

CAMEROON

Attacks on education continued during the 2022-2023 reporting period, predominantly in North-West and South-West regions. GCPEA identified attacks on schools and school students, teachers, and education personnel, as well as an incident of sexual violence on the way to or from school. In addition, GCPEA identified cases of military use in Far North region.

CONTEXT

As conflict in the North-West and South-West regions of Cameroon continued, clashes between separatist non-state armed groups and armed forces persisted, in addition to violence and human rights abuses perpetrated against civilians by both.¹ The UN reported that non-state armed groups used improvised explosive devices (IEDs) during hostilities in these regions, killing and injuring civilians, and leading to displacement.² Conflict-related violence also spread to the neighbouring West region during the reporting period, according to the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED).³ In Far North region, Boko Haram and splinter group Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) continued to kill and injure civilians in 2022 and 2023, leading to an increase in internally displaced persons, as reported by Human Rights Watch.⁴ Intercommunal clashes were reported in Far North, South-West and North-West regions during the reporting period.⁵

The UN reported that 4.7 million people, including at least 2.5 million children, were in need of humanitarian assistance and protection in 2023,⁶ and that conflict and flooding in Far North, North-West, and South-West regions had displaced more than one million people.⁷ In addition to conflict, 37,000 people in Far North region were affected by floods, which destroyed 2,400 houses and 88 schools.⁸

At least 1.1 million children were deprived of their right to education in Cameroon in 2022.⁹ The UN reported that, in North-West and South-West regions, armed separatists maintained a boycott on education, which they enforced by attacking schools, students, and education staff.¹⁰ These groups imposed stay-at-home orders in 2022 and 2023, during which schools were required to close.¹¹ As of December 2023, the UN reported that 41 percent of schools were non-operational in North-West and South-West regions.¹² In Far North region, 117 schools remained non-operational in January 2023 after having been previously destroyed or closed in the context of insecurity, as reported by the UN.¹³

ATTACKS ON SCHOOLS

During the reporting period, GCPEA identified at least 54 attacks on schools in Cameroon, mostly in North-West or South-West regions. In comparison, during the previous reporting period the UN verified 18 attacks on schools in 2021 and 20 in 2020.¹⁴ In North-West and South-West regions, in September 2022 and 2023,

there were spikes in attacks around the start of the school year,¹⁵ when non-state armed groups imposed a two-week lockdown to delay the start of the school year.¹⁶ GCPEA collected at least 14 reports of attacks on schools in 2022.¹⁷ Many attacks on schools in 2022 involved arson. Examples of attacks included:

- The UN reported that, on February 8, 2022, members of a non-state armed group set fire to a government school in Buea city, Fako division, South-West region.¹⁸
- Human Rights Watch and the UN reported that, on February 11, 2022, during the night, armed separatists set fire to a girls' boarding school in Okoyong village, Manyu division, South-West region, burning down three dormitories and threatening students.¹⁹
- On August 17, 2022, a primary school in Tinta village, Manyu division, South-West region, was allegedly destroyed during armed clashes between the Cameroonian military and armed separatists, as reported by local media.²⁰
- On August 22, 2022, local media reported that a secondary school was allegedly set on fire in Bamenda city, Mezam division, North-West region.²¹

In 2023, the UN reported 40 attacks on schools.²² Separately, GCPEA identified ten reports of attacks on schools in 2023.²³ Since it was not clear whether any of these overlapped with the UN count, they were not added, to avoid double counting. For example, in February 2023, the UN reported seven attacks on education in North-West region and one in South-West region, leading several schools to close, during a lockdown imposed by non-state armed groups, which included an order to shutter schools.²⁴ However, it was unclear how many of these were attacks on schools rather than attacks on students and staff, so this number has not been included in the total number of attacks on schools. Examples of attacks on schools included:

- On February 7 and 8, 2023, members of non-state armed groups reportedly entered two schools in Atukom, Mezam division, North-West region, and Nkamlikum, Meme division, South-West region, and ordered them to close, enforcing an order to shut schools between February 7 and February 11, according to the UN.²⁵ Several other schools subsequently closed as a result.²⁶
- On February 22, 2023, alleged members of an armed group reportedly attacked a private primary school in Molyko village, Buea division, South-West region, including firing warning shots near the school, according to local media *Cameroon Concord News*.²⁷
- On September 5, 2023, a primary school in Bamumka village, Ngoketunjia division, North-West region was burned; the school had recently been renovated, as reported by OCHA.²⁸
- Around November 23, 2023, in Soueram, Logone-et-Chari department, Far North region, an IED was reportedly detonated near a primary school.²⁹

ATTACKS ON SCHOOL STUDENTS, TEACHERS, AND OTHER EDUCATION PERSONNEL

During the reporting period, GCPEA identified at least 44 attacks on school students, teachers, and other education personnel. In comparison, GCPEA identified at least 26 such incidents in 2021 and at least 31 in 2020.³⁰ Abductions of students and teachers were the most frequently reported attacks in 2022 and 2023. In 2022, GCPEA identified at least 35 attacks on school students, teachers, and other education personnel.³¹

Separately, the UN reported 37 attacks on schools and students or protected personnel in 2022.³² Since it was unclear how many of these attacks overlapped with reports collected by GCPEA, and how many were attacks on students and staff rather than schools, this number was not included in the total number of attacks in this report, to avoid double counting. The UN also reported that at least 81 teachers or students were abducted, and five teachers or students were killed,³³ and attacks targeting students and staff appeared to spike in September of that year.³⁴ Incidents identified by GCPEA included:

- Human Rights Watch and OCHA reported that, on January 19, 2022, armed separatists abducted five teachers, including two female teachers, and injured two students, from the government high school in Weh village, Menchum division, North-West region.³⁵
- The UN reported that, on January 26, 2022, members of a non-state armed group abducted three teachers from a government technical college in Keyon village, Boyo division, North-West region.³⁶
- On February 22, 2022, ten teachers, including nine female teachers, were abducted from the Inclusive Government Bilingual Primary School, a school for children with disabilities, in Ngomham neighborhood, Bamenda city, North-West region, as reported by international media VOA.³⁷
- The UN reported that, in August and September 2022, 15 teachers were abducted from two schools in North-West region and accused of enrolling students for the new academic year, which non-state armed groups in the area had prohibited. The teachers were released upon payment of a ransom.³⁸
- On September 6, 2022, one day after the start of the academic year, a female primary school teacher was shot while she was on her way to school in Ekon village, Koupé-Manengouba division, South-West region, as reported by local media *Journal du Cameroun*.³⁹
- On September 8, 2022, at least 12 students were abducted in Bamenda city, Mezam division, and in Fundong town, Boyo division, both in North-West region, as reported by International Crisis Group.⁴⁰

GCPEA identified at least nine reports of attacks on school students, teachers, and other education personnel in 2023.⁴¹ Separately, the UN reported 25 attacks targeting education in 2023, including attacks against schools, students, staff, and parents.⁴² Again, it was not clear how many were attacks on students and staff rather than schools. As in previous years, attacks increased in the period around the return to school in September. Examples included:

- In February 2023, following an attack on a private primary school in Molyko village, Buea division, South-West region, detailed above, the head teacher was reportedly kidnapped, and the owner of the school was threatened, according to local media *Cameroon Concord News*.⁴³
- The UN reported that, on June 14, 2023, members of a non-state armed group abducted 12 students in Mbveh locality, Bui division, North-West region, because of their participation in secondary school examinations; the students were subsequently released.⁴⁴
- Ahead of the start of the new school year, on September 2, 2023, members of a separatist armed group reportedly killed two head teachers in Belo town, Boyo division, North-West region, according to International Crisis Group and local media.⁴⁵
- On September 26, 2023, in Kembong village, Manyu division, South-West region, three teachers were reportedly shot and injured by members of a non-state armed group allegedly enforcing a school ban, ac-

ording to ACLED and local media *Actu Cameroun*.⁴⁶

MILITARY USE OF SCHOOLS AND UNIVERSITIES

Cameroon Armed Forces used 17 schools for military purposes in Far North region in 2022, according to the UN.⁴⁷ In comparison, GCPEA identified at least 21 and 19 incidents of military use in 2021 and 2020 respectively, in Far North, North-West, and South-West regions.⁴⁸

GCPEA did not identify any incidents of military use in 2023.

SEXUAL VIOLENCE AT, OR ON THE WAY TO OR FROM, SCHOOL OR UNIVERSITY

During the 2022-2023 reporting period, GCPEA identified at least one report of sexual violence by a non-state armed group that occurred on the way to a school. In *Education under Attack 2022*, which covered 2020 and 2021, GCPEA also identified one reported incident of sexual violence.⁴⁹ Human Rights Watch reported that, on June 12, 2022, armed separatists threatened and subjected to degrading treatment 11 students who were on their way to Bokova secondary school, in Buea town, South-West region, forcing them to strip naked. One student was also reportedly shot in the leg.⁵⁰

ATTACKS ON HIGHER EDUCATION

GCPEA identified at least four attacks on higher education during the 2022-2023 reporting period, affecting at least 34 students and education personnel. In comparison, in *Education under Attack 2022*, GCPEA identified at least three reported incidents in 2021 and at least four in 2020.⁵¹ GCPEA identified at least three attacks on higher education in 2022.⁵² For example:

- Human Rights Watch and local media reported that, on April 5, 2022, armed separatists stormed Bamenda University, in Bambili town, Mezam division, North-West region, targeting students and teachers for not observing the stay-at-home order they had declared. The armed men fired shots in the air, which led to a stampede that injured at least five people.⁵³
- On July 8, 2022, a non-state armed group attacked the faculty of engineering and technology at the University of Buea in Buea town, South-West region. The armed group disrupted examinations, abducted the supervisor, and ordered students to leave by threatening to shoot them, as reported by the UN, Scholars at Risk, and local media.⁵⁴
- GCPEA identified one report of an attack on higher education in 2023. On March 16, 2023, the military reportedly raided a student residential area of the University of Buea, in Buea town, South-West region. During the raid, two students were allegedly detained and one of them died in custody, as reported by ACLED and international media *University World News*.⁵⁵

ENDNOTES

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