

THE PHILIPPINES

Attacks on education in the Philippines continued at a less frequent rate than during the previous reporting period. However, teachers and school personnel remained the targets of threats and violence by state and non-state armed groups. In particular, schools and teachers of the indigenous Lumad community were subjected to violence and threats.

Context

Violent conflict in the Philippines continued during this reporting period in Mindanao and in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM), to the south, as well as in central Philippines, in the Central Visayas region.¹⁶³⁷ Violence also occurred nationwide in relation to the government's anti-drug campaign.¹⁶³⁸

On Mindanao island, armed conflict continued following the government's enactment of martial law in 2017 after the battle for Marawi city between an armed group and the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP). The fighting resulted in the deaths of over 1,000 people and the displacement of over 77,000 families.¹⁶³⁹ In July 2019, the European Union reported that 320,000 returnees from the Marawi conflict and 113,197 displaced people were in need of humanitarian assistance.¹⁶⁴⁰ Fighting between the AFP and different armed groups in Mindanao and BARMM regions escalated in 2019, displacing nearly 50,000 people in early 2019 in Maguindanao, Lanao del Sur, and Sulu provinces, according to the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).¹⁶⁴¹ In January 2019, it was reported that one armed group operating in the region used explosive weapons to destroy a church on Jolo island, killing 20 civilians.¹⁶⁴²

In Negros Oriental province, Central Visayas region, the government intensified its offensive against the armed group operating in the region, with violence peaking between March and May 2019, and again after the reported killing of four police officers on July 18, 2019, according to Human Rights Watch and ACLED.¹⁶⁴³

Martial law in Mindanao allowed the AFP to surveil, restrict movement, and forcibly expel people from tribal lands during this period.¹⁶⁴⁴ The government explicitly targeted schools between 2016-2019, accusing them of serving as recruitment sites for armed groups.¹⁶⁴⁵ Save Our Schools (SOS) Network, a local network of children's rights advocates and organizations, reported in December 2019 that 161 of 215 indigenous Lumad schools had been closed since July 2016.¹⁶⁴⁶

Conflict in the Philippines has disproportionately affected children. In 2017, the UN reported 30 cases of recruitment and use of children by armed groups in the Philippines, as well as the detention of 12 children for their alleged association with armed groups, 33 cases of killing and maiming of children, three cases of rape, and five cases of abduction, which affected seven children.¹⁶⁴⁷ Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International reported in 2017 and 2019 that the government targeted and killed, or failed to protect, children in anti-drug operations, destroying family structures and leaving children increasingly vulnerable.¹⁶⁴⁸

In Shariff Aguak, Maguindanao province, some classes were suspended in March 2019 while the school was used as an evacuation center for people displaced by violence from confrontations between a non-state armed group and the AFP.¹⁶⁴⁹ In Lanao del Sur, schools were also used as shelters for some of the more than 8,900 people displaced by armed encounters between an armed group and the AFP in March 2019.¹⁶⁵⁰ In November 2019, nearly 7,000 families were displaced due to armed conflict in Mindanao.¹⁶⁵¹

Attacks on schools

During the 2017-2019 reporting period, GCPEA collected at least 30 reports of attacks on schools. The number of reported attacks on schools in this period decreased after a peak in 2017 during the Marawi siege.¹⁶⁵² As occurred during the 2013-2017 reporting period covered in *Education under Attack 2018*, during local elections, bombs were reportedly planted near at least two schools.¹⁶⁵³

In 2017, GCPEA collected approximately 25 reports of attacks on schools from various sources, including media, a government press release, and a local NGO.¹⁶⁵⁴ Several of these incidents were identified after the publication of *Education under Attack 2018*, such as the explosion of an improvised explosive device (IED) outside Jose Rizal Elementary School,

in Lamitan city, Basilan province, on March 9, 2017. The device was allegedly planted by a non-state armed group and detonated without causing casualties, as reported in local media.¹⁶⁵⁵ Separately, the UN Secretary-General verified 24 attacks on schools and education personnel in 2017, many from armed engagements during the Marawi siege.¹⁶⁵⁶ However, it remains unclear how many of these were attacks on schools rather than education personnel, or if they overlap with the attacks identified by GCPEA.

From the beginning of martial law in Mindanao, in 2017, until July 2019, SOS Network documented five incidents of aerial bombardment of schools, affecting 2,350 people.¹⁶⁵⁷ Over the same time period, SOS Network also documented 126 cases of forced school closures and 36 cases of forced school evacuations in Mindanao.¹⁶⁵⁸ The government also reportedly threatened Lumad schools in July 2017.¹⁶⁵⁹

In 2018, the UN verified two attacks on schools in the Philippines.¹⁶⁶⁰ Separately, GCPEA documented five reported incidents of attacks on schools, all of which involved explosive devices allegedly planted at or near schools by non-state armed groups or unidentified actors:

- According to *Philippine Star* and *Bombo Radyo Philippines*, two grenades allegedly exploded at the Borongotan Elementary School in Barangay Borongotan, Upi town, Maguindanao province, on March 23, 2018, reportedly injuring two civilians and one police officer.¹⁶⁶¹
- The *Philippine Daily Inquirer* and *ABS CBN News* reported allegations that on May 11, 2018, an IED planted by an armed group detonated in front of a school set to be a polling station for local elections several days later, in Midsayap, Cotabato province. According to reports, no one was injured.¹⁶⁶²
- *Philippine Star* reported an allegation that on May 14, 2018, during local elections, unidentified attackers launched a grenade into a field near an elementary school in Pagalungan, Maguindanao province.¹⁶⁶³
- Local media outlets *Philippine News Agency* and *Rappler* reported allegations that on May 27, 2018, government soldiers defused an improvised explosive device, reportedly left by an unidentified armed group in front of an elementary school in Tacurong City, Sultan Kudarat province.¹⁶⁶⁴
- According to allegations reported in *Philippine Star*, on June 4, 2018, an armed group set off a landmine near a public school in Barangay San Vicente, Dimasalang town, Masbate province.¹⁶⁶⁵

In 2019, according to the Philippine Information Agency and Commission on Human Rights, the Department of Education closed Lumad schools in the Davao region that taught an anti-government curriculum;¹⁶⁶⁶ local media outlet *Rappler* alleged that the number of Lumad schools forcibly closed, in response to a National Security Advisor report, was 55.¹⁶⁶⁷ Separately, the UN verified 12 attacks on schools and protected personnel, including threats against 20 teachers, in 2019.¹⁶⁶⁸

GCPEA compiled two reports of attacks on schools in 2019:

- Local media outlet *Philippine News Agency* reported that on February 16, 2019, unidentified individuals launched mortar attacks towards an elementary school near Patikul town, Sulu province, while the military and NGOs were providing medical services there. According to the news source, no one was hurt since the mortar shells exploded at a distance from the school.¹⁶⁶⁹
- On October 30, 2019, an armed group allegedly burned a partially constructed three-classroom school, as well as building materials, near Malapatan town, in Sarangani province, as reported by the *Philippine News Agency*.¹⁶⁷⁰

Attacks on school students, teachers, and other education personnel

During the 2017-2019 reporting period, GCPEA identified at least 45 attacks on school students, teachers, and other education personnel. Attacks on school students and personnel occurred at a similar or reduced rate, as compared to the previous reporting period, when between 2013-2017 GCPEA compiled at least 100 reports of attacks on students and educators, between 13 and 42 incidents per year.¹⁶⁷¹

GCPEA gathered 27 reports of attacks on school students and personnel in 2017, from media and NGO reports.¹⁶⁷² Several of these incidents were identified after publication of *Education under Attack 2018*, for instance the reported killing of

a grade seven Lumad student by alleged members of a non-state armed group, in Talaingod municipality, Davao del Norte province, on September 5, 2017, according to SOS Network and local media.¹⁶⁷³ Among the 27 incidents recorded in 2017, 23 were reported cases of attacks on educators and students in indigenous communities, including threats, harassment, and one case of abduction, affecting at least 37 educators and 304 students.¹⁶⁷⁴ The UN reported that AFP and paramilitary groups continued to make threats against indigenous-run schools in 2017.¹⁶⁷⁵

Between May 2017 and July 2019, SOS Network documented the arbitrary arrest and detention of 97 school personnel and students that occurred in 21 incidents, as well as the targeted killing of seven school personnel, in Mindanao.¹⁶⁷⁶

In 2018, the UN verified attacks, including threats of attacks, on schools and protected personnel, affecting two schools and 23 teachers, who were threatened because of their suspected support for, or membership in, the non-state New People's Army (NPA).¹⁶⁷⁷

That same year, GCPEA compiled nine reported abductions, killings, and threats, that affected 12 educators, school personnel, and members of the Alliance of Concerned Teachers (ACT), a teacher and education staff organization that advocates for workers' political and economic rights.¹⁶⁷⁸ Attacks in 2018, which occurred primarily in Mindanao and BARMM regions, included:

- Local media outlet *Sun Star* reported that on March 8, 2018, members of an armed group reportedly abducted a school teacher at Matatal Elementary School in Matatal, Maimbung municipality, Sulu province.¹⁶⁷⁹
- On March 22, 2018, an armed group allegedly abducted a school teacher in Liang, Patikul municipality, Sulu province, as reported in local media *Manila Bulletin*.¹⁶⁸⁰
- *Al Jazeera* reported that, on an unspecified date in November 2018, four soldiers and one unidentified armed individual visited a Lumad learning center in Mindanao and threatened teachers, ordering them to evacuate the premises; days later, the group reportedly returned to the school and recorded videos.¹⁶⁸¹
- Campaign for Human Rights Philippines and local media reported that on November 12, 2018, members of the state military allegedly abducted four volunteer teachers affiliated with Rural Missionaries of the Philippines, a national organization that advocates for indigenous rights, in Barangay Durongan, Tagoloan 2, Lanao del Sur province.¹⁶⁸²
- On November 18, 2018, soldiers from the state military's 19th Infantry Battalion reportedly abducted and tortured five students near Magpet municipality, Cotabato province, according to Campaign for Human Rights Philippines.¹⁶⁸³
- Local media outlets *Philippine Star* and *GMA News Online* reported that on November 29, 2018, an ACT Teachers party-list representative was detained at a police station in Talaingod, Davao del Norte province, while reportedly on a mission to aid indigenous school children evacuating from a militarized community; the representative and another individual were charged with "kidnapping" and human trafficking.¹⁶⁸⁴

In 2019, GCPEA compiled approximately ten media and NGO reports of attacks on students, teachers, and ACT members in Mindanao, BARMM, and Central Visayas regions.¹⁶⁸⁵ Several of the reported incidents involved attacks on teacher convoys in Patikul municipality, Sulu province. Examples of the attacks on educators included:

- The NGO Education International reported that ACT General Secretary received death threats on his personal phone. One such message was sent during an ACT press conference on January 11, 2019, during which the union made a statement on harassment and threats endured by its leaders.¹⁶⁸⁶
- Local media outlet *The Manila Times* reported that on April 2, 2019, a group of teachers traveling with police escorts in Patikul municipality, Sulu province, encountered around 10-15 assailants who reportedly attacked the group; two police escorts were injured.¹⁶⁸⁷
- Public school teachers in Sumisip and Tipo-Tipo towns, in Basilan province, reportedly received threats from an armed group, in July 2019, according to *Philippine Star*.¹⁶⁸⁸
- *Philippine Star* reported that on August 19, 2019, an armed group allegedly attacked a teacher convoy in Patikul municipality, Sulu province. According to reports, two police officers were wounded, while the teachers re-

mained unharmed by the attack.¹⁶⁸⁹

- Also in Patikul municipality, Sulu province, *Manila Bulletin* reported that on August 26, 2019, an armed group allegedly attacked another teacher convoy. One soldier from the Philippine Army's Special Forces was wounded in the attack, although no teachers were hurt, according to reports.¹⁶⁹⁰
- According to the Commission on Human Rights, an unidentified individual attacked two teachers at a school in Valencia City, Bukidnon province, in the presence of their students, on October 15, 2019. Both members of ACT, one teacher was reportedly shot six times, while the other avoided the attack and was unharmed. ACT-affiliated teachers in the area had allegedly received threats before the shooting, as reported in local media outlet *Bulatlat*.¹⁶⁹¹

Military use of schools and universities

For the 2017-2019 period, GCPEA collected at least 30 reports of military use of schools, from UN and NGO reports and media sources. Reported instances of military use of schools continued from the prior 2013-2017 period, when at least 30 schools were used by the AFP, paramilitary, and non-state armed groups, generally as bases, interrogation centers, or lodging.¹⁶⁹²

In 2017, the UN verified the military use of six schools and one hospital (AFP four, Philippine National Police one, the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) one, Maute Group one), noting that schools were used as bases and as sites where the AFP provided civil-military services.¹⁶⁹³ GCPEA compiled 12 reports of military use of schools and universities from SOS Network and media sources in 2017; the AFP or pro-government armed groups were allegedly responsible for the majority of cases.¹⁶⁹⁴ GCPEA identified one such reported incident after the publication of *Education under Attack 2018*, in which AFP soldiers were allegedly attacked by a non-state armed group while the soldiers carried out community service in an elementary school in Quirino municipality, Ilocos Sur province, on October 15, 2017, according to local media.¹⁶⁹⁵

In 2018, the UN verified the use of two schools as bases by AFP during military operations, lasting up to one week.¹⁶⁹⁶ By contrast, community organization SOS Network reported 35 cases of military camping in schools and communities between May 2017 and July 2019, which allegedly affected as many as 9,000 people.¹⁶⁹⁷ In addition, GCPEA compiled two reported cases of military use in Mindanao, related to Lumad community schools in 2018:

- A community-based respondent reported to GCPEA that on June 15, 2018, the Marine Battalion Landing team allegedly set up camp 20 meters away from the school in Barangay Datu Ito Andong, Sultan Kudarat division, Maguindanao province. Residents reported that the battalion was searching for Lumad teachers, and was instructed to shut down Lumad community schools. The soldiers reportedly bribed students to answer questions and disclose the locations of teachers.¹⁶⁹⁸
- A community-based respondent reported that on November 17, 2018, members of the national military camped 10 meters from the Salugpongan Ta Tanu Irganogon community learning center in Palma Gil, Talaingod, Davao del Norte province.¹⁶⁹⁹

In 2019, the UN verified the use of three schools by AFP for military operations.¹⁷⁰⁰

Attacks on higher education

During the 2017-2019 reporting period, GCPEA collected approximately five reports of attacks on higher education from media sources, all of which occurred in 2017. In the previous reporting period, attacks occurred sporadically, peaking in 2013-2014 with between seven and ten reported incidents per year, generally related to physical attacks on higher education buildings, and abductions or killings of university personnel.¹⁷⁰¹

For 2017, GCPEA collected approximately five attacks on higher education,¹⁷⁰² several of which were identified after the publication of *Education under Attack 2018*. Most of the reported attacks in 2017 occurred in Mindanao. Examples of the newly identified attacks included:

- On August 16, 2017, according to local media source *Inquirer*, an explosive was reportedly set off outside the

gate of the Cotabato Foundation College of Science and Technology campus in Barangay Doroluman, Arakan municipality, Cotabato province. No one was harmed in the explosion, the news source reported.¹⁷⁰³

- *The Manila Times* and *Philippine News Agency* reported that a non-state armed group allegedly fired a rocket propelled grenade at Gani L. Abpi College in Datu Piang municipality, Maguindanao province, on November 18, 2017.¹⁷⁰⁴

In 2018 and 2019, GCPEA received no cases of attacks on higher education students, personnel, or infrastructure.

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¹⁶⁵⁰ OCHA, “Philippines: Mindanao humanitarian situation,” *Flash Update No. 1*, March 25, 2019.

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¹⁶⁵² UNICEF, “Humanitarian Situation Report: Philippines,” August 23, 2017, p. 2; Government of the Philippines, “DepEd-ARMM continues to assist schools affected by Marawi crisis,” August 2, 2017.

¹⁶⁵³ *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, as cited in ACLED, Event ID PHL4902; Edwin O. Fernandez, “Explosion rocks front of school in North Cotabato,” *Philippine Daily Inquirer (online)*, May 11, 2018; Jasper Acosta, “IED, exploded at the polling center (IED, sumabog sa paaralang gagamiting polling center),” *ABS-CBN News*, May 11, 2018; *Philippine Star*, as cited in ACLED, Event ID PHL4928; John Unson, “Explosions cause panic in Maguindanao, North Cotabato towns,” *Philippine Star*, May 14, 2018.

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- ¹⁷⁰² Leoncio Balbin, “University teacher killed in Ilocos Sur”, *Philippine Daily Inquirer (online)*, January 7, 2017; “Philippines: 4 Maute militants fall,” *Philstar.com*, March 18, 2017,” as cited in National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START), Global Terrorism Database 201703050026; Greanne Trisha Mendoza, “Marawi City jail, Dansalan College on fire,” *ABS-CBN News*, May 23, 2017; Williamor Magbanua, “Explosive goes off at North Cotabato state college; no one hurt,” *Philippine Daily Inquirer (online)*, August 16, 2017.
- ¹⁷⁰³ Williamor Magbanua, “Explosive goes off at North Cotabato state college; no one hurt,” *Philippine Daily Inquirer (online)*, August 16, 2017.
- ¹⁷⁰⁴ Al Jacinto, “Soldier wounded in BIFF attacks,” *The Manila Times*, November 18, 2017; Edwin Fernandez, “BIFF blamed for grenade attack in Datu Piang,” *Philippine News Agency*, November 20, 2017.