

MYANMAR

Reports of attacks on schools, teachers, and students occurred at a similar rate to the previous reporting period, though challenges continued in accessing conflict-affected areas. State security forces used dozens of schools for military purposes in Rakhine, Shan, and Kachin states. Attacks on higher education increased in this period, due to repression and arrests of university students during education-related and anti-government protests.

Context

Hostilities between the Myanmar Armed forces, known as the Tatmadaw, and ethnic armed groups in Rakhine, Kachin, Shan, and Karen States, escalated throughout the reporting period.¹¹⁹² In 2019, the UN reported that the implementation of peace agreements between the government and ethnic armed groups had largely stalled amidst increasing tensions between parties to the conflict.¹¹⁹³ Fighting between the Tatmadaw and ethnic Rakhine insurgents, such as the Arakan Army, also intensified in 2018 and the first half of 2019.¹¹⁹⁴

Following a series of attacks on police and border guard posts in August 2017, the Myanmar military launched an operation targeting the Rohingya minority in Rakhine state, forcibly displacing an estimated 738,800 Rohingya Muslims to Bangladesh to escape the violence, including 16,676 Rohingya refugees in 2018 alone.¹¹⁹⁵ By the end of 2019, UNHCR estimated that 854,704 Rohingya refugees were in Cox's Bazaar refugee camp in Bangladesh.¹¹⁹⁶ In 2019, over 680,000 Rohingya refugee children were estimated to be in need of humanitarian assistance in Cox's Bazaar, most of whom did not have access to formal or non-formal learning opportunities.¹¹⁹⁷

In 2018, after a 15-month investigation, a United Nations-mandated fact-finding mission concluded that the abuses committed by the Tatmadaw in Kachin, Rakhine, and Shan States since 2011 constituted crimes against humanity and war crimes.¹¹⁹⁸ According to a mapping of satellite data by the UN, 30 Rohingya villages in Rakhine state were destroyed between November 2018 and May 2019.¹¹⁹⁹ Conflict also impacted civilians in Kachin, Shan, Kayin, and Chin states. As of December 2019, OCHA reported that a total of around 97,000 displaced persons in Kachin state and 9,600 displaced persons in Shan state were living in camps or camp-like settings.¹²⁰⁰ In 2018 and 2019, humanitarian organizations faced access restrictions, which prevented populations in need from accessing services.¹²⁰¹

In January 2019, the UN reported that nearly 68,000 children remained in displacement camps in Rakhine state, as a result of 2012 violence, many of whom had little or no access to formal education.¹²⁰² For non-displaced Rohingya children in Rakhine state, quality of and access to education was negatively impacted by discriminatory government practices, such as the language of instruction, de facto segregated schools, and restrictions on movement.¹²⁰³ The UN reported in 2018 that Rohingya students had been unable to enroll at Sittwe University in Rakhine state since 2012.¹²⁰⁴

In January 2019, ongoing fighting between the Myanmar military and the Arakan Army forced the closure of 31 schools in Rakhine state, at least 16 of which were located in Buthidaung township, as reported to *Radio Free Asia* by the deputy director of Rakhine state's Education Department.¹²⁰⁵

Attacks on schools

Over the 2017-2019 reporting period, GCPEA collected almost 30 reported incidents of attacks on schools in Myanmar. As in the previous reporting period, monitoring and reporting in conflict-affected areas remained constrained, and a possibility of underreporting existed, according to the UN.¹²⁰⁶ However, from early January 2018, improvements to community-led monitoring and reporting, and collaboration with the government, improved reporting, which may have contributed to higher numbers of reported attacks on education than in previous years.¹²⁰⁷

In 2017, the UN verified 15 attacks on schools and protected personnel in Myanmar.¹²⁰⁸ Of these verified events, the UN reported that on September 17, 2017 the Tatmadaw burned down three religious schools, including all of the educational material, affecting approximately 1,500 students in Gaw Du Thar Ra village, Maungdaw township.¹²⁰⁹ GCPEA also identified five media reports of attacks on schools in 2017 which occurred in Rakhine and Shan states,¹²¹⁰ although it was not clear whether any of these were included in the UN-verified events.

In 2018, attacks decreased as compared to the previous year. In this period, the UN documented five attacks on schools

in Myanmar, all of which occurred in Kachin state.¹²¹¹ At least one attack involved an explosive device.¹²¹² In addition, GCPEA identified one report of an attack on a school through media sources. According to local media *World Watch Monitor* and *Christian Solidarity Worldwide*, on May 12, 2018, aerial bombs struck the Kachin Baptist Mission School in Bawmwang village, northern Kachin state, hitting the administrative office of the middle school. No casualties were reported.¹²¹³ International media *The Guardian* reported in May 2018 that this incident occurred during a period of intensified violence against the Christian minority in Kachin state.¹²¹⁴

In 2019, attacks on schools slightly increased as compared with the previous year. The UN verified 12 attacks on schools in 2019.¹²¹⁵ In addition, GCPEA identified ten media, UN, and NGO reports of schools and learning materials being damaged or affected by crossfire, arson, shelling, and explosives.¹²¹⁶ Examples included:

- Amnesty International reported that on January 13, 2019, armed assailants attacked a majority Mro village, in the Buthidaung township, with gunfire and explosives, causing villagers to flee. A local resident reported to Amnesty International that the school and houses were damaged.¹²¹⁷
- On June 13, 2019, the UN and local media reported that the Tatmadaw attacked the village of Yraw Haung Taw, in Mrauk-U township, and fired munitions which struck a school while students were inside. The attack damaged the school and injured at least one student at the school.¹²¹⁸
- Local media reported that on December 8, 2019, an artillery shell allegedly exploded near a high school in Myo Thit Ward, in Paletwa Township, Chin State. The school was allegedly located in the same ward as Burma Army's Light Infantry Battalion 289. The school reportedly closed for one week.¹²¹⁹

Attacks on school students, teachers, and other personnel

Between 2017 and 2019, GCPEA collected at least five reports of attacks on school students, teachers, and other personnel. Students and teachers were arrested, detained, and held hostage during this reporting period. In 2017, three reported attacks on school personnel occurred in Shan and Kachin states; these are included in the 15 attacks on schools verified by the UN and reported above.¹²²⁰

In 2018, GCPEA identified one reported attack on school students in Myanmar. According to media reports, the United Wa State Army in Shan state reportedly took hostage 42 Wa students and 92 Lahu Christian leaders in Shan state around September 25, 2018. The Lahu Baptist church issued a statement that more students had been abducted but only those of Wa ethnicity were detained. The detained students were suspected of being used by the armed group; however, the age of students was not disclosed.¹²²¹ The UN reported the use of children by the United Wa State Army in 2018.¹²²²

In 2019, GCPEA identified at least one incident of attack on a school student. UN and local media sources reported that on December 6, 2019, armed clashes occurred near a school in Pike The, Kyauktaw, Rakhine state, causing students to flee the building. While attempting to return home, a nine-year-old boy was struck by bullets and was killed in front of the school.¹²²³

GCPEA also received anecdotal evidence that children had been injured on the way to or from school in Kayah state when the Tatmadaw artillery camps conducted drills near schools.¹²²⁴

Military use of schools and universities

Between 2017 and 2019, the UN documented over 50 reported cases of military use of schools. Under the grave violations monitoring and reporting mechanism, the UN found that Tatmadaw forces used schools for barracks, detention centers, and as locations for perpetrating sexual violence against women and children.¹²²⁵

Reports of military use of schools increased in comparison to the previous reporting period, when use by state and non-state groups occurred between two and six times per year. However, this may have been due to improvements in monitoring. In 2017, the UN documented two incidents of military use of schools in Kachin state, one of which was verified.¹²²⁶ By comparison, in 2018, the UN received 32 alleged reports of military use, 30 of which occurred in Rakhine state and two in Kachin state.¹²²⁷ Militaries generally camped in schools while patrolling areas of the state and generally occupied the buildings for one to seven days, causing limited disruption to education, according to sources in the field.¹²²⁸ GCPEA also identified one media report of the use of a school in Kachin state in 2018. According to local media

Kachinland News, on April 2, 2018, the KIA 11th Battalion and the Tatmadaw reportedly clashed at the Dum Bung village, Myitkyina township in Kachin state. About 30 Tatmadaw troops were stationed in the village school where the fighting occurred.¹²²⁹

In 2019, the UN verified 51 cases of military use of schools in Myanmar.¹²³⁰ GCPEA also compiled three reports of state armed forces using schools to detain men and boys in Rakhine state during this time, one of which was documented by the UN:

- On February 22, 2019, *Radio Free Asia* reported that during an attack on Min Bu village, Rathedaung township, Rakhine state, the Tatmadaw used a school to detain and violently interrogate 11 villagers.¹²³¹
- Amnesty International reported that on March 19, 2019, state armed forces attacked Hnget Taw Ya village in Minbya township, Rakhine state, and detained at least five men at Pan Myaung Ywar Thit school.¹²³²
- In April and May 2019, the UN reported that the Tatmadaw used a school in Kyauk Tan village, Rathedaung township, in northern Rakhine state, to detain at least 275 men and boys. The report stated that, on May 2, 2019, the army opened fire on detainees inside the school, killing six and wounding eight. On May 10, 2019, at least 40 Rakhine boys and men continued to be detained in the school.¹²³³

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

In 2017 and 2018, the UN reported that Tatmadaw soldiers perpetrated sexual violence against women and girls in schools in Rakhine state, based on eyewitness and survivor accounts.¹²³⁴ In one specific incident in an unnamed village, a girl survived an incident of rape by a Tatmadaw soldier in the local school and reported that several other women and girls were sexually abused at the same time.¹²³⁵ The UN noted that access restrictions and stigma likely led to an underrepresentation of the prevalence of sexual violence and rape in Rakhine state.¹²³⁶

GCPEA also identified one media report in 2017 of sexual violence by armed groups at a school. On October 27, 2017, in a village in Shan state, two Ta'ang National Liberation Army soldiers reportedly raped a female education staff member. As a protective measure, local education authorities forced the closure of the local elementary school and ordered seven personnel and 14 teachers to leave the town, following the incident.¹²³⁷

Attacks on higher education

Between 2017 and 2019, GCPEA identified at least six attacks on higher education students. These attacks occurred at a similar rate to the previous reporting period, which saw at least two in attacks in 2015.¹²³⁸

GCPEA identified one media report of an attack on higher education students in 2017.¹²³⁹ In 2018 and 2019, there was an increase in student protests at universities in Mandalay and throughout the country. Student protests were forcibly disrupted, and dozens of students were detained and, in some cases, suspended from studies. Authorities detained nearly 100 students in 2018 and 2019 during the following reported incidents:

- On January 22, 2018, student protests erupted at several universities across the country. Students from several universities assembled at Yadanbon University in Mandalay to demand an increase in the national education budget, according to local and international media sources.¹²⁴⁰ At least 72 students were reportedly detained on January 25 and released soon after, according to *The Irawaddy*.¹²⁴¹ Following the event, Scholars at Risk also reported the expulsions of 34 students from their universities.¹²⁴²
- On December 28, 2018, students allegedly burned a coffin with photos of government and university officials at Yadanapon University, Amarapura Township, Mandalay state, leading to the arrest of four students during the protest and three other students on January 2, 2019. The seven students were detained, and Amarapura Township Court sentenced them on February 13, 2019, to two months in prison for violating the peaceful assembly law, and to three months' hard labor for burning effigies, according to Scholars at Risk and a local media source.¹²⁴³

- On January 2, 2019, police arrested four students during a peaceful protest at that gates of Yadanapon University, Amarapura, Mandalay state. Students were protesting insufficient security facilities and maintenance, according to Scholars at Risk.¹²⁴⁴
- Between July 12 and 14, 2019, Scholars at Risk reported that state security forces detained and charged eight university students in Yangon who had taken part in a student march commemorating the anniversary of a 1962 student protest in which as many as 100 students were killed. The students reportedly chanted anti-government slogans during the march, on July 7. The students were charged with “protesting without permission from authorities,” according to the report. Two students remained in detention at the time of writing.¹²⁴⁵

¹¹⁹² Human Rights Watch, *World Report 2019*, Myanmar chapter, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2019/country-chapters/burma>.

¹¹⁹³ UN General Assembly, “Situation of human rights in Myanmar,” A/74/311, August 20, 2019, para. 18.

¹¹⁹⁴ Richard C. Paddock, “Rohingya Militants in Myanmar Claim Responsibility for Attack,” *The New York Times*, January 7, 2018; Thu Thu Aung and Shoon Naing, “Rakhine rebels kill 13 in Independence Day attack on Myanmar police posts,” *Reuters*, January 4, 2019.

¹¹⁹⁵ UNHCR, “Operational Update: Bangladesh,” January 15, 2019.

¹¹⁹⁶ UNHCR, “Protection Factsheet & Dashboard, UNHCR, Bangladesh, Cox’s Bazar - as of December 2019,” March 9, 2020.

¹¹⁹⁷ UNICEF Bangladesh, “Beyond Survival: Rohingya Refugee Children in Bangladesh Want to Learn,” (Dhaka: UNICEF Bangladesh, August 2019, p.7.

¹¹⁹⁸ UN Human Rights Council, “Report of the detailed findings of the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Myanmar,” A/HRC/39/CPR.2, September 17, 2018, para. 1511; UN Human Rights Council, “Report on the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Myanmar,” A/HRC/39/64, August 24, 2018, paras. 88, 89.

¹¹⁹⁹ UN Human Rights Council, “Detailed findings of the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Myanmar,” A/HRC/42/CRP.5, September 16, 2019, para. 128.

¹²⁰⁰ OCHA, *Myanmar Humanitarian Needs Overview 2020*, (Yangon; OCHA, December 2019, p. 5.

¹²⁰¹ UNICEF, *Myanmar Humanitarian End of Year Situation Report*, December 31, 2018, p. 2; UNICEF, UNICEF Myanmar Humanitarian Situation Report #12 (December 2019),” January 31, 2019, pp. 2-3.

¹²⁰² “Investing in Children Should Be the Foundation of Myanmar’s Progress and Development,” UNICEF press release, January 31, 2019.

¹²⁰³ OCHA, *Myanmar Humanitarian Needs Overview*, p. 4.

¹²⁰⁴ UN Human Rights Council, “Report of the Detailed Findings of the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Myanmar,” A/HRC/39/CPR.2, September 17, 2018, para. 567.

¹²⁰⁵ Min Thein Aung and Nandar Chann, “Two Youths Injured, 200 Villagers Flee Homes Amid Clashes in Myanmar’s Northern Rakhine State,” January 16, 2019, *Radio Free Asia*.

¹²⁰⁶ UN Security Council, “Report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in Myanmar,” S/2018/956, October 29, 2018, paras. 11,13, 21, 35.

¹²⁰⁷ Information provided by a UN respondent, March 25, 2019.

¹²⁰⁸ 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. 132.

¹²⁰⁹ UN Security Council, “Report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in Myanmar,” S/2018/956, October 29, 2018, <https://undocs.org/S/2018/956>, para. 31.

¹²¹⁰ Lawi Weng, “TNLA Attacks Burma Army Bases in Namhsan,” *The Irrawaddy*, January 11, 2017; Kristin Huang and Reuters, “Chinese teacher killed in Myanmar conflict after shelling hits school,” *South China Morning Post*, March 13, 2017; “FOCUS: Residents fear for their lives after clashes in Myanmar’s Rakhine,” *Japan Economic Newswire*, September 1, 2017, as cited in START, GTD 201708270028; Tsa Doi La, “Fighting Continues With No Sign of Letup in Kachin and Shan States,” *Kachinland News*, January 11, 2017; Hein Ko Soe, “Bomb blast damages Islamic school in Buthidaung,” *Frontier Myanmar*, September 22, 2017.

¹²¹¹ 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. 130; Information received by a UN respondent via email on July 25, 2019.

¹²¹² Information provided by a UN respondent via email, July 25, 2019.

¹²¹³ “Burma army targets Kachin Christian Mission School,” CSW, May 14, 2018; “Myanmar: 7,000 Kachin displaced as violence escalates,” *World Watch Monitor*, May 15, 2018.

¹²¹⁴ Libby Hogan, “Slow genocide’: Myanmar’s invisible war on the Kachin Christian minority,” *The Guardian*, May 14, 2018.

¹²¹⁵ Information received from a UN respondent via email on May 21, 2020.

¹²¹⁶ A full list of references can be found on GCPEA’s website, <http://www.protectingeducation.org/education-under-attack-2020-references>.

¹²¹⁷ “Myanmar: Fresh evidence of violations amid ongoing military operation in Rakhine State,” Amnesty International news brief, February 11, 2019.

¹²¹⁸ “UN Human Rights Council, “Detailed findings of the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Myanmar,” September 16, 2019, A/HRC/42/CRP.5, para. 333; Moe Myint, “Civilians Injured, School Shelled in Army Response to Mrauk-U Ambush,” *The Irrawaddy*, June 14, 2019.

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¹²²⁰ Information shared by a UN respondent via email, July 25, 2019.

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- ¹²²⁵ UN Human Rights Council, “Report of the detailed findings of the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Myanmar,” A/HRC/39/CPR.2, September 17, 2018, paras. 790, 951. OHCHR, “Briefing notes - Myanmar, 10 May 2019,” Report, May 10, 2019.
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- ¹²²⁷ Information shared by a UN respondent via email, July 25, 2019.
- ¹²²⁸ Information shared by a UN respondent, March 25, 2019.
- ¹²²⁹ *Kachinland News*, as cited in ACLED, Event ID MMR5253; “Fighting Continues Between BA and KIA Forces,” *Kachinland News*, April 3, 2018.
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- ¹²³⁴ UN Security Council, “Report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in Myanmar,” S/2018/956, October 29, 2018, paras. 22-23.
- ¹²³⁵ UN Security Council, “Report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in Myanmar,” S/2018/956, October 29, 2018, paras. 22-23.
- ¹²³⁶ UN Security Council, “Report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in Myanmar,” S/2018/956, October 29, 2018, para. 11.
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