacks on school students, teachers, and education personnel. Similarly to the 2013-2017 reporting period covered in *Education under Attack 2018*, attacks on students, teachers, and other education personnel continued to occur sporadically. These included targeted and collateral killings and injuries, assaults, and abductions. In addition to two attacks reported in *Education under Attack 2018*, at least six other incidents were reported by UN or media sources:<sup>1131</sup>

- In 2017, the UN verified two separate incidents in which children were injured by stray bullets while at school.<sup>1132</sup>
- On August 19, 2017, unidentified armed actors reportedly opened fire on the vehicle of an education official in Gharyan, Jabal al Gharbi district, in the Nafussa Mountains, without causing any casualties.<sup>1133</sup>
- On January 4, 2018, unidentified gunmen reportedly killed the head of Abyar town's education office, in Ben-

ghazi district.<sup>1134</sup>

- On December 3, 2018, unidentified individuals reportedly threw acid on female students in Ghurayfah town, Wadi Al Hayat district. The attack allegedly caused severe burns.<sup>1135</sup>
- On December 18, 2018, unidentified attackers reportedly abducted a student from Nahdet al-Ghad primary school in Sebha city, while he was on his way to school.<sup>1136</sup>

### **Military use of schools and universities**

As reported in *Education under Attack 2018*, limited information on military use of educational facilities was available. GCPEA identified UN or media reports of several cases in which schools were occupied or otherwise used for military purposes between 2017 and 2019. These included:

- As reported in *Education under Attack 2018*, on July 9, 2017, unidentified corpses were found in two schools in Benghazi after the area had been retaken from armed groups.<sup>1137</sup>
- In December 2018, according to media sources, local Benghazi residents complained that an armed group was occupying a plot of land intended to be used for a school.<sup>1138</sup>
- In April 2019, during fighting in Tripoli, REACH reported that an armed group had taken over a school in Wadi Rabia. The report suggested that other schools in the area had also been used.<sup>1139</sup>

### **Attacks on higher education**

GCPEA identified seven reported incidents of attacks on higher education between 2017 and 2019, including armed conflict in the vicinity of university campuses, as well as abductions and killings of university personnel. These rates were similar to those reported during the previous reporting period.

In 2017, in addition to the three attacks on higher education described in *Education under Attack 2018*,<sup>1140</sup> media sources reported at least three additional attacks on university students, personnel, or facilities in 2017:

- On May 11, 2017, the deputy of Financial and Administrative Affairs at the University of Tripoli was reportedly abducted by unidentified attackers. He was released four days later, on May 15.<sup>1141</sup>
- On July 19, 2017, three faculty members at Al-Mergib University in Emsalata, Murqub district, were reportedly assaulted by unidentified attackers.<sup>1142</sup>
- On November 27, 2017, a gunfight between two armed groups that took place near the Arab Media University in Benghazi reportedly resulted in the death of a staff member who was on his way to work at the university.<sup>1143</sup>

GCPEA collected three news reports of attacks on higher education that took place in 2018 and 2019:

- On September 20, 2018, fighting between two armed groups occurred near Nasser University in Tripoli and surrounding areas. *Libya Herald* reported that dozens of civilians were injured or killed, but did not specify whether any were students or personnel at the university.<sup>1144</sup>
- On December 30, 2018, unidentified attackers reportedly abducted a student at Benghazi University.<sup>1145</sup>
- On March 28, 2019, a mortar shell was reportedly found at Sebha University. Security forces removed the shell.<sup>1146</sup>

<sup>1098</sup> Ahmed Elumami and Ayman al-Warfalli, "Eastern Libyan commander orders forces to move on Tripoli," *Reuters*, April 4, 2019; OCHA, *2019 Humanitarian Needs Overview – Libya*, October 2018, p. 8.

<sup>1099</sup> OCHA, *2019 Humanitarian Needs Overview – Libya*, October 2018, pp. 8-9; "Libya: Civilians Under Threat from Militias," Human Rights Watch news release, January 17, 2019; Ahmed Elumami and Ayman al-Warfalli, "East Libyan troops close on Tripoli, clashes near former airport," *Reuters*, April 5, 2019.

<sup>1100</sup> OCHA, *2019 Humanitarian Needs Overview – Libya*, October 2018, p. 9; Henry Meyer, "Libya Elections by Year-End 'True Possibility,' UN Envoy Says," *Bloomberg*, February 16, 2019; Human Rights Watch, *World Report 2020: Events of 2019* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2020), Libya chapter.

<sup>1101</sup> "Ten conflicts to worry about in 2019," ACLED, February 1, 2019; OCHA, *2019 Humanitarian Needs Overview – Libya*, October 2018, p. 11.

- <sup>1102</sup> Ahmed Elumami and Ayman al-Warfalli, “Eastern Libyan commander orders forces to move on Tripoli,” *Reuters*, April 4, 2019; Melissa Pavlik, Andrea Carboni, Heni Heni Nsaibia, Kars De Bruijne, “Push comes to shove: Haftar’s abrupt and inevitable march towards Tripoli,” ACLED, April 19, 2019.
- <sup>1103</sup> International Crisis Group, *Crisis Watch*, Libya, July 2019.
- <sup>1104</sup> “Deadly airstrikes and drone hits displace thousands of civilians in Libya oasis town,” UN News Service, August 20, 2019.
- <sup>1105</sup> UNICEF, “Libya Humanitarian Situation Report 1 October to 31 December 2019,” p. 1.
- <sup>1106</sup> IOM, *Displacement Tracking Matrix*, Libya, Round 28, <https://dtm.iom.int/libya> (accessed February 27, 2020).
- <sup>1107</sup> IOM “Tripoli Update 09 January 2019,” *Displacement Tracking Mechanism*, January 9, 2020.
- <sup>1108</sup> “Libya: Civilians Under Threat from Militias,” Human Rights Watch news release, January 17, 2019.
- <sup>1109</sup> OCHA, *2020 Humanitarian Needs Overview – Libya*, January 2020, p. 10.
- <sup>1110</sup> IOM, “Libya – IDP & Returnee Report, Round 28 (Nov-Dec 2019),” January 24, 2020, p. 14.
- <sup>1111</sup> OCHA, *2019 Humanitarian Needs Overview* (October 2018), p. 59.
- <sup>1112</sup> “Our Education, Our Future: “The Ministry of Education and UNICEF launch this year’s Back to School Campaign,” UNICEF press release, November 6, 2019.
- <sup>1113</sup> “UNICEF, Libya Flash Update, 20 – 28 April 2019,” April 28, 2019, p. 1.
- <sup>1114</sup> UN Mine Action Service, “Libya,” February 2019.
- <sup>1115</sup> “Human rights report on civilian casualties - January 2017,” United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL), February 1, 2017; MENA, “3 Libyan officers injured in suicide bombing in Benghazi,” *Egypt Today*, July 10, 2017; See GCPEA, *Education under Attack 2018*, p. 165.
- <sup>1116</sup> UN General Assembly and Security Council, “Children and armed conflict: Report of the Secretary-General,” A/73/907-S/2019/509, June 20, 2019, para. 109.
- <sup>1117</sup> “Human rights report on civilian casualties - October 2018,” United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL), November 2, 2018.
- <sup>1118</sup> *Libya24*, as cited in ACLED, Event ID LBY7099; “Unidentified people burn a school in Al-Zawia city,” *Libya24*, October 30, 2018.
- <sup>1119</sup> “Human rights report on civilian casualties 1 November through 31 December 2018,” United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL), March 6, 2019.
- <sup>1120</sup> “Two bombs ready to explode found in a school in Sabri,” *Libya 24*, December 7, 2018, <https://libya24.tv/news/195305> (accessed February 27, 2020).
- <sup>1121</sup> A full list of references can be found on GCPEA’s website, [https://protectingeducation.org/wp-content/uploads/eua\\_2020\\_references.pdf](https://protectingeducation.org/wp-content/uploads/eua_2020_references.pdf)
- <sup>1122</sup> “Tripoli Rapid Situation Overview,” REACH, April 17, 2019, p. 4.
- <sup>1123</sup> OCHA, “LIBYA: Tripoli Clashes, Situation Report No. 21,” May 5, 2019.
- <sup>1124</sup> UNICEF, “Libya Humanitarian Situation Report 1 October to 31 December 2019,” p. 1.
- <sup>1125</sup> OCHA, “LIBYA: Tripoli Clashes, Situation Report No. 8,” April 14, 2019, p. 2; Safa Alharathy, “Education warehouse bombed by pro-Haftar aircraft destroying textbooks and school materials,” *Libya Observer*, April 15, 2019; *Libya Observer*; *Airwars*; *Twitter*, as cited in ACLED, Event ID LBY7819, (data downloaded February 27, 2020).
- <sup>1126</sup> UNICEF, “Libya Flash Update, 04 – 20 April 2019,” April 20, 2019; OCHA, “Libya: Tripoli Clashes, Situation Report No. 8,” April 14, 2019; “Tripoli Rapid Situation Overview,” REACH, April 17, 2019, p. 4; Safa Alharathy, “Education warehouse bombed by pro-Haftar aircraft destroying textbooks and school materials”.
- <sup>1127</sup> Hanan Salah, “Libya’s Chaos Explained: Civilians Bear the Brunt of Renewed Fighting,” Human Rights Watch interview, May 5, 2020. Further details provided by a Human Rights Watch researcher on April 21, 2020.
- <sup>1128</sup> Sami Zaptia, “Air wars escalate Libyan fighting to Jufra and Misrata,” *Libya Herald*, July 28, 2019; “July ends with brutal acts of violence perpetrated against children across the Middle East and North Africa,” UNICEF statement, August 2, 2019.
- <sup>1129</sup> Abdullah Ben Ibrahim, “Schools are not a target; UNICEF reacts to Al-Alamain school shelling in Tripoli,” *The Libya Observer*, July 29, 2019; “UN condemns deadly shelling of field hospital in Libyan capital,” *Xinhua*, July 30, 2019; “Statement by the Spokesperson on the targeting of a field hospital and school in Tripoli,” European External Action Service, July 29, 2017; “Humanitarian Coordinator a.i. in Libya Mrs. Böell -Yousfi strongly condemns the Attack of Az-Zawiyia Field Hospital and Al-Alamain School,” Office of the UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator, July 29, 2019.
- <sup>1130</sup> “A video showing school children panicking in Tajura during the bombing of Haftar’s area,” *The New Arab*, December 30, 2019; “One woman was killed and others injured in Haftar’s bombing,” *The Libya Observer*, December 29, 2019.
- <sup>1131</sup> See GCPEA, *Education under Attack 2018*, p. 166.
- <sup>1132</sup> UN General Assembly and Security Council, “Children and armed conflict: Report of the Secretary-General,” A/72/865-S/2018/465, May 16, 2018, para. 110.
- <sup>1133</sup> “Gunmen fire at education official’s car,” *The Libya Observer*, August 22, 2017,” as cited in START, GTD 201708190028.
- <sup>1134</sup> Abdullah Ben Ibrahim, “Education official in east Libya murdered,” *The Libya Observer*, January 4, 2018.
- <sup>1135</sup> *Al Marsad*, as cited in ACLED, Event ID LBY7197; “Unidentified people throw acid water on female students in Ghuraifa and flee,” *Al Marsad*, December 3, 2018.
- <sup>1136</sup> *Fezzan Libya*, as cited in Insecurity Insight, “Education in Danger Monthly News Brief: January 2019,” January 2019, p.2.
- <sup>1137</sup> See GCPEA, *Education under Attack 2018*, p. 167.
- <sup>1138</sup> “An armed group occupies a public plot of land in the University Quarter of Benghazi and the residents appeal to the competent authorities,” *Alsawat*, December 21, 2018.
- <sup>1139</sup> “Tripoli Rapid Situation Overview,” REACH, April 17, 2019, p. 4.
- <sup>1140</sup> See GCPEA, *Education under Attack 2018*, p. 168.
- <sup>1141</sup> Abdulkader Assad, “Exams put off at Tripoli University over kidnap of staff member,” *Libya Observer*, May 13, 2017; Olfa Andosi, “Tripoli University staff member freed; classes to resume,” *Libya Herald*, May 15, 2017.
- <sup>1142</sup> “Hosted Product: Libya Press Review Security Terrorism Arabic Sources July 19, 2017,” Libya Foreign and Domestic Affairs Digest, July 19, 2017,” as cited in START, GTD 201707190047.
- <sup>1143</sup> *Libya24*, as cited in ACLED, Event ID LBY6538; “Khalil Suleiman Al-Qabaili killed after hit by a stray bullet,” *Libya Akhbar*, November 27, 2017.
- <sup>1144</sup> *Libya Herald*, as cited in ACLED, Event ID LBY7022; Sami Zaptia, “Indiscriminate civilian shelling continues as Tripoli militias continue to break ceasefire with impunity,” *Libya Herald*, September 20, 2018.
- <sup>1145</sup> Housam Najjair, “Benghazi University student abducted by militiamen at campus,” *Libya Observer*, January 1, 2019.
- <sup>1146</sup> *Libya 24*, as cited in ACLED, Event ID LBY7623; “A mortar shell was found at Sebha University School of Economics,” *Libya 24*, March 29, 2019.