

SOUTH SUDAN

A peace agreement signed between the government and main opposition groups and enacted in September 2018 contributed to a decrease in violence in South Sudan. However, attacks on education continued to occur during this reporting period, including the use of schools by armed forces and groups, attacks on schools, attacks on students and teachers, and sexual violence at schools.

Context

Fighting de-escalated between the pro-Riek Machar Sudan People's Liberation Army in Opposition (SPLA-IO (RM)) and the government's South Sudan People's Defense Forces (SSPDF) preceding and following the signing of the Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (R-ARCSS) in September 2018.¹⁷⁹⁹ According to International Crisis Group (ICG), armed conflict noticeably declined in former areas of hostilities such as Bentiu, Wau, and Yei.¹⁸⁰⁰ However, violence escalated again in late 2018 and early 2019 between signatories and non-signatories to the agreement, including the National Salvation Front (NAS) in Central Equatoria state and the Greater Bahr el Ghazal region, in addition to continued intercommunal violence.¹⁸⁰¹

Violence during the 2017-2019 reporting period occurred in the context of a civil war that erupted in 2013 when a power struggle between President Salva Kiir, of the majority Dinka ethnic group, and former vice-president Riek Machar, of the Nuer ethnic group, triggered ethnically-charged violence between government armed forces and the SPLA-IO (RM), and other affiliated militias and local self-defense groups.¹⁸⁰²

Civilians were impacted by the fighting during the 2017-2019 reporting period. Between April and August 2018, the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) documented unlawful killings, forced displacement, abduction of civilians, and widespread burning and looting of property, by state forces and non-state armed groups, some of which they claimed may have amounted to war crimes.¹⁸⁰³ More than 3,100 children were released from armed forces and armed groups between 2014 and 2019, after UN negotiations, with more than 1,000 released between February 2018 and February 2019.¹⁸⁰⁴ According to the UN, 1.47 million people were internally displaced in South Sudan in December 2019.¹⁸⁰⁵

According to UNMISS and OHCHR, the government's Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA), the former name of the SSPDF,¹⁸⁰⁶ used sexual violence as a weapon of war in Southern Unity state.¹⁸⁰⁷ Another joint report by these agencies documented 175 cases of conflict-related sexual and physical violence against 111 women and 64 girls in Northern Unity state between September and December 2018.¹⁸⁰⁸

During this reporting period, war in South Sudan continued to significantly impact education. In July 2018, the UN reported that 2.2 million school-aged children in South Sudan were out of school, the highest proportion globally, and that 75 percent of girls were out of school.¹⁸⁰⁹ An estimated 2.7 million children aged between three and 18 did not have access to pre-school, primary, and secondary education in 2019, with the most severe needs reported in Central Equatoria, Lakes, and Unity states.¹⁸¹⁰ The UN reported that one out of three schools has been damaged, destroyed, occupied, or closed since 2013.¹⁸¹¹ Over 50 percent of schools that reported interruptions to education cited insecurity as the main cause, according to the UN.¹⁸¹² However, there were some improvements in access to education during this period: an Education Cluster Assessment published in October 2018 estimated that 80 percent of schools were functioning, an increase of 21 percent from the previous school year.¹⁸¹³

Attacks on schools

During the 2017-2019 reporting period, GCPEA identified at least 50 reports of attacks on schools. Reported attacks on schools occurred at a less frequent rate than during the 2013-2017 period, when violence reportedly destroyed more than 800 schools between late 2013 and early 2016.¹⁸¹⁴

In 2017, the UN verified attacks on 26 schools perpetrated by government forces, SPLA-IO (RM), the pro-Taban Deng SPLA-IO, and the South Sudan People's Patriotic Front (SSPPF).¹⁸¹⁵

In 2018, the UN verified 18 attacks on schools that were attributed to government security forces, including the SSPDF

and the Taban Deng-allied SSPDF, as well as non-state armed groups, including SPLA-IO (RM) and NAS; these attacks predominantly took the form of destruction and looting of educational facilities, and crossfire.¹⁸¹⁶ In addition, GCPEA identified the following media and UN reports of specific attacks on schools in 2018, which may have been included in the above number reported by the UN:

- Media outlet *Radio Tamazuj* reported allegations that on February 26, 2018, government forces from Yuai launched an offensive and burned a school, killing 13 people, including four children. Another four children were reported missing.¹⁸¹⁷
- The UN Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan reported that on May 14, 2018, SPLA soldiers attacked a Christian college that was offering only primary-level classes due to security concerns, in Goli, Central Equatoria state. In the attack, the soldiers killed five students and three staff, as well as two internally displaced persons (IDPs) seeking refuge at the school. The soldiers were reportedly looking for “rebels.”¹⁸¹⁸
- In July 2018, UNMISS and OHCHR reported that five primary schools had been ransacked and looted on the road between Tambura and Nagero, Gbudue state.¹⁸¹⁹

In 2019, the UN verified ten attacks on schools.¹⁸²⁰ UNMISS also reported that government forces looted four schools in Karpeto, Kergulu, Morsak, and Yappa, in Central Equatoria state, between January and April 2019.¹⁸²¹ However, it is unclear whether incidents between the reports overlapped. No media reports were collected at the time of writing.

Attacks on school students, teachers, and other personnel

For the 2017-2019 reporting period, GCPEA collected approximately nine reports of attacks on students, teachers, and other personnel. As in the previous reporting period, attacks on students, teachers, and other education personnel occurred sporadically between 2017-2019. Between 2013 and early 2017, approximately 35 attacks and threats against students and educators occurred, including abductions and killings.¹⁸²²

GCPEA identified five reported attacks on school students and personnel from media sources and the Education Cluster in 2017.¹⁸²³ Two of these reported attacks were identified after the publication of *Education under Attack 2018*. In one such instance, as reported by local media outlet *Gurtong*, an armed actor allegedly killed a teacher in Wau town, Wau state, on April 1, 2017. The armed actor was reportedly arrested and held in a military prison after the attack, according to the same news outlet.¹⁸²⁴ No reported incidents were collected for 2018.

In 2019, GCPEA collected four reported instances of attacks on school students and teachers in Amadi, Western Lakes, and Jonglei states:

- Media outlet *Catholic Radio Network* reported that on May 6, 2019, students and teachers from Rumbek National Secondary School in Rumbek, Western Lakes state, protested for classes to be resumed, following a disagreement among staff at the school which had halted lessons. The report alleged that police arrested ten students and two teachers.¹⁸²⁵
- Media source *Radio Tamazuj* reported that pupils and teachers of Agergum Primary School in Rumbek, Western Lakes state, held a demonstration against the recent transfer of teachers, during which they damaged Ministry of Education property, on June 7, 2019. Police reportedly arrested approximately 20 teachers and students, allegedly beating and torturing some, before releasing them. Classes were reportedly suspended after the events.¹⁸²⁶
- Local NGO Screen of Rights reported that on June 12, 2019, students from the Royal High School in Bor, Jonglei state, protested the low quality of classes and lack of school feeding program, setting some school buildings on fire. In response, police reportedly shot and injured two demonstrators.¹⁸²⁷
- Sometime around July 2019, armed individuals allegedly abducted six students in Amadi state, as reported by media source *Radio Tamazuj*.¹⁸²⁸

Military use of schools and universities

Reports of military use of schools occurred at a similar rate during this period, as compared to the 2013-2017 reporting period, during which state armed forces and non-state armed groups reportedly used over 100 schools and universities.¹⁸²⁹ In 2017, the UN verified that 22 schools were used for military purposes.¹⁸³⁰

In 2018, the UN reported the military use of 35 schools for sleeping quarters and bases, as of June 30 of that year. The UN also reported that 85 schools had been vacated by that same date.¹⁸³¹ In addition, GCPEA collected seven reported instances of military use of schools, however these may also be included in the summary statistics reported by the UN.¹⁸³² For instance:

- The UN Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan reported that, in June 2018, the SPLA began to use a primary school in Wadhalelo, Wau state, as a base and barracks. The SPLA reportedly took over the school from the SPLA-IO, giving as their reason for using the school that it was not in operation when they arrived in the area.¹⁸³³
- Human Rights Watch reported in a news release that on June 24, 2018, the army attacked the town of Mboro, Wau state, to regain control of rebel-controlled areas; the government soldiers reportedly took control of the town on June 30, using at least one school and the health clinic as a military base.¹⁸³⁴
- In July 2018, Human Rights Watch also documented the use of a school by government soldiers in Wad Alel, Wau state.¹⁸³⁵
- The UN Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan reported that the SPLA-IO (RM) used a school in Central Equatoria state before September 24, 2018, when the NAS attacked and began to use the school as a barracks.¹⁸³⁶

GCPEA collected at least 20 reported instances of military use of schools in 2019.¹⁸³⁷ Separately, the UN verified the use of 18 schools for military purposes in 2019.¹⁸³⁸ Between February 27 and May 28, 2019, ten instances of military use of schools affected an estimated 3,210 children, 1,550 of whom were girls, according to the UN.¹⁸³⁹ It remains unclear whether the reported incidents collected by GCPEA overlap with those recorded in the UN reports. Examples of reported instances of military use in 2019 collected by GCPEA included:

- Human Rights Watch reported that government forces used a primary school as a barracks in Lorega village, Mukaya county, Yei River state, in early January 2019.¹⁸⁴⁰
- UNMISS reported the use of two primary schools by government forces around Lobonok area, Central Equatoria state, in early 2019, which interrupted classes in those communities.¹⁸⁴¹
- In September 2019, non-state armed groups used four primary schools in Moreno county, Yei River state, for military purposes; all four schools had property looted. The schools had been closed since 2016.¹⁸⁴²
- Armed forces used two primary schools in Tore county, Yei River state, in 2019, including looting school materials. By October 2019, the armed forces were still present, and the schools had not reopened. The schools had been used for military purposes since an unspecified month in 2017.¹⁸⁴³
- Armed forces used six primary and secondary schools in Eastern Equatorial state in 2019, all of which remained closed in October of that year, although some had been vacated.¹⁸⁴⁴

Child recruitment at, or on the way to or from, school

For the 2017-2019 reporting period, GCPEA identified at least three reported incidents of child recruitment at, or on the way to or from, school. Fewer reports of child recruitment were collected during this reporting period as compared to 2013-2017, when at least six cases, affecting hundreds of children were reported.¹⁸⁴⁵ No reports of school-related child recruitment were documented in 2017. In September 2018, UNMISS reported that NAS abducted seven children from Yondoru Primary School in Mukaya, Equatoria state, and forced them into both military training and labor, including acting as bodyguards to commanders.¹⁸⁴⁶ On June 28, 2019, the SPLA-IO attempted to recruit several hundred children from schools in Pibor, Jonglei state.¹⁸⁴⁷

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

GCPEA collected reports of sexual violence at, or on the way to or from, school, on two occasions, both in 2018. The UN Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan reported that on May 14, 2018, SPLA soldiers attacked a Christian college that was offering only primary-level classes due to security concerns, in Goli, Central Equatoria state. The Commission documented at least three cases of sexual violence in the attack, including at least one against a boy. Other incidents of sexual violence were suspected that day at the school but could not be verified.¹⁸⁴⁸ In addition, a non-state armed group attacked a primary school in Western Equatoria state, during an unspecified month in 2018. School property was looted, and a female teacher was raped during the attack. As a result, the school was closed for two months.¹⁸⁴⁹

Attacks on higher education

For the 2017-2019 reporting period, GCPEA identified at least three reports of attacks on higher education. Attacks on higher education in South Sudan occurred sporadically between 2017-2019, as they did in the previous reporting period, which covered 2013-2017 and included one reported attack in 2013 and two in 2015, involving assault, abduction, arrest, and threats against university teachers and students.¹⁸⁵⁰ For 2017, GCPEA collected one reported attack on higher education, which was identified after the publication of *Education under Attack 2018*. Human Rights Watch and media outlet *South Sudan Liberty News* reported that, in January 2017, National Security Service officers arrested two lecturers from Juba University for organizing faculty protests and salary negotiations.¹⁸⁵¹

In 2018, GCPEA identified one report of an attack on a university student. *Eye Radio* and *The Tower Post* reported that on April 16, 2018, armed actors shot and killed a university student, and injured two others, at a checkpoint outside a UN camp in Juba, presumably as the students were on their way home from studies.¹⁸⁵²

In 2019, GCPEA identified one reported attack on higher education, involving the repression of a student protest. Media sources reported that on or around May 8, 2019, students at the St. Mary College for Nursing and Midwifery in Wau state, many of whom were reportedly female, protested against tuition fees and a high cost of living. State security forces reportedly arrested two students and beat others. It was reported that the college would remain closed until the end of May 2019.¹⁸⁵³

¹⁷⁹⁹ Human Rights Watch, *World Report 2019*, (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2019), South Sudan chapter; Human Rights Watch, “South Sudan,” *World Report 2020*; “Drop in Violence Reveals ‘Glimmer’ of Possibilities for Peace, Secretary-General’s Special Representative for South Sudan Tells Security Council,” *UN Meetings Coverage*, June 25, 2019; “Preventing Renewed War in South Sudan,” ICG statement, July 1, 2020; “A Major Step Toward Ending South Sudan’s Civil War,” ICG statement, February 25, 2020.

¹⁸⁰⁰ ICG, “Crisiswatch: January 2019,” January 2019.

¹⁸⁰¹ ICG, “Crisiswatch: January 2019,” January 2019; United Nations Security Council, “Report of the Secretary-General on South Sudan (covering the period from 2 September to 30 November 2018),” *S/2018/1103**, December 10, 2018, paras. 18, 19, 43; Human Rights Watch, “South Sudan,” *World Report 2020*.

¹⁸⁰² United Nations Security Council, “Report of the Secretary-General on South Sudan (covering the period from 2 September to 30 November 2018),” *S/2018/1103**, December 10, 2018, para. 13; “Civil War in South Sudan,” Council on Foreign Relations (CFR), April 9, 2020. UNMISS and OHCHR, “Violations and abuses against civilians in Gbudue and Tambura States (Western Equatoria) April – August 2018,” October 18, 2018.

¹⁸⁰³ UNMISS and OHCHR, “Violations and abuses against civilians in Gbudue and Tambura States (Western Equatoria) April – August 2018,” October 18, 2018, paras. 16, 84, 77; UNMISS and OHCHR, “Indiscriminate attacks against civilians in Southern Unity, April-May 2018,” July 10, 2018, paras. 17, 60-61.

¹⁸⁰⁴ “More than 3,000 children released from armed groups in South Sudan since conflict began, but thousands more continue to be used,” UNICEF press release, February 12, 2019.

¹⁸⁰⁵ UNHCR, “South Sudan Situation: UNHCR Regional Update (December 2019),” December 31, 2019.

¹⁸⁰⁶ Human Rights Council, “Report of the Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan,” *A/HRC/40/CRP.1*, February 20, 2019, p. 8, fn. 4.

¹⁸⁰⁷ UNMISS and OHCHR, “Indiscriminate attacks against civilians in Southern Unity, April-May 2018,” July 10, 2018, para. 29.

¹⁸⁰⁸ UNMISS and OHCHR, “Conflict-related sexual violence in Northern Unity: September – December 2018,” February 15, 2019, para. 4.

¹⁸⁰⁹ UNESCO, *Global Initiative on Out of School Children: South Sudan Country Study*, (UNESCO: Paris, May 2018), p. 21.

¹⁸¹⁰ OCHA, “Humanitarian Needs Overview, 2019,” November 2018, p. 21.

¹⁸¹¹ UNICEF, “3 in 4 children born in South Sudan since independence have known nothing but war – UNICEF,” UNICEF press release, July 6, 2018; OCHA, “Humanitarian Needs Overview, 2019,” November 2018, p. 2.

¹⁸¹² OCHA, “Humanitarian Needs Overview, 2019,” November 2018, p. 21; “Education Cluster Assessment: South Sudan,” Education Cluster South Sudan, October 2018, p. 18.

¹⁸¹³ “Education Cluster Assessment: South Sudan,” Education Cluster South Sudan, October 2018, p. 7.

- ¹⁸¹⁴ GCPEA, *Education under Attack 2018* (New York: GCPEA, 2018), p. 213.
- ¹⁸¹⁵ 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. 159.
- ¹⁸¹⁶ UN General Assembly and Security Council, “Report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict,” A/73/907-S/2019/509, July 30, 2018, para. 155.
- ¹⁸¹⁷ “13 killed in fresh clashes between gov’t and rebels in Bieh State,” *Radio Tamazuj*, February 28, 2018.
- ¹⁸¹⁸ UN General Assembly, UN Human Rights Council, “Report of the Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan,” March 12, 2019, A/HRC/40/69, paras. 78-82. Human Rights Council, “Report of the Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan,” A/HRC/40/CRP.1, February 20, 2019, para. 519; “Ten Killed as Christian College Attacked in South Sudan,” *World Watch Monitor*, May 17, 2018.
- ¹⁸¹⁹ UNMISS and OHCHR, “Violations and abuses against civilians in Gbudue and Tambura States (Western Equatoria) April-August 2019,” October 18, 2018, para. 58.
- ¹⁸²⁰ UN Security Council, “Report of the Secretary-General on the Situation in South Sudan,” S/2019/491, June 14, 2019, para. 58-59. Information provided by a UN respondent via email, May 2020.
- ¹⁸²¹ UNMISS, “Conflict-related violations and abuses in Central Equatoria September 2018-April 2019,” July 3, 2019, para. 65.
- ¹⁸²² GCPEA, *Education under Attack 2018* (New York: GCPEA, 2018), p. 214.
- ¹⁸²³ *Gurtong Trust*; *Radio Tamazuj*, as cited in ACLED, Event ID SSD3854; James Deng Dimo, “Three Killed In Wau In Unclear Circumstances,” *Gurtong*, April 4, 2017; OCHA, “South Sudan: Humanitarian Access Snapshot (March 2017),” April 2017; Information provided by the South Sudan Education Cluster via email, June 7, 2017, June 20, 2017.
- ¹⁸²⁴ *Gurtong Trust*; *Radio Tamazuj*, as cited in ACLED, Event ID SSD3854; James Deng Dimo, “Three Killed In Wau In Unclear Circumstances,” *Gurtong*, April 4, 2017.
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- ¹⁸²⁶ *Radio Tamazuj*, as cited in ACLED, Event ID SSD5803; “A primary school in Rumbek closed indefinitely after pupils strike,” *Radio Tamazuj*, June 10, 2019.
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- ¹⁸³⁰ 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. 160.
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- ¹⁸³² “South Sudan: Soldiers Attack Civilians in Western Region,” Human Rights Watch news release, October 24, 2018; Human Rights Council, “Report of the Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan,” A/HRC/40/69, February 21, 2019, para. 93; Human Rights Council, “Report of the Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan,” A/HRC/40/CRP.1, February 20, 2019, paras. 544, 851.
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